

“PLOTINUS’ DOCTRINE OF THE ΛΟΓΟΣ AS A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON AUGUSTINE’S EXEGESIS OF GENESIS”

One of the most commented passages in the *Confessiones* of Augustine is book VII, ix 13. In this part of his grand oeuvre, Augustine narrates that after having read a few Platonist treatises, he discovered there almost the same doctrine as in the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-5).¹ To explain Augustine’s understanding of this comparison, several scholars have pointed out the similarities of Augustine’s own doctrine of the Word of God (*Verbum Dei*) as Creator, with the hypostasis of the Intellect (Νοῦς) of Plotinus.² In my view, these

¹ VII. ix. 13: ..., *procurasti mihi per quendam hominem inmanissimo tyfo turgidum quosdam Platoniorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam uersos, et ibi legi non quidem his uerbis, sed hoc idem omnino multis et multiplicibus suaderi rationibus, quod in principio erat uerbum et uerbum erat apud deum et deus erat uerbum: hoc erat in principio apud deum; omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil; quod factum est in eo uita est, et uita erat lux hominum; et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt; et quia hominis anima, quamuis testimonium perhibeat de lumine, non est tamen ipsa lumen, sed uerbum deus, ipse est lumen uerum, quod inluminat omnem hominem uenientem in hunc mundum; et quia in hoc mundo erat, et mundus per eum factus est, et mundus eum non cognouit. quia uero in sua propria uenit et sui eum non receperunt, quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri credentibus in nomine eius, non ibi legi. Les Confessions Livres I-VII, Bibliothèque Augustinienne. Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 13; Texte de l’Édition de M. Skutella, Introduction et Notes par A. Solignac, Traduction de E. Tréhorel et G. Bouissou, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie., 1962). (See also CSEL 33, CCL 27). “Through a man puffed up with monstrous pride, you brought under my eye some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. There I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made. What was made is life in him; and the life was the light of men. And the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.’ Moreover, the soul of man, although it bears witness of the light, is, ‘not that light’, but God the Word is himself ‘the true light which illuminates every man coming into the world’. Further, ‘he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him.’ But that, ‘he came to his own and his own did not receive him; but as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become sons of God by believing in his name’, that I did not read there (John I: 1-12).” (*Saint Augustine Confessiones*, translated with an introduction and notes by H. Chadwick, (Oxford: University Press, 2008).*

² O. Perler, *Der Nus bei Plotin und das Verbum bei Augustinus als vorbildliche Ursache der Welt*, (Paderborn: Bonifazius-Druckerei, 1930), 23-25, 31, 47, 72-74.; É. Gilson, *Introduction à l’Étude de Saint Augustin*, 3e édition, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, J. Vrin, 1969), 275, note 1, 261-263.; P. Brown, *La Vie de Saint*

scholars have failed to take the influence of the Plotinian Λόγος into serious consideration. I will show in this paper that numerous significant points of agreements can easily be detected between Augustine's doctrine of the *Verbum Dei* and the Plotinian Λόγος. On the basis of my conclusions, it is plausible to infer that the Plotinian Λόγος was a major influence for Augustine's creation doctrine. This will be the subject of my final evaluation.

Augustine and the Platonists

The text *Confessiones* VII. ix. 13, in which the prologue of the Gospel of John is compared to Platonism, provokes a number of interesting questions which have inspired many modern studies,³ such as: how could Augustine claim that there are similarities between the Λόγος of John and Platonism in the first place? Do such similarities really exist? And what were the 'few Platonist treatises' which Augustine read just before his conversion to Christianity, which impelled him to compare Platonic concepts with John's Λόγος? Augustine doesn't provide us with any titles nor does he let us know which group of Platonists he was referring to in the passages.⁴

Augustin, (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2001), 122. Translated to French by J. Marrou (original title: *Augustinus of Hippo, A Biography*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1967, 2000); M. Fattal, *Plotin chez Augustin suivi de Plotin face aux Gnostiques*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 83-88.; J. Brachtendorf, *Augustins Confessiones* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 130-131.; J. M. Quinn, *A Companion to the Confessions of Augustine*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 360-366.

³ Commentaries on this theme are too numerous to name here. In addition to the authors in note 2, I consulted the following studies for this research: P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1968); J. Pépin, "Augustin, *Quaestio De Ideis*, Les Affinités Plotiniennes", in: *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought, Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeaneau*, ed.: H.J. Westra, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 117-134.; J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine Confessions*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), vol. II, 413-426; K. Ruhstorfer, „*Confessiones* 7; Die Platoniker und Paulus, Augustins neue Sicht auf das Denken, Wollen und Tun der Wahrheit“, in: *Die Confessiones des Augustinus von Hippo: Einführung und Interpretationen zu den dreizehn Büchern*, eds.: M. Bettetini, N. Fischer, C. Mayer, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1998), 283-341.; A. Solignac, „Ce que Augustin dit avoir lu de Plotin“, *BA* 13, 682-689.; G. Sterling, "Day One: Platonizing Exegetical Traditions of Genesis 1:1-5 in John and Jewish Authors", in: *Studia Philonica Annual XVII*, (2005), 118-140. All these authors deal with the influence of Platonism on various aspects of Augustine's teachings.

⁴ Augustine does refer to Plotinus when mentioning 'the few Platonist books' but in a different context: *De Beata Vita* 1, 4-5: *Lectis autem Plotini paucissimis libris...*, CSEL 29.

Concerning the question which Platonist texts Augustine had read, P. Henry demonstrated in 1938 that the *Enneads* by the Neo-Platonist Plotinus, was most certainly an important source for Augustine and especially the treatises *On Beauty* (I,6) and *On the three primary hypostases* (V,1), which he surely studied well.⁵ Henry’s conclusions find consensus among modern scholars. Since Henry, further research on this subject has been done so that many other treatises of the *Enneads* have come to be regarded as plausible sources for Augustine.⁶

The question of Augustine’s intention of comparing John’s prologue with Platonism in *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13 has been responded to by many scholars such as O. Perler (1931), É. Gilson (1969) and most recently, M. Fattal (2006).⁷ Essentially it is their assumption that Augustine, while devising his exegesis of the creation story of Genesis, adopted a few key concepts of the Plotinian Νοῦς as inspiration for his doctrine of the Creator, the Word of God.

Now I will go deeper into this to clarify a few points of interest. Augustine spent practically his whole adult life striving to attain the ‘correct interpretation’ of Genesis. It was of utmost importance for him to place the Jewish creation story in Genesis into a Christian redemption framework.⁸ As a logical point of departure for his exegesis, Augustine began with the prologue in the Gospel of John, the most extensive New Testament interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. There, the Word of God, the Λόγος, is the Son of God, from which all things were made; it is the divine Light that came into the world but wasn’t recognized. Expressed more explicitly, Jesus Christ is the Λόγος, the Creator of the world. Augustine translated John’s term Λόγος from Greek into Latin as *Verbum Dei*.

Now we will return to the conclusions of Perler, Gilson and others regarding the question what Augustine read in the Platonist texts which led him to claim affinities with the divine Λόγος of John’s Gospel. My response to their conclusions was: if we are to compare Augustine’s Word of God with a divine, creative force from the Plotinian cosmogony, why not the Λόγος?

⁵ P. Henry, *La Vision d’Ostie. Sa place dans la vie et l’oeuvre de Saint Augustin*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938) (regarding the theme ecstasy and the ascent to God in *Confessiones* VII).

⁶ Pépin (see note 3) provides a list of these treatises.

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ R.N. Hebb, “Augustine’s exegesis *ad litteram*”, *Augustinian Studies* 38: 2, (2007), 365-379.; E. Hill, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees, Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis, The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. The Works of Augustine, A Translation for the 21st century, Part I vol. 13, (New York: New York City Press, 2000), 13-21.

Up until now I have not been able to locate any studies in which Augustine's *Verbum Dei* is set side-by-side the Plotinian Λόγος doctrine and particularly in reference to the question above.⁹ The Plotinian Λόγος seems to me a better place to begin because of the relationship between Augustine's doctrine of the Word of God and John's Λόγος. John's Word could possibly have been influenced by the λόγος tradition in Greek philosophy and appears to some extent to resemble the Λόγος doctrine of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria.¹⁰ In Philo's exegesis of Genesis, a divine Λόγος is the Creator of the cosmos and intermediary between God and humanity in world history.¹¹ Philo clearly relied upon Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato for his creation interpretation. Just as Philo's Λόγος, the principle of the Λόγος of certain Middle Platonists (such as Timaeus of Locri, Alcinoüs and Numenius) also acts as mediator between the worlds of the divine and humans.¹² Even several of Augustine's predecessors (such as Justin, Clement and Origen) identified Christ with the Λόγος from Greek philosophy.¹³ For this reason I find it of utmost relevance to investigate the question of whether Augustine's doctrine of the Word of God had undergone influence from the Greek philosophical λόγος tradition and particularly, from the notion of the Λόγος within Plotinus' cosmogony.

My strategy here is to investigate the differences and the similarities between Augustine's *Verbum Dei* and Plotinus' Λόγος. But in order to compare these two entities, it is necessary to first look into how both thinkers conceived the origin of the world and how they depicted the respective creative forces producing the universe. My investigation will begin with a short exposé of Augustine's creation doctrine and then a discussion of certain salient features of the *Verbum*

⁹ Cf: A.P. Bos, *In de greep van de Titanen, Inleiding tot een hoofdstroming van de Griekse filosofie*, (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1991), 115-121. Bos shows how Augustine integrated Plotinus' Λόγος doctrine into his creation theory and why the rationality of the creation of the cosmos was of importance to Augustine's statements in *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13.

¹⁰ Cf: C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 276-279.; A.P. Bos, "God as 'Father' and 'Maker' in Philo of Alexandria and its background in Aristotelian Thought", *Elenchos* 24, (2003), 211-332; idem, "Philo on God as Archê geneseôs", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 60, (2009), 32-47.

¹¹ E.g. *De Opificio Mundi* 16.

¹² See Sterling, 2005, 126.

¹³ H.J. Vogt, "Sohn Gottes, Λόγος des Schöpfers, Verwertung hellenistischer Gedanken bei den Kirchenvätern", in: *Theologische Quartalschrift*, jrg. 154, (1974), 250-265.

Dei. After going into Plotinus' discussion of the emergence of the three hypostases: the One, the Intellect (Νοῦς) and the Soul, we will take a closer look at the functions of the Λόγος within his cosmogony before ultimately discussing the resemblances between the *Verbum* and the Λόγος.

Augustine's exegesis of Genesis

Augustine's interpretation of Genesis can be found in at least five different major works which he wrote within a period of thirty years.¹⁴ For the sake of brevity, I aim to give merely an impression of his exegesis by describing -in the most simplified form possible- the main lines which are common to all his interpretations.¹⁵ For this purpose, I chose to use here the three final books of *Confessiones*¹⁶ and *De Genesi ad litteram libri XII*.¹⁷ In addition, references will be made to the short essay *De Ideis*.¹⁸ In these works many aspects of Augustine's exegesis, which will be referred to here, are more fully developed. Admittedly, Augustine's creation doctrine contains

¹⁴ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, (388-389); *De Genesi ad litteram liber unus imperfectus*, (393-394); Books XI-XIII of *Confessiones*, (397-401); *De Genesi ad litteram libri XII*, (401-416), Book XI of *De Civitate Dei*, (approx. 416). (Hill, 2000, 13-14).

¹⁵ The most complete overview of Augustine's creation doctrine in all its facets is C. Mayer's "Creatio, Creator, creatura" in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed.: Mayer, C. et al, vol. 2, (Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1996-2000), 56-116. For other summaries of Augustine's creation doctrine: *Augustine through the Ages, An Encyclopedia*, ed.: A.D. Fitzgerald et al., (Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999): „Creation", R. Williams, 251-254, and "Genesis accounts of Creation", R.J. Teske, 379-381.; É. Gilson, 1969, 275-285.; S. Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine", *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 103-115.; S. MacCormack, "Augustine Reads Genesis", Saint Augustine's Lecture 2006, in: *Augustinian Studies* 39:1 (2008), 5-47.; M.A. Vannier, *Creatio, Conversio, Formatio chez Saint Augustin*, (Paradosis 31), (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1991).

¹⁶ See note 1: Chadwick, 2008; Solignac, BA 13, BA 14; CSEL 33, CCL 27.

¹⁷ *St. Augustine, the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, translated and annotated by J. H. Taylor, (New York: Newman Press, 1982); *La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres* (I-VII), BA 48, 49; Traduction, Introduction et Notes par P. Agaësse et A. Solignac, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie., 1972.); CSEL 28.

¹⁸ No. 46 *De Diversis Quaestionibus*. CCL 44A; *Saint Augustine Eighty-Three Different Questions*, translated by D. L. Mosher, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1982); BA 10: *Opusculum X. Mélanges Doctrinaux*; texte de l'Édition Bénédictine. Introductions, traduction et notes: G. Bardy, J.-A. Beckaert, J. Boutet, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie., 1952), 123-129.

numerous complicated issues which are not possible to fully unravel in this succinct exposé.¹⁹

The Word of God and the creation of the world

Reflecting upon the world around us, Augustine summed up our corporeal existence by using only a few adjectives: the visible world can be characterized by its changeability which is a direct result of its sheer imperfection. The imperfection of the world, according to the bishop of Hippo, creates an inner tension in humans and a longing for the true, ultimate source of an unchanging, enduring nature. The realization that we are created by a perfect, immutable and eternal God, together with the proper knowledge of how our world came to be, are necessary steps for delivering ourselves from this tumultuous, earthly existence. We require this knowledge in order to fulfil these longings and to be able to unite ourselves with the highest form of existence.²⁰

The church father no doubt pondered the lack of coherence in the notion of an eternal and immutable God which produced a world which is temporal and constantly in a state of flux. To resolve this discrepancy, a creative, divine entity is required which can manifest in both worlds. In Augustine's exegesis this entity is conceived when God the Father 'spoke' and thereby generated a Son, the Word of God.²¹ God's Son, in turn, created the world by 'speaking' and materializing the eternal Ideas (*formae*) and reasons (*rationes aeternae*) which exist in His mind.²² Augustine declared that the Son of God is a perfect image of his Father and like Him, is eternal, immutable, transcendent and perfect (*Verbum similitudinis*).²³ God the Father and His Son are one and in unison, they created the world. But due to his role as intermediary²⁴ and to his immanence in the visible world, the Word is nonetheless unlike his Father. The problem of the ontological discrepancy between the eternal and immutable realm of the Creator and the temporal, changeable world of his creation still remains. In the following sections we will see Augustine's further attempt at the

¹⁹ E.g., his interpretation of 'heaven' and 'earth' in Genesis 1 often lacks consistency.

²⁰ *Confessiones* XI.

²¹ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* I. iv. 9; I. ii. 6; I. v. 11.

²² *Ibid.* I. v. 11; I. ii. 6; I. v. 11; II. viii. 17. *Confessiones* XI. ix. 11; *De Ideis*.

²³ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. I. iv. 9; I. ii. 6.

²⁴ E.g.: *Confessiones* XI. ii. 4.

solution in his conception of the two phases of creation and his theory of *rationes*.²⁵

The six days of creation

Augustine saw that the Creator was able to retain his infinite nature by creating within the eternal realm itself: within 'one moment' in eternity: *in actu condendi*. In this way, Augustine could assert that the words "in the beginning" "*in principio*" from the first verse of Genesis, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth," refer not to the initiation of time (as the ἀρχή of the Λόγος in John's Gospel), but to the creation principle itself, the origin of all things, the *Verbum Dei* or the ontological foundation of the universe.²⁶

The bishop of Hippo emphasized that the notion of the completion of creation within six days was of an allegorical nature and should not be understood literally.²⁷ How then did the temporal, changing world which we know, come into existence? Augustine posited a creation in two phases. Our world first came into existence in the second phase.²⁸

In the first phase of creation, the *prima conditio*,²⁹ God created heaven and earth, but not the visible heaven and earth which we are accustomed to perceiving with our corporeal senses. The 'heaven of the heavens' (*caelum caeli*) was the first product of creation, a realm of pure Light, intelligence and knowledge which is closest to God. This is the domicile of the Holy Trinity and of the angels: heavenly beings enlightened with God's Wisdom by the Word, having received formation.³⁰ This is also the origin of the human soul as well as the destination of saints after their death.³¹

Then the Word created the invisible 'earth' which is, in other words, 'intelligible matter'. Within matter, the four elements (*elementa mundi*) came into being which were impregnated with causal reason

²⁵ Cf: Agaësse and Solignac, 1972, 653-668.

²⁶ *Confessiones* XI. ix. 11.

²⁷ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, II; IV. xxxiii. 51; V. xxiii. 46. See note 8.

²⁸ *Ibid*, III-X.

²⁹ *Ibid*, V. v. xii-xvi.

³⁰ The beings of this reality are perfect creatures in respect to those with a carnal body on account of their 'formation' in the first creation phase, by means of the *Verbum*'s Illumination. *Ibid*, I. iv. 9-11; III. viii.

³¹ *Ibid*, I. xvii. 32; *Confessiones* XII. ii. 3-iii. 4.

principles or *rationes causales*.³² These principles contain the laws of development and outlines for every future living being in the visible world. This indicates that the creatures which are known to us in this world were 'pre-formed' primordially in the first creation phase: invisibly, potentially and causally.³³

In the second creation phase, the *administratio*,³⁴ the rational principles unfold in the material world within the realm of time. In this way, all kinds of physical beings with souls come into existence and are still being produced. The creation in the second phase is largely carried out by seminal reasons or *rationes seminales*,³⁵ invisible, rational principles established in matter which develop and grow in the manner of seeds. They unfold in accordance with the eternal forms and eventually actualize all things in the visible world. The world is, according to Augustine, a reflection of forms and reason principles, models for the physical world, which exist in the intellect of the Creator.³⁶ The Ideas and the rational principles are the invisible building stones of the material world which become objective only in the second creation phase.

It was in this phase that God instigated the commencement of world history. However, the world is governed and maintained further by the *rationes causales*, in complete dependency of God's will. Nothing in this phase could come to life without first existing as an intelligible form in the *prima conditio*. The *rationes* assure the order, reasonability and stability of established species. Their impact in the *administratio* phase explains how God can 'rest' on the seventh day, while the initial creation act is perpetuated in cosmic history in the corporeal realm of existence. With his theory of the *rationes*, Augustine could ascertain the absolute dependency of the creation on God.³⁷

We see here that the two moments of creation conform conveniently to the ontological oppositions mentioned earlier. For example, God, the *Verbum*, the Ideas and the *rationes aeternae* pertain to

³² *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* V. xiii. 29; VI. i-ii; XIV. xxv; I ii-iii; IV. ix.

³³ *Ibid.*, VI. vi. x; IX. xvii, xxxii. Matter plays an important role in Augustine's exegesis of Genesis. The church father defends *creatio ex nihilo* (Cf: *Conf.* XII and XIII) but not the pre-existence of matter. Augustine's theory of matter, specifically how matter and form were brought together, is another example of a complicated issue which is presented here in the briefest terms. (Cf. note 19)

³⁴ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* V. iv, 10-11, viii. 23, ix. 24, xi. 27, etc.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I. v. 29; IV. xxxiii. 52; VI. x. 17; VI. xi. 19; V. vii.

³⁶ *De Ideis* (note 18)

³⁷ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* IV. xii. 22; VI. x.17-11,19; VI. xiv. 25-15, 26.

the first phase of creation which took place in the intelligible, eternal realm. The physical, visible world is subject to time and changeability and corresponds with the second creation phase. Viewing this system as a whole, God the Father and the *Verbum* are perfect, the intelligible realm is less perfect,³⁸ and the material realm of the cosmos is unquestionably deficient.

Augustine employs his theory of the *rationes* for resolving the ontological discrepancies between the eternal, divine realm and the sensible world of time. The *rationes causales* serve as a synthesis of the ontological dialectic.³⁹ Altogether, these creating reasons function on three levels of existence: that of the Creator (*rationes aeternae*) and in the two phases of creation: the first or intelligible phase (*rationes causales*) and the second or corporeal phase (*rationes seminales*).⁴⁰ On account of the co-existence of the Reasons and Ideas in the mind of the Creator, the *Verbum* was designated as the 'Form Principle'⁴¹ and the 'Reason Principle'.⁴² To summarize, the Word, the Ideas and the *rationes* are transcendent as well as immanent. According to Augustine, the world that the Creator made was of a rational nature and therefore comprehensible to the human mind; God and his Word are on the other hand, unfathomable.⁴³

How does the creation of man fit into this exegesis? Augustine saw human beings as being composed of a body and a soul. The formation of the human body is narrated in Genesis 2:7.⁴⁴ In Augustine's exegesis of this passage, physical bodies are first created intelligibly by *rationes causales* and then, developed in matter ('dust') in the second phase of creation by *rationes seminales*.⁴⁵ We have already seen in his exegesis how the human soul was created at the same time as the angelic intelligence of the *caelum caeli* at the *prima conditio*.

³⁸ E.g.: the potential changeability of beings of the *caelum caeli*; or the human soul, both which are not eternal or immutable.

³⁹ Agaësse and Solignac, 1972, 599-603.

⁴⁰ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 5. xii. 28.

⁴¹ *Confessiones* XIII. 10. 11; *De Ideis*; *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* II. viii. 17; V. xii. 28; V. xiii. 29; V. xv. 33; V. xvi. 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II. vi. 12 and 13; II. viii. 17; V. xii. 28; V. xiii. 29; VI, x, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XIV. xxviii-15. XIV. xxiv; I. v. 11; II. vi. 14; IX. xvii. 32.

⁴⁴ The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (The bible translations above are the New International Version. <http://www.biblegateway.com>.)

⁴⁵ As in the bodies of Adam and Eve. Cf: *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* VI; How the soul was united with the physical body was a problem which Augustine himself admitted to being incapable of giving an adequate explanation (*Epistulae* 137.3). See also his attempts to explain this process: Cf.: R. de Teske, "Soul", in: *Augustine through the Ages*, 809.; Agaësse and Solignac, 1972, BA 48 695-706.

Augustine also interpreted the verse Genesis 1:26, which states that man was created as an image of God, as a description of God's creation of the soul.⁴⁶ He explained that the image of God can only be located in the soul (and not the body) of humans and specifically in the highest part of the soul, the only region in the mind where knowledge of God can be attained.⁴⁷ The soul cannot become perfect until it is completely (in)formed, that is, until it attains the same divine knowledge which the beings of the *caelum caeli* possess. The potential to attain this knowledge and perfection exists intrinsically in the human soul as a direct result of the *Verbum*'s creation.⁴⁸

The Creator: *Verbum Dei*.

Up until now we have seen that the eternal Ideas and the rational principles exist in their purest form in the *Verbum* and are therefore transcendent. Yet they are immanent in matter as well. In a parallel manner, the *Verbum* is transcendent and also manifests in the experiential world of humans. Augustine delineated the presence of the Word of God in the world in a number of ways. For example: the *Verbum* appears to persons in their soul as their Inner Teacher, whose education consists of the secrets of the origin of the world, in other words, knowledge of Himself, but also knowledge of the eternal Ideas, by which all things were made. The Word administers pure, spiritual knowledge (*uisio intellectualis*), and true knowledge, because He himself is the ultimate Truth (*ueritas*) and Wisdom (*sapientia*). To fathom this wisdom and attain insight required for faith, we must actively search for knowledge, by turning inward and focusing upon one's own mind.⁴⁹ Yet it is imperative that the soul be purified. By turning (*conuersio*) to God's Word and receiving his Enlightenment (*illuminatio*), we can become more of an image of God the Father by imitating His Form (*formatio*) and Perfect Image. In this manner, we approach perfection which will enable us to fully unify with the Origin of our existence.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

⁴⁷ *De Ideis; De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* III. xx. 31; III. xxii. 34; V. xiii. 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III. xx. 30; IV. xxiii. 40; IV. xxv. 42.

⁴⁹ E.g.: *Confessiones* XI. ii. 9, "You call us therefore, to understand the Word, God, who is with you." (translation Chadwick); *Confessiones* XI. ix. 11; XII. viii. 10; XII. ix. 11, *De Magistro; De Ideis*.

⁵⁰ *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* I. iv. 9; I. v. 10; III. xx. 30. Cf. Vannier, 1991.

Christ and the notion of the Λόγος from Greek philosophy

We have seen that Augustine made various references to the Gospel of John, such as the Creator Word as 'Principle', as the origin of existence and as Light. We have also seen how Augustine used these ideas to expound his doctrine of the Inner Teacher and *illuminatio*, by identifying Christ with Wisdom and Truth. Yet how did Augustine deal with the Greek term Λόγος from John's Gospel? Before examining the Λόγος concept in Plotinus' cosmogony in the following section, I will now underline certain aspects of Augustine's creation doctrine which refer to the general meaning of the term λόγος from the ancient Greek language and philosophy.

The term λόγος in ancient Greek signifies, among other things, a 'story' or an 'account', and is therefore associated with speaking. In his interpretation of the creation story in Genesis, Augustine utilized the term 'speaking' as a motif in various ways. For example, the Word of God is a kind of expression or statement of the Father. By 'speaking', the Word itself created the material world with the eternal Ideas which reside in himself. The words which Christ spoke during his incarnation on earth as Jesus of Nazareth, which are accounted for in the Scriptures, also reflect the *Verbum's* Λόγος activity. The language of the Word of God is identified with education, the provision of wisdom and true knowledge. By 'speaking', Christ illuminates the mutable human mind with immutable, eternal Light.

The significance of λόγος in the sense of 'reason' as in Greek philosophy is emphatically present in Augustine's creation exegesis, especially in his theory of *rationes*. In a short essay, he discusses the Latin translation of the Greek word Λόγος in the prologue of John's Gospel.⁵¹ Augustine explains his choice of 'uerbum' for its translation, although the correct translation, he says, is actually *ratio* or 'reason'. Does this statement in his essay indicate that Augustine was trying to avoid the association with the Divine Reason from Greek philosophy, for example from the Stoics or from Philo, or even with the Christ-Λόγος from earlier Christian thinkers?

This seems to me highly improbable. Because in another essay, *De Ideis*, he brings up once again the subject of the translation of λόγος, but this time in the context of his doctrine of the Ideas. The Latin translation of the Greek word ἰδέα, Augustine expounds, is *forma* or *species*. He reminds us that 'form' can also signify 'ratio' (λόγος), because the meaning of the term *ratio* also includes rational

⁵¹ *De Verbo*: essay 63, *De Diuersis Quaestionibus*, see note 18.

principles of knowledge and intelligibility which are inherent in the Ideas. *Ratio* (λόγος) and *forma* (ἰδέα) are then, in Augustine's point of view, synonymous. We have already seen a demonstration of these statements in the collaborative activities of the *rationes* and the Ideas in Augustine's creation doctrine and also in the references to the Creator as Reason Principle and Form Principle.

Augustine integrated the meaning of λόγος in the sense of 'rational thinking' into his redemption doctrine by stressing the importance of acquiring knowledge. Contemplation of the Ideas and gaining divine knowledge take place only in the highest and purest part of the human soul, the rational mind. These facts indicate to us, that even before we consider Plotinus' Λόγος doctrine, it is already clear that Augustine's doctrine of the *Verbum Dei* is permeated with influence from λόγος concepts from Greek philosophy.

Plotinus' view of the formation of the universe⁵²

The origin of the world and all life in it is an hypostasis which Plotinus calls the One or the Good. This principle of absolute unity is so far removed from anything thinkable or recognizable that any description of it is impossible. It is a complete whole and totally transcendent. By means of expressing itself (Λόγος), the One gives birth to a new hypostasis, the Νοῦς or the Intellect.⁵³ The result of the coming to existence of this new entity is a duplicity. The One remains exactly as it is, but the new hypostasis is less perfect than the One. Once the Intellect comes into being, it longs to understand its source.

⁵² *Plotinus with an English translation*, A. H. Armstrong (London: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988). Studies focused on the Plotinian Λόγος utilized for my research: P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, "Le Logos et les Logoi chez Plotin", *BA* 48, 654-657; A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1940, 1967); P. Boot, *Plotinus Over Voorzienigheid Enneade III 2-3* [47-48] Inleiding, Commentaar, Essays, (dissertation), (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1984); M. Fattal, *Logos et Image chez Plotin*, (Paris, Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1998), "Beauté et métaphysique chez Plotin: le rôle du logos venu des dieux", in: *Logos et Langage chez Plotin et avant Plotin* sous la direction de Michel Fattal, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), *Image, Mythe, Logos et Raison*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 35-62; R. Ferwerda, *Plotinus Enneaden, Porphyrius Over Het Leven van Plotinus*, vertaald uit het Grieks en ingeleid door R. Ferwerda, (Budel (the Netherlands): Uitgeverij Damon, 2005) [in particular the extensive introduction p. 13-101 and glossary p. 911-928.]; E. Früchtel, *Weltentwurf und Logos. Zur Metaphysik Plotins* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970); J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1967).

⁵³ *Enneads* III. 2. 2.15, xx-xxv; V. I. 7. 44-46.

It then turns⁵⁴ to contemplate (θεωρεῖν) the Good. By means of this contemplation, it receives the fullness and abundance of the One and becomes pure Thought. The Intellect is, as the One, totally transcendent and exists exclusively in its own divine realm. From the One, it also receives the intelligible world (the Forms or the Ideas) which contains the models for producing life in the material world. For this reason, the Νοῦς is referred to as Being. The Νοῦς reproduces itself by expressing itself (Λόγος) and also divides itself into individual intellects (also referred to as Λόγοι).

Plotinus calls the Intellect a god: the demiurge.⁵⁵ By means of a creative expression (Λόγος), the Νοῦς produces a new hypostasis: the Soul. The Soul is an image of the Intellect but exists at a further distance away from the One than the Νοῦς which means that it is less perfect and more differentiated than its source. Just as the Νοῦς above, it turns to its origin, contemplates the Νοῦς, and in doing so receives its properties: Thought and Being. It also receives the individual intellects (as individual Λόγοι) and the forms or models of Being for the material world which it will realize at a later stage.

The Soul is now an image of the Intellect. However, these noetic properties remain only in the highest region of the Soul, which is subsequently called νοῦς. Following an expression (Λόγος), the Soul now produces two lower realms which will always belong to the domain of the total Soul. The realm just below the Νοῦς region is called the World Soul, which is responsible for creating the universe. It then splits itself into individual parts or souls. This came about by contemplation of its source (the Ideas) and expressing itself (Λόγος), whereby its activities became united with the universal Λόγος or Reason. The third realm of the Soul is called Nature, which creates matter and the corporeal world by reproducing itself further as well.

The visible world as we know it, is the fabrication of Nature and the Λόγος, the latter of which, at an earlier stage -in the realm of the Νοῦς- split itself up into individual Λόγοι. Now at the level of Nature, these are called Λόγοι σπερματικοί: germinative principles or creative and formative forces which carry internal laws of growth and development of physical and material structures. They also contain the characteristics of the various species of living beings with the capacity to reproduce. Λόγοι in matter are in themselves images of the eternal Ideas and are responsible for making the sense world a reflection of

⁵⁴ The Greek term ἐπιστροφή is the equivalent of the Latin: *conuersio*.

⁵⁵ *Enneads* V. 1; V. 9. 3; II. 9. 6.

the intelligible. Both Nature and the Λόγοι are involved with the creation of physical bodies which will house the individual souls. Human bodies are made by Nature contemplating, expressing itself and 'donating' the Λόγοι to matter, thereby (in)forming it.⁵⁶

When treating the subject of the creation of human beings, it is useful to lend some extra attention to Plotinus' view of the relationship between the total Soul and the human soul for the benefit of our upcoming comparison. The tripartite nature of the hypostasis Soul is reflected in the human soul. The human soul is made up of thinking, emotional and desiring parts. The highest part of the human soul is an individual intellect (νοῦς). This νοῦς is exclusively involved with the intelligible realm and never passes outside of it. Just as the total Νοῦς, this part of the human soul comprehends intuitively and simultaneously. Pertaining to the individual νοῦς is an individual λόγος which possesses the capacity to reason (λογισμός), to think discursively (διάνοια) and to come to an understanding of things by logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis. The individual νοῦς is therefore called the rational soul. The lowest region of the human soul deals with emotional affects. It bears the capacity to perceive with the senses and also contains lust and appetites which are useful for vegetative growth and procreation. This part of the soul is named after its transcendent archetype: 'nature'.⁵⁷

Within this process of creating new living beings, we see that the offspring on every level of existence are a result of contemplation (θεωρία) of its source in a higher realm. Θεωρία of beings above is also a way to unite oneself with the highest principle. This brings us to another aspect of Plotinus' philosophy. His cosmogony begins with a description of the development of entities and life coming into existence by a continuous extenuation and emanation from the One. But Plotinus also describes a development moving in the opposite direction: the ascension of the human soul back to the ultimate source, which is important to briefly treat here.

For Plotinus, the return of mankind to its source, the One or the Good, revolves around the subject of beauty. As we have already seen, the visible world is regarded by Plotinus as a mirror image of the higher intelligible world of the Ideas. Consequently, an object which

⁵⁶ Ibid, III. 8. 3; IV. 3. 13,15; IV. 4. 39; V. 9. 6. 11, 19; III. 2. 2. xx. Fattal, 2009, 38-45, note 32, 33 and 37. For a detailed study of the relationship between matter, form and seminal reasons in Plotinus, Cf: ibid, 2009, 51-56 and 1998, 35-38; and Plotinus' transformation of the Stoic theory of providential Universal Reason and seminal reasons, ibid, 1998, 30-31, note 1.

⁵⁷ *Enneads* IV. 8. 8.

we perceive with our senses is in one way or the other a reflection of a certain Idea existing in *de Noûs*. The ascension to the One then begins with an experience of sensory perception of physical beauty. Eventually one realizes that the beautiful physical phenomenon we perceive is not true beauty at all, but a manifestation of a universal character. The experience of beauty evoked by sense perception is then transformed and raised to an intellectual realization of truth. To ascend a step higher, one turns inward to the deepest recesses of the soul, discovering the source of beauty in oneself. Looking upwards to the higher regions of one's own *voûs*, the intellect, the beauty of all eternal forms are beheld (*θεωρία*). However, to reach this level, a rigorous purification of the soul is required as well as the abandonment of the world of the physical senses.

The Idea 'Beauty' receives special treatment by Plotinus, because of its elevated status compared to the other intelligible Ideas. 'Beauty' derives not only from the Intellect but from the One. The ultimate step of the ascension to the Good is the most difficult. One has to surpass the intellect and leave the realm of thought behind. The aim is to unify oneself with the highest principle, however this entails waiting until the One reveals itself. Whenever this happens, one participates in the infinite, undetermined and absolute unity of the Good, an experience which is accompanied by ecstasy, comparable to the feeling of being joined with one's beloved, or more intensely, that one has become pure love.⁵⁸

Comparison: *Noûs-Verbum*

It is possible to go on extensively about the numerous similarities and differences between Augustine's creation doctrine and Plotinus' cosmogony. But instead, I will only point out a few general resemblances here. To begin with, both Plotinus and Augustine follow the Platonic line of thought, that the visible world is a reflection of the intelligible Ideas. Both thinkers claim that the visible world appeared as a result of a joining together of matter and form. A human being is composed of a body and soul, both of which developed separately before coming together. The soul has both higher and lower levels, of which the highest part is purely rational. Plotinus' *Noûs* is the demiurge of our world and Augustine's Creator is the *Verbum*. Plotinus'

⁵⁸ Ibid, V. 5. 8; V. 9. 2; I. 6. 8-9; VI. 7. 31-33.

Noûς is the source and location of the intelligible forms just as Augustine's *Verbum*.

The last two similarities bring us back to the issue concerning Augustine's comparison of John's prologue and Platonism in *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13, which I referred to in the introduction. The main question was, what did Augustine have in mind when he claimed that the two had so much in common? In the introduction I mentioned certain scholars (see note 2) who pointed to the similarities between the Plotinian Noûς and Augustine's *Verbum Dei* to illustrate their answer. Now we will look at the arguments which Perler used to justify this.

Perler demonstrates that both Plotinus' Noûς and Augustine's *Verbum* represent the *vorbildliche Ursache* or exemplary cause of the corporeal world. The Noûς is the 'Word', or Λόγος of the One, just as Augustine's *Verbum* is God the Father's Word. The Noûς and the *Verbum* are both, in particular, the source of the Forms and also of Light and Enlightenment. Both Plotinus and Augustine claim that the harmony of the world demands supernatural wisdom as its cause. The *Verbum*, as the Noûς, is a reasoning Creator who carries out a rational plan in creating the world.⁵⁹

Perler's findings are unquestionably correct. But the problem with Perler and the other scholars who find the Noûς-*Verbum* similarities to be the most significant, is that not one of them takes the similarities between Augustine's *Verbum* and Plotinus' Λόγος into consideration. And why not? Their justification is that Plotinus' Λόγος is not a hypostasis and therefore deviates too far from the *Verbum* to be eligible for a serious comparison. It is only the Noûς, they assume, with sufficient related features. We can check this statement by taking a closer look at Plotinus' Λόγος doctrine.

Plotinus' doctrine of the Λόγος

In my sketch of Plotinus' cosmogony we came across different aspects of the Λόγος which are useful to review here. For example, the Λόγος was in regard to all three hypostases an 'expression' which was always accompanied by a creative process or a reproduction of the hypostases themselves. The first appearance of the Λόγος took place in the realm of the Noûς which is a 'Λόγος' of the One. By contemplating its source, the Noûς received the intelligible world. The

⁵⁹ Perler, 1931, 23-24, 31, 47, 72-74.

Νοῦς divided itself into individual intellects, each intellect comprising an individual Λόγος. When the Νοῦς expressed itself and the Soul came into being, the Soul turned to contemplate its origin. When the highest part of the Soul became an intellect, it expressed itself (Λόγος) in the same way. This was the second level in which the Λόγος functions, the region of the Soul. We saw in Plotinus' cosmogony that the World Soul eventually became the World Λόγος and subsequently divided itself up into individual souls. These individual souls contained intellects which are λόγοι originally from the total Νοῦς. At the lowest region of the Soul (Nature), form and matter were brought together to make bodies for the individual souls. This was the third level of the Λόγος' activity where the visible world was fabricated by Λόγοι σπερματικοί.⁶⁰

In summary, we have seen that the Λόγος is not only a creative expression, it is also an entity which divided itself into individual parts just as the Intellect and the Soul had done and functioned on three levels of existence: at the level of the Νοῦς, of the Soul and of the visible world.⁶¹ The Λόγος is transcendent as well as immanent. In its transcendent existence, it emanated originally from the One and delivered the intelligible forms from the Νοῦς to the Soul. In the sense world, the incorporeal Λόγοι, which are images of the eternal Ideas, are immanent in matter. The Λόγος and the Soul were both in part responsible for producing the corporeal world and were both called a 'maker' by Plotinus. Plotinus also specified that the Λόγος is identical to the forms and subsequently is a form principle. The Λόγος serves as representative of the Intellect in the lower realms of existence.⁶²

Now we may elaborate on the nature of the Λόγος. Besides being a creative and formative principle, its foremost function is as a principle of reason and order.⁶³ Within the creation process, the Λόγος provides the cosmos and the intelligible world with a rational foundation in compliance with set laws. In this way, it fulfills an important providential function in the world. Altogether, the Λόγος is the structure, the plan and the plot. It is also the origin of the reasoning facility in the human mind: every human being possesses an individual λόγος

⁶⁰ *Enneads* III. 2. 2. 20; III. 7.; V. 9. 6.11 and 19; Cf: Agaësse-Solignac, 1972, 654-657.

⁶¹ *Enneads* III. 2. 2. 15-40; III. 3. 5. 10; III. 3. 4. 20, 25-30.

⁶² *Ibid*, III. 2. 11 and 15; V. 9. 6. / III.2.xx-xxx; III.3.4. See Aristotle as the source for equating the Λόγος with 'idea' εἶδος, Cf: Fattal, 1998, 32-33.

⁶³ *Enneads* II. 7. 3; III. 3. 4. 5-10; III. 8. 8. 13-16; VI. 9. 5.

which is a reflection of the Λόγος at the highest, transcendent level. It provides the human intellect with its mental structure which it needs to process and assimilate the images entering the perception organs and imagination. The reasoning facility resides in the highest region of the human soul, as we have already seen.⁶⁴ As we shall read in the next section, the Λόγος is associated with providence and contemplation and plays a distinct role in the return to the One. With these aspects of the Λόγος in mind, we are ready to proceed to a comparison with Augustine's *Verbum*.

Comparison: Λόγος-*Verbum*

There are at least six points of agreement between the Plotinian Λόγος and Augustine's *Verbum* which are candidates for discussion here.⁶⁵

1) As a 'Word of God' and a 'Son of God'

Up until now I have employed forms of the verb 'to express' to describe the activity of Plotinus' Λόγος in its utterance (ἐν προφορᾷ): the Intellect was an expression or utterance of the One, the Soul an utterance of the Intellect, the World Soul-Universal Reason an utterance of the Intellect-Soul. As mentioned earlier, Plotinus refers to the Intellect as the demiurge or a god. Taking this into consideration and also the fact that the term λόγος can just as well be translated as 'word', it would be justified calling Plotinus' Λόγος a 'Word of God'. The following quote illustrates the 'Λόγος-Word' relationship between the Intellect and the Soul, and how the Λόγος or an 'expressed thought' or 'word' coming forth from the Intellect, brought the World-Soul-Universal Λόγος, as well as all of life, into existence.

Enneads V.I.3.7-9: Soul...is...an image of Intellect; just as a thought in its utterance (LZ: Λόγος) is an image of the thought in soul, so soul itself is the expressed thought (LZ: Λόγος) of Intellect, and its

⁶⁴ Ibid, IV. 3. 16, 7; III. 2. 2, 3; III. 3. 4.

⁶⁵ Where it is possible I have included relevant quotes to illustrate the comparisons. Other discussion points however are more suited for a conceptual analyse. The quotes serve to underline conceptual similarities. I do not intend to make textual comparisons between the passages here. Material used for these comparisons, unless otherwise indicated, is derived from the introductory exposés.

whole activity, and the life which it sends out to establish another reality;...⁶⁶

We could equally regard Augustine’s *Verbum* as an ‘expression’ of God the Father.

De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim 1.2.6: For the Word of God, true God in the bosom of God and the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father; and yet through his utterance of God in the eternal Word, creation has been brought about in time.⁶⁷

No less than Augustine’s *Verbum*, the Λόγος is also a ‘Son of God’. The Intellect as demiurge assumes a paternal relationship to everything which comes into existence after itself. The first entity which emerges from the Νοῦς is the Λόγος, followed by the Soul, which unites with both the Νοῦς and the Λόγος. This relationship is depicted in the quote below.

Enneads V.I.7.44-46: And the offspring (LZ: Λόγος) of Intellect is a rational form and an existing being, that which thinks discursively; it is this which moves round the Intellect and is light and trace of Intellect and dependent on it, united to it on one side and so filled with it and enjoying it and sharing in it and thinking, but on the other side, in touch with the things which came after it...⁶⁸

A significant resemblance worthy of mention here is that the Plotinian Νοῦς and Augustine’s God the Father, from where both the *Verbum* and the Λόγος emerged, are regarded as the source of all Being. Both the *Verbum* and the Λόγος are intimately associated with these entities. An important difference is however, that the *Verbum* and God the Father are equal in their essence and perfection. The Λόγος, which is not a hypostasis, cannot be equal to the Intellect or any other hypostasis in Plotinus’ world view. However, as mentioned

⁶⁶ ἡ ψυχὴ....εἰκὼν τίς ἐστι νοῦ· οἷον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἦν προῖεται ζῶν εἰς ἄλλου ὑπόστασιν· The English translations of the quotes from the *Enneads* are of Armstrong (see note 52). The Greek passages: edition Henry and Schwyzler.

⁶⁷ The English translations of the quotes here from this book are from Taylor (note 17). ...*quia uerbum Dei, Deus apud Deum, filius unicus Dei, patri coaeternus est, quamuis Deo haec in aeterno uerbo dicente creatura temporalis facta sit.* (BA 48). See also note 21.

⁶⁸ Νοῦ δὲ γέννημα λόγος τις καὶ ὑπόστασις, τὸ διανοούμενον· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ περὶ νοῦν κινούμενον καὶ νοῦ φῶς καὶ ἵχνος ἐξηρητημένον ἐκείνου, κατὰ θάτερα μὲν συνηγμένον ἐκείνῳ καὶ ταύτῃ ἀποπιμπλάμενον καὶ ἀπολαῶν καὶ μεταλαμβάνον αὐτοῦ καὶ νοοῦν, κατὰ θάτερα δὲ ἐφαπτόμενον τῶν μετ’ αὐτό. The One is also called the father of the Νοῦς and of the Λόγος (πατὴρ λόγου). *Enneads* VI. 8. 14. 35-40; VI. 8. 15. 30-38.

earlier, Plotinus does refer to the Λόγος as the representative of the Intellect and the intelligible world.

2) As rational principle

The term 'rational principle' recalls not only the active force in the three realms of existence of Plotinus' Λόγος, the Λόγοι and the Λόγοι σπερματικοί but also Augustine's *rationes aeternae causales*, and *seminales* which provide order and stability in the world. As the origin of rational principles, with which His creation is permeated, the Word is, like the Λόγος, designated as 'Reason Principle'.

De Ideis 2: ...the ideas are certain original and principal forms of things, i.e., reasons, fixed and unchangeable,...being thus eternal... are contained in the Divine Intelligence.⁶⁹

The *Verbum Dei* is the primary, rational principle element in creation. Exactly the same can be said of Plotinus' Λόγος.

Enneads III.2.14-15: The rational principle (LZ: Λόγος), then, is the origin, and all things are reason, both those which are brought into being according to principle and those which, in their coming to birth, are altogether arranged in common order.⁷⁰

3) As creation and form principle

Despite the many differences between the cosmogonies in which the *Logos* and *Verbum Dei* function, we can nonetheless find many remarkable similarities between the two entities, such as the fact that both are referred to as form principles and creators. The Λόγος has a productive function as 'expression' when the Νοῦς and the Soul come into being and also reproduces itself within the realm of the Soul by breaking itself up into individual λόγοι. Plotinus described the Λόγος as 'the maker' of the world and as we saw in the quote above, as the origin of all things.⁷¹ The Λόγος delivers the eternal forms of

⁶⁹ The translations of *De Ideis* are from Mosher (note 18). *Sunt namque ideae principales formae quaedam, uel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles,... ac per hoc aeternae ac semper modo sese habentes,... quae in diuina intelligentia continentur.* (BA 10). See also note 42.

⁷⁰ Ἀρχὴ οὖν λόγος καὶ πάντα λόγος καὶ τὰ γινόμενα κατ' αὐτὸν καὶ συνταττόμενα ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει πάντως οὕτως. See note 63.

⁷¹ See notes 56 and 62.

being from the Intellect to the World Soul and Nature and is entirely associated with the forms and intelligible world.

Enneads III.2.2.36: It is the intelligible universe that is nothing but rational principle, and there could not be another which is nothing but rational principle;...⁷²

The *Verbum* is in Augustine's exegesis the 'Form Principle' because He is the origin of the eternal Forms, and also due to his Formation and Illumination of human souls.

Gn ad lit 2.8.17...they (LZ: the angels) simply recognize what they interiorly know more perfectly in the Word of God Himself, who illuminates them and imparts to them a life of wisdom. ...The form (*ratio*) therefore, according to which a creature is created, exists first in the Word of God before the actual creation of the work itself. So also the knowledge of this form is produced first in the intellectual creatures not yet darkened by sin, and then the work is created.⁷³

Just as Plotinus' Ideas are synonymous to the Λόγοι, Augustine affirmed that the *rationes* were to be considered one and the same as the *formae*, and that they together are the foundations of the visible world. Parallel to Plotinus' Λόγοι and Ideas, Augustine's *rationes* and *formae* are essentially two different concepts, each with its own functions, yet are almost impossible to separate from one another.

4) As mediators on three levels of existence

In Plotinus' and Augustine's world views, there is a clear separation between the intelligible world and the sensible world. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, a construction of the universe of this kind requires an entity which is able to communicate with both of these worlds and is transcendent as well as immanent. In Augustine's creation doctrine, this is the *Verbum Dei*. In Plotinus' cosmogony, this is the Λόγος *par excellence*. It is important to underline this fact because it appears at first sight that the most powerful creator in Plotinus' cosmogony is the Νοῦς. However, the Intellect is not involved in any direct way with the creation of the material world.

⁷² Ὁ μὲν γὰρ νοητὸς μόνον λόγος, καὶ οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἄλλος μόνον λόγος.

⁷³ ...*quae melius nouerunt interius in ipso Dei uerbo, a quo inluminantur, ut sapienter uiuant, cum sit in eis lux, quae primo facta est, si lucem spiritalem in illo die factam intelligimus...Quemadmodum ergo ratio, qua creatura conditur, prior est in uerbo Dei quam ipsa creatura, quae conditur...*(BA 48). See also notes 36, 41 and 50.

Only the Λόγος manifests throughout all levels of reality in Plotinus' system: in the Intellect, the Soul and matter. Seen in this way, the Λόγος corresponds to the Augustine's *Verbum* more precisely than the Νοῦς. This important fact was completely ignored by Perler and the other mentioned scholars (note 2).

We also saw in Plotinus' cosmogony that the Λόγοι and the Λόγοι exercise their most significant powers on three levels: of the Νοῦς, the Soul and the material world. This corresponds neatly with Augustine's three levels of existence in which the *Verbum* and the *rationes* are at work.⁷⁴ To recapitulate, these were: the realm of the *Verbum Dei* and then at the two 'moments' of creation, respectively at the intelligible and the physical level. The three levels of the *rationes* and the Λόγοι as invisible, intelligible creation principles are in the systems of both thinkers almost identical. In Plotinus' view, the Λόγοι deliver the *intelligibilia* from the Νοῦς to the various realms of the Soul and ultimately to unformed matter. They also serve as an agent (μεταξύ) between the eternal, transcendent and divine realm of the Intellect, the Soul and the visible cosmos. In this role they assure the communication between the different levels of reality.⁷⁵ Augustine's *rationes* fulfill approximately the same mediatory function as the Λόγος and the λόγοι. The *rationes causales*, for example, mediate between their transcendent source, the *Verbum* and the corporeal world. Augustine also described the *Verbum Dei* as mediator between God and humans.⁷⁶ This last point brings us to another difference between the *Verbum* and the Λόγος: the *Verbum* suffices in Augustine's system as the one and only mediator. His intervention is direct and immediate as opposed to Plotinus' transcendent Λόγος which requires λόγοι in order to act upon the lower regions of existence.

The *rationes seminales* and *causales* in Augustine's creation doctrine are in essence the same as Plotinus' Λόγοι σπερματικοί: they contain the forms, they bring life and human bodies into the

⁷⁴ See notes 40 (Augustine) and 61 (Plotinus).

⁷⁵ E.g.: *Enneads* II. 9. 1. 33 and II. 9. 1. 57-63. / The Soul shares with the Λόγος some of the same functions in the Plotinian cosmogony, for example as maker of the world and also as mediator of the forms from the Intellect to the individual souls. However, in *Enneads* III. 2. 2. the Λόγος is indicated as the most important intermediary and almost achieves the status of a hypostasis. In the second and third treatises of this book, Plotinus states that the individual souls are governed by the Λόγος, the ruler of the visible world. In summary, in these treatises of book III, the Λόγος holds a much more influential status than the Soul as creator of the world. (Ibid, III. 8. 3.)

⁷⁶ See note 24.

visible world and assure that vegetative growth takes place according to the laws of structural development. Augustine does not however employ a ‘World Soul’ or a soul of any kind, in the way Plotinus does to assist the *rationes* with the creation of human beings. In addition to this, Augustine’s *rationes* act only in strict dependance on God’s will, contrary to the Plotinian Λόγοι.

Nonetheless, it is evident here that Augustine made use of Plotinus’ Λόγος and the Λόγοι doctrine to structure and underpin his exegese of Genesis and his doctrine of the *Verbum Dei* and *rationes*. Both the Λόγος and the *Verbum Dei* are directly involved with the coming into being of the corporeal world in similar ways and as I will illustrate in the following points, both are also responsible for the further continuation of the world, as well as for the return of humans to their divine source.

5) As Providence

The last two points of agreement involve aspects of the Λόγος which I have not yet introduced and will now elaborate on. For the next point we turn to book III, treatises 2 and 3 of the *Enneads* where Plotinus equates the Λόγος with the term πρόνοια ‘providence’. Providence is understood as the maintenance of the rational, ordered and hierarchical structure of the cosmos. It is also understood as the effectuation of harmony between opposing forces among individual beings (λόγοι) and the establishment of moral order in the world. The Λόγος operates in these ways as the representative of the Νοῦς – as its ἐνέργεια – in the visible world.⁷⁷

Enneads III.3.4.5-10: For he (LZ: man) is not only what he was made but has another free principle, which is not outside providence or the rational principle of the whole; for those higher principles are not separated from these here but the better illuminate the worse, and this is perfect providence; and there is one rational principle which is creative and another which connects the better principles with the things which have come into being, and those higher principles are providence which act from above,...⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Enneads* III. 2. 20-30; III. 3. 4.

⁷⁸ Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ὁ πεποιηταί ἐστιν, ἀλλ’ ἔχει ἀρχὴν ἄλλην ἐλευθέραν οὐκ ἔξω τῆς προνοίας οὔσαν οὐδὲ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ ὅλου· οὐ γὰρ ἀπήρτηται ἐκεῖνα τούτων, ἀλλ’ ἐπιλαμβάνει τὰ κρείττω τοῖς χειρόσι καὶ ἡ τελεία πρόνοια τοῦτο· καὶ λόγος ὁ μὲν ποιητικός, ὁ δὲ συνάπτων τὰ κρείττω τοῖς γενομένοις, κάκεῖνα πρόνοια ἡ ἄνωθεν, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἄνω,....

In the passage above, Plotinus intertwines the creator Λόγος as rational principle not only with providence but also with illumination. These functions essentially entail a transfer of properties from the divine realms to the experiential world of humans. These characteristics can easily be associated in a *general fashion* with certain features of Augustine's *Verbum*. For example, in his role as mediator between the Father and the world, and in particular in the role of Illuminator, He brings divine knowledge from above to human minds below. We can also consider his deliverance of mankind as providence, including the manner in which the Word of God fulfills the human spirit, because in these ways, the *Verbum*, as the Λόγος, advances harmony and moral order in the world. Additionally, parallel to the providential Λόγος and λόγοι, the *Verbum* and the *rationes* also govern and maintain the rational order and structure of the world.⁷⁹

We should not lose sight of major differences between the divinities in Augustine's and Plotinus' doctrines: such as the fact that Plotinus' Λόγος (including the other hypostases) is not a 'person' of any kind as the *Verbum*. The Λόγος is divine but not a god. It is merely a divine function. As Augustine himself mentioned in *Confessiones* VII, ix.13, it is unthinkable for a Platonist divinity to incarnate on earth as a human redeemer.

6) In contemplation of the Ideas and ascending to the highest Principle

For this last point we will focus on how an individual makes his way back to the creator source and on the roles Augustine's *Verbum Dei* and Plotinus' Λόγος both play in this process. We recall from the introduction that Plotinus' view of returning to the One begins with the experience of physical beauty.⁸⁰ This involves an elevation from physical perception, to an inward experience of the intellect where universal truths are realized and then continues beyond. The Λόγος plays an indispensable part here, due to the obligatory passing through the regions of discursive reasoning, science and contemplation.⁸¹ The goal here however is to surpass the contemplation of the Ideas. The

⁷⁹ See note 50.

⁸⁰ See note 58.

⁸¹ Plotinus associates the Λόγος with contemplation of that which is higher than itself. The Λόγος was produced from a state of contemplation and likewise produces by this means. *Ibid.*, II. 7. 3; III. 8. 3. 5-10; III. 8. 4. 5-10; III. 8. 7. 1-5, 19-24; III. 8. 8. 13-16; VI. 7. 36.1-10. Cf: Boot, 1984, 376-377.

Λόγος itself serves as a signpost pointing to the loftier regions of the Good, beyond rationality. As mentioned above, the Λόγος as form principle relays the eternal forms from higher to lower levels in the creative process of emanation from the One. Thus, in the reverse direction, returning to the One, the forms –especially the Idea Beauty– are drawn back to their source by the impulse of the Λόγος.⁸²

We can discover parallel services of the Λόγος in Augustine's *Verbum*, in his teaching of illumination, particularly as expressed in his essay *De Ideis*.

De Ideis 46. 2: Now among the things which have been created by God, the rational soul is the most excellent of all, and it is closest to God when it is pure. And in the measure that it has clung to him in love...and illumined by him with light, intelligible light, the soul discerns – not with physical eyes, but with its own highest part – in which lies excellence, i.e., with its intelligence – those reasons whose vision brings to it full blessedness. These *rationes*, as was said, may be called ideas, or forms or species, or reasons; and while it is the privilege of many to name them what they wish, it is the privilege of very few to see them in their reality.⁸³

In this passage, Augustine indicates that a believer can contemplate the Ideas in the highest region of her or his soul, which is of rational disposition and closest to God. This psychical region is illuminated when it turns to the *Verbum*, the Divine Intellect and source of Ideas. Augustine expounds that the only path to God the Father is through the Son.⁸⁴ Yet an active, preliminary quest for divine knowledge is prerequisite for faith and for comprehending God's revelations.⁸⁵

Therefore both the *Verbum* and the Λόγος are intensely involved in the ascent to the highest principle, in collaboration with the intellectual activity of the seeker. Their contributions to the ascent

⁸² *Enneads* I. 6. 2. 27-28; I. 6. 6. 14-15; III. 8. 6, 35-40; III. 8. 8; VI. 7. 36. 1-10; VI. 8. 14. 30; VI. 8. 15-30; VI. 9. 4. 13-14. Cf: Fattal, 1998, 14-22, and 2003, 301-303.

⁸³ *Sed anima rationalis inter eas res quae sunt a Deo conditae, omnia superat; et Deo proxima est, quando pura est; eique in quantum caritate cohaeserit...in tantum ab eo lumine illo intelligibili perfusa quodam modo et illustrata cernit, non per corporeos oculos, sed per ipsius sui principale, quo excellit, id est per intelligentiam suam, istas rationes, quarum uisione fit beatissima. Quas rationes, ut dictum est, siue ideas, siue formas, siue species, siue rationes licet uocare, et multis conceditur appellare quod libet, sed paucissimis uidere quod uerum est.* (BA 10).

⁸⁴ E.g. see notes 24 and 50.

⁸⁵ See notes 49 and 50.

are essential for passing through to the highest state. The general differences between these two theologies have already been discussed. Yet there are a few other differences to mention: for example, Augustine's stress on the necessity of grace concerning the *Verbum*'s illumination which is absent in Plotinus' philosophy. Augustine and Plotinus also differ in attitude as to how a person can return to the divine source. Plotinus tends to advocate the ascent to the One solely by merit of one's personal efforts, while Augustine emphasizes dependency on the *Verbum Dei*. Once again we must confirm here that Augustine's *Verbum* is more personally involved with individuals than the Λόγος of Plotinus.

Evaluation

In the beginning of my paper, I showed how Augustine made use of the Λόγος principle from Greek philosophy to articulate his doctrine of the Creator and the creation. Later, in my six points of comparison, we saw how the Plotinian Λόγος as a divine principle was deeply involved in the creation process, in its continuation and in the provision of the cosmos, in many similar ways as Augustine's *Verbum Dei*. The two entities are both an expression generated from a higher principle, a divine Word, a Son of God. Both are the creators of a rationally constructed material universe, the sources of creative reason principles by which the visible world was made and of which it became a reflection. Augustine's system of reason principles bears such close similarities to Plotinus' system of λόγοι that a dependence is practically undeniable. Both the *Verbum* and the Λόγος represent higher principles (God the Father, the Intellect) which are unable to manifest in matter or physical substance due to their absolute transcendence. Lastly, both the *Verbum* and the Λόγος are instrumental in pointing the way back to the source of life, a 'journey' which entails ascending to the highest principle.

Let us return briefly to the questions from my introduction. The first was: which Platonist concepts did Augustine depict in his description of the Platonist texts in *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13, which convinced him that there were similarities to be found in the prologue of John's Gospel? Taking again the conclusions of the researchers into consideration who claimed that it was the Plotinian Νοῦς which Augustine was referring to (see note 2) and who underlined that Augustine borrowed these aspects of the Νοῦς to formulate his Creator doctrine and exegesis of Genesis, we can now see that these statements require

correction. We can surely affirm that Plotinus’ Intellect resembles the *Verbum* in certain ways. But it is not only the Plotinian Νοῦς which influenced the Augustine’s *Verbum Dei* doctrine. For example, it is not the Νοῦς, but the Λόγος which created the visible world. It is only the Λόγος and not the Νοῦς which shares the *Verbum*’s double character of transcendence and immanence. The passages in *Confessiones* do reflect Plotinus’ Νοῦς to some extent, but to a greater extent his Λόγος principle.

Returning to the question concerning which Platonist books Augustine read: the studies of Henry and those after him who established Augustine’s dependence on certain treatises of the *Enneads* (see notes 5 and 6) allow us to infer that Plotinus’ Λόγος was most likely the source for the Λόγος influence in Augustine’s creation doctrine. It would now be useful to determine which books of the *Enneads* Augustine studied which reflect the influence of the Λόγος on his *Verbum Dei* doctrine. Unfortunately this paper did not allow the space to treat this question. This issue deserves further attention in the future. In any case, studies on Augustine’s doctrines of the creation and the Word of God should regard the Plotinian Λόγος doctrine as one of Augustine’s most significant extra-biblical sources.⁸⁶

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