

Confessions - Book IV - Chapter XV

by St. Augustine

Transcript

24. But I had not seen how the main point in these great issues [concerning the nature of beauty] lay really in thy craftsmanship, O Omnipotent One, "who alone doest great wonders." [107] And so my mind ranged through the corporeal forms, and I defined and distinguished as "beautiful" that which is so in itself and as "fit" that which is beautiful in relation to some other thing. This argument I supported by corporeal examples. And I turned my attention to the nature of the mind, but the false opinions which I held concerning spiritual things prevented me from seeing the truth. Still, the very power of truth forced itself on my gaze, and I turned my throbbing soul away from incorporeal substance to qualities of line and color and shape, and, because I could not perceive these with my mind, I concluded that I could not perceive my mind. And since I loved the peace which is in virtue, and hated the discord which is in vice, I distinguished between the unity there is in virtue and the discord there is in vice. I conceived that unity consisted of the rational soul and the nature of truth and the highest good. But I imagined that in the disunity there was some kind of substance of irrational life and some kind of entity in the supreme evil. This evil I thought was not only a substance but real life as well, and yet I believed that it did not come from thee, O my God, from whom are all things. And the first I called a Monad, as if it were a soul without sex. The other I called a Dyad, which showed itself in anger in deeds of violence, in deeds of passion and lust--but I did not know what I was talking about. For I had not understood nor had I been taught that evil is not a substance at all and that our soul is not that supreme and unchangeable good.

25. For just as in violent acts, if the emotion of the soul from whence the violent impulse springs is depraved and asserts itself insolently and mutinously--and just as in the acts of passion, if the affection of the soul which gives rise to carnal desires is unrestrained--so also, in the same way, errors and false opinions contaminate life if the rational soul itself is depraved. Thus it was then with me, for I was ignorant that my soul had to be enlightened by another light, if it was to be partaker of the truth, since it is not itself the essence of truth. "For thou wilt light my lamp; the Lord my God will lighten my darkness" [108]; and "of his fullness have we all received," [109] for "that was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" [110]; for "in thee there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." [111]

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