

Graduate Seminar Series

Adrian R. Jacobs

“The Inconceivable Divine: Augustinian Beauty’s Bearing on Contemporary Sublimity

Philosophers have long held to the division between beauty and sublimity. However, this distinction wasn't always as apparent: in medieval philosophy, beauty and sublimity were deeply intertwined. This paper focuses on Augustine of Hippo's depiction of the beautiful, found especially in *Confessions*, but also across works like *De Musica* and *De Trinitate*. While a wide variety of scholarship exists on Augustine's use of beauty, there is a lack of significant scholarship regarding his relation to sublimity. I hope to fill in this gap. I argue that studying Augustine's conception of beauty reinforces the overlap between it and sublimity and ultimately helps illustrate how their combination is perfected in the divine. I start by tracing the history of sublimity through philosophers such as Longinus, Burke, Kant, and Hegel. I then discuss beauty as illustrated by Augustine, comparing it with notions of sublimity. I emphasize the theological implications of both aesthetic experiences, establishing how Augustine's portrayal is directly tied to his notion of God. Finally, I suggest why this analysis is significant in its contribution to current understandings, and why scholars might reconsider the divorce between the two concepts in favor of a more unified perspective. This project has implications not only in the realm of philosophy, but it also possesses interdisciplinary bearing for the theologian and the artist, as they study and produce aesthetic experiences that carry moral import.

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