

1. The Teacher¹

[The Purpose of Language]

[1.1] AUGUSTINE. When we speak, what does it seem to you we want to accomplish?

ADEODATUS. So far as it now strikes me, either to teach or to learn.

AUGUSTINE. I see one of these points and I agree with it, for it's clear that by speaking we want to teach. But to learn? How?

ADEODATUS. How do you suppose we learn, after all, if not when we ask questions?

AUGUSTINE. Even then I think that we want only to teach. I ask you: do you question someone for any reason other than to teach him what you want [to hear]?

ADEODATUS. You're right.

AUGUSTINE. So now you see that we seek nothing by speaking except to teach.

ADEODATUS. I don't see it clearly. If speaking is nothing but uttering words, I see that we do this when we're singing. Given that we often sing while we're

alone, without anyone present who might learn, I don't think we want to teach anything.

AUGUSTINE. Well, for my part I think there is a certain kind of teaching through reminding—a very important kind, as our discussion will itself bring out. Yet if you don't hold that we learn when we remember or that the person who reminds us is teaching, I won't oppose you. I now stipulate two reasons for speaking: to teach or to remind either others or ourselves. We do this even when we're singing. Doesn't it seem so to you?

ADEODATUS. Not exactly. I would seldom sing to remind myself; I do it only to please myself.

AUGUSTINE. I see what you mean. But aren't you aware that what pleases you in a song is its melody? Since this melody can be either added to or taken away from the words, speaking is one thing and singing is another. There are [musical] songs on flutes or on the guitar, and birds sing, and we occasionally make some musical sound without words. This sound can be called 'singing' but can't be called 'speaking.' Is there anything here you would object to?

ADEODATUS. Nothing at all.

[1.2] AUGUSTINE. Then doesn't it seem to you that speaking is undertaken only for the sake of teaching or reminding?

ADEODATUS. It would seem so were I not troubled by the fact that we certainly speak while we're praying, and yet it isn't right to believe that we teach God or remind Him of anything.

AUGUSTINE. I dare say you don't know that we are instructed to pray "in closed chambers"²—a phrase that signifies the inner recesses of the mind—precisely because God does not seek to be taught or reminded by our speaking in order to provide us what we want. Anyone who speaks gives an external sign of his will by means of an articulated sound.³ Yet God is to be

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1. Augustine, *Reconsiderations* 1.12: "I wrote a work entitled *The Teacher* [in 389]. There it is debated, sought, and found that there is no teacher giving knowledge to man other than God. This is also in accordance with what is written by the Evangelist: *Your teacher, Christ, is unique* (Matt. 23:10)." The brevity of Augustine's entry is remarkable. In *Confessions* 9.6.14 he writes: "In our book entitled *The Teacher*, [Adeodatus] there speaks with me. You, Lord, know that all the thoughts put in there in the person of my interlocutor were his, though he was only sixteen years old. I have experienced many more wonderful things in him at other times: I was in awe of his talents." This suggests that Augustine's love for his dead son may have prevented him from making any revisions to *The Teacher*.

2. Matt. 6:6.

3. As a technical definition of speaking, a necessary condition is that an utterance be produced which is literally

sought and entreated in the hidden parts of the rational soul, which is called the ‘inner man’; for He wanted those parts to be His temples. Have you not read in the Apostle:⁴

Do you not know that you are the temple of God
and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?

and:⁵

Christ dwells in the inner man.

Didn’t you notice in the Prophet:⁶

Speak in your hearts and be stricken in your
bedchambers; offer up the sacrifice of justice,
and hope in the Lord.

Where do you think the “sacrifice of justice” is offered up but in the temple of the mind and in the bedchambers of the heart? What is more, one should pray where one should sacrifice. There is accordingly no need for speaking when we pray. That is, there is no need for spoken words—except perhaps to speak as priests do, for the sake of signifying what is in their minds: not that God might hear, but that men might do so and by remembering might, with one accord, be raised to God. Do you hold otherwise?

ADEODATUS. I agree completely.

AUGUSTINE. Then doesn’t it trouble you that when the supreme Teacher was teaching His disciples to pray, He taught them certain words?⁷ In so doing,

‘articulated’—expelled air intentionally modulated by the muscles of the larynx, palate, tongue, and the like. This sets speaking apart from involuntary sounds, such as snoring or cries of pain; see *On Christian Doctrine* 2.1.2. Articulated sounds are ‘external signs’ of something internal, namely, the will. Much of the rest of *The Teacher* is devoted to exploring how a given sound can be a sign.

4. 1 Cor. 3:16.

5. Eph. 3:16–17.

6. Pss. 4:5–6 (Vulgate) = 4:4–5 (RSV).

7. The Lord’s Prayer: Matt. 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4.

what He seems to have done is precisely to have taught them how we ought to speak when we pray.⁸

ADEODATUS. Nothing at all troubles me on that score. He taught them not the words but the things themselves by means of the words. With these words they remind themselves of Whom they should pray to and of what they should pray for, since they would be praying in the inner recesses of the mind, as mentioned [1.2].

AUGUSTINE. You understand this correctly. Someone might object that, although we don’t produce any sound, nonetheless we do ‘speak’ internally in the mind, since we think these very words. Yet I believe you’re also aware that in ‘speaking’ in this way we do nothing but remind ourselves, since by repeating the words our memory, in which the words inhere, makes the very things of which the words are signs come to mind.

ADEODATUS. I understand, and I go along with this.

[The Nature of Signs]

[2.3] AUGUSTINE. Then we are in agreement: words are signs.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. Well, can a sign be a sign if it doesn’t signify anything?

ADEODATUS. It can’t.

AUGUSTINE. Consider this line of verse:⁹

If nothing from so great a city it pleases the gods
be left . . .

How many words are there?

ADEODATUS. Thirteen.

8. Augustine discusses this extensively in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* 2.3.10–14.

9. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.659: *Si nihil ex tanta superis placet urbe relinqui*, spoken by Aeneas to his father, Anchises, in reference to the imminent destruction of Troy. Adeodatus takes up the first three words in order, namely, *si* (‘if’), *nihil* (‘nothing’), and *ex* (‘from’).

AUGUSTINE. Then there are thirteen signs?

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. I believe you understand this line of verse.

ADEODATUS. Quite well, I think.

AUGUSTINE. Tell me what each word signifies.

ADEODATUS. Well, I do see what 'if' signifies, but I don't know any other word by which it can be explained.

AUGUSTINE. At least you know where anything signified by this word would be.

ADEODATUS. It seems to me that 'if' signifies doubt. Now where is doubt but in the mind?

AUGUSTINE. I accept that for now. Continue with the other words.

ADEODATUS. What else does 'nothing' signify except that which doesn't exist?

AUGUSTINE. Perhaps you're right, but I'm hesitant to agree with you, because you granted above that there is no sign unless it signifies something [2.3]. Yet what does not exist can't in any way be something. Accordingly, the second word in this line of verse isn't a sign, because it doesn't signify anything. So we were wrong to agree either that all words are signs or that every sign signifies something.

ADEODATUS. You're really pushing too hard. It's stupid to utter a word when we don't have anything to signify. Yet in speaking with me now I believe you yourself aren't making a sound pointlessly. Instead, you're giving a sign to me with everything that comes out of your mouth, so that I may understand something. Thus you shouldn't enunciate those two syllables ['no-thing'] when you speak if you don't signify anything with them! If you see that they are necessary for producing an enunciation, and that we are taught or reminded when they strike the ears, then surely you also see what I want to say but can't explain.

AUGUSTINE. What then are we to do? Given that one doesn't see a thing and furthermore finds (or thinks oneself to have found) that it doesn't exist, shall we not say that this word ['nothing'] signifies a certain state of mind rather than the very thing that is nothing?

ADEODATUS. Perhaps this is the very point I was trying to explain.

AUGUSTINE. Then be the matter as it may, let us move on from here so that the most absurd thing of all doesn't happen to us.

ADEODATUS. Which is?

AUGUSTINE. If *nothing* holds us back, and we suffer delays!

ADEODATUS. This is ridiculous, and yet somehow I see that it can happen—or rather, I clearly see that it has happened.

[2.4] AUGUSTINE. We shall understand this kind of difficulty more clearly in due order, God willing.¹⁰ Now return to that line of verse and try to explain, as best you can, what the other words in it signify.

ADEODATUS. The third word is the preposition 'from,' for which I think we can say 'out of.'

AUGUSTINE. I'm not looking for this, that in place of one familiar word you say another equally familiar word that signifies the same thing—if really it does signify the same thing; but for now let us grant that this is so. Surely if the poet had said 'out of so great a city' instead of 'from so great a city' and I were to ask you what 'out of' signifies, you would say 'from,' since these words ['from' and 'out of']—that is, these signs—do signify some one thing, as you think. I'm asking for that one thing itself, whatever it is, that is signified by these two signs.

ADEODATUS. It seems to me that they signify some kind of separation with regard to a thing in which something had been. This ['something'] is said to be "from" that thing, whether that thing (a) does not continue to exist, as for example in this line of verse some Trojans were able to be "from" the city when it no longer existed; or it (b) continues to exist, as we say that there are traders in Africa "from" the city of Rome.

AUGUSTINE. Even supposing that I grant you these claims and do not enumerate how many exceptions to your rule may perhaps be discovered, surely it's easy for you to notice that you have explained words by means of words. That is to say, you have explained signs by means of signs and familiar things by the same familiar things. I would like you to show me the very things of which these words are the signs, if you can.

[3.5] ADEODATUS. I'm surprised that you don't know, or that you're pretending not to know, that what you

10. See 8.22–8.24 below, where Augustine discusses the autonomous and referential use of signs.

want can't be done in my answer while we're engaged in discussion, where we can only answer with words. Furthermore, you're asking about things that, whatever they may be, surely aren't words—and yet you're also asking me about them with words! First raise the question without words, so that I may then answer under that stipulation of yours.

AUGUSTINE. You're within your rights, I admit. But if when one says '*wall*' I were to ask what this one-syllable¹¹ word signifies, couldn't you show me with your finger? Then when you pointed it out I would straightaway see the very thing of which this one-syllable word is a sign, although you used no words.

ADEODATUS. I grant that this can happen only in the case of names that signify bodies, so long as the bodies themselves are present.

AUGUSTINE. Do we call color a body? Don't we instead call it a quality of a body?

ADEODATUS. That's true.

AUGUSTINE. Then why can this too be pointed out with a finger? Are you also adding the qualities of bodies to bodies [in your proposal], so that those qualities too, when they are present, may nonetheless be taught without words?

ADEODATUS. Well, although I said 'bodies,' I wanted all corporeal things—that is, all the things sensed in bodies—to be understood [in my proposal].

AUGUSTINE. Consider whether you should make some exceptions even to this claim.

ADEODATUS. Your warning is a good one! I should have said 'all *visible* things' rather than 'all *corporeal* things.' I admit that sound, smell, flavor, weight, heat, and other things that pertain to the rest of the senses, despite the fact that they can't be sensed without bodies and consequently are corporeal, nevertheless can't be exhibited through [pointing] a finger.

AUGUSTINE. Haven't you ever seen that men "converse" with deaf people by gesturing? That deaf people themselves, no less by gesturing, raise and answer questions, teach, and indicate all the things they want, or at

least most of them? When this happens, they show us without words not only visible things, but also sounds and flavors and other things of this sort. Even actors in the theaters unfold and set forth entire stories without words—for the most part, by pantomime.

ADEODATUS. I have nothing to say against this, except that neither I nor even that pantomiming actor could show you without words what 'from' signifies.

[3.6] AUGUSTINE. Perhaps you're right, but let's imagine that he can. You do not doubt, I suppose, that any bodily movement he uses to try to point out to me the thing signified by the word ['from'] isn't going to be the thing itself but a sign [of the thing]. Accordingly, he too won't indicate a word with a word. He'll nonetheless still indicate a sign with a sign. The result is that this syllable 'from' and his gesture signify some one thing, which I should like to be exhibited for me without signifying.

ADEODATUS. Who can do what you're asking, pray tell?

AUGUSTINE. In the way in which the wall could [be exhibited].

ADEODATUS. Not even [the wall] can be shown without a sign, as our developing argument has taught us. Aiming a finger is certainly not the wall. Instead, through aiming a finger a sign is given by means of which the wall may be seen. I see nothing, therefore, that can be shown without signs.

AUGUSTINE. What if I should ask you what walking is, and you were then to get up and do it? Wouldn't you be using the thing itself to teach me, rather than using words or any other signs?

ADEODATUS. I admit that this is the case. I'm embarrassed not to have seen a point so obvious. On this basis, too, thousands of things now occur to me that can be exhibited through themselves rather than through signs: for example, eating, drinking, sitting, standing, shouting, and countless others.

AUGUSTINE. Now do this: tell me—if I were completely ignorant of the meaning of the word ['walking'] and were to ask you what walking is while you were walking, how would you teach me?

ADEODATUS. I would do it a little bit more quickly, so that after your question you would be prompted by something novel [in my behavior], and yet nothing would take place other than what was to be shown.

11. Literally, 'these three syllables,' referring to the syllables *par-i-es* of *paries* ('wall'). Here and elsewhere the number of syllables of Latin terms has been altered to fit the English translation.

AUGUSTINE. Don't you know that *walking* is one thing and *hurrying* another? A person who is walking doesn't necessarily hurry, and a person who is hurrying doesn't necessarily walk. We speak of 'hurrying' in writing and in reading and in countless other matters. Hence given that after my question you kept on doing what you were doing, [only] faster, I might have thought walking was precisely hurrying—for you added that as something new—and for that reason I would have been misled.

ADEODATUS. I admit that we can't exhibit a thing without a sign if we should be questioned while we are doing it. If we add nothing [to our behavior], the person who raises the question will think that we don't want to show him and that we are persisting in what we were doing while paying no heed to him. Yet if he should ask about things we can do, but when we aren't doing them, after his question we can point out what he's asking about by doing the action itself rather than by a sign. (That is, unless he should happen to ask me what speaking is while I'm speaking, namely because no matter what I say I must be speaking to teach him.) In this way I'll confidently teach him, until I make clear to him what he wants, neither getting away from the thing itself that he wanted to be pointed out nor casting about beyond the thing itself for signs with which I might show it.

[4.7] AUGUSTINE. Very acute. See then whether we're now in agreement that the following things can be pointed out without signs: (a) things we aren't doing when we are asked [about them] and yet can do on the spot; (b) the very signs we happen to be 'doing' [when asked about them], just as when we speak we are making signs (and [the word] 'signifying' is derived from this [activity]).¹²

ADEODATUS. Agreed.

12. "And [the word] 'signifying' is derived from this [activity]": *de quo dictum est significare*, literally, "from which signifying is so called." That is, the word 'signifying' (*significare*) is derived from the activity of making signs (*signa facere*).

[Fundamental Division of Signs]

AUGUSTINE. Thus [1] when a question is raised about certain signs, these signs can be exhibited by means of signs. Yet [2] when a question is raised about things that aren't signs, [these things can be exhibited] either [(a)] by doing them after the query [has been made], if they can be done, or [(b)] by giving signs with which they may be brought to one's attention.

ADEODATUS. That's right.

[Discussion of Division [1]]

AUGUSTINE. Then in this threefold classification let us consider first, if you don't mind, the case in which signs are exhibited by means of signs. Are words the only signs?

ADEODATUS. No.

AUGUSTINE. Then it seems to me that in speaking we designate with words either (a) words themselves or other signs, such as when we say '*gesture*' or '*letter*,' for what these two words signify are nonetheless signs; or (b) something else that isn't a sign, such as when we say '*stone*'—this word is a sign because it signifies something, but what it signifies isn't necessarily a sign. Yet the latter kind of case, namely when words signify things that aren't signs, isn't relevant to the part [of the threefold classification] we proposed to discuss. We have undertaken to consider the case in which signs are exhibited by means of signs, and in it we have discovered two subdivisions, since with signs we teach or remind someone of either the same signs or other signs. Doesn't it seem so to you?

ADEODATUS. That's obvious.

[4.8] AUGUSTINE. Then tell me to which sense the signs that are words are relevant.

ADEODATUS. Hearing.

AUGUSTINE. What about gestures?

ADEODATUS. Sight.

AUGUSTINE. Well, when we come upon written words, aren't they understood more accurately as *signs* of words than as words? After all, a word is that which is uttered by means of an articulated sound accompanied by some significate. A sound, however, can be perceived by no sense other than hearing. Thus it is

that when a word is written, a sign is produced for the eyes, and by means of this [inscription] something that strictly pertains to the ears comes into the mind.

ADEODATUS. I agree completely.

AUGUSTINE. I think you also agree that when we say 'name' we signify something.

ADEODATUS. That's true.

AUGUSTINE. What then?

ADEODATUS. Obviously, what each thing is called; for example, 'Romulus,' 'Rome,' 'virtue,' 'river,' and countless others.

AUGUSTINE. Do these four names signify nothing?

ADEODATUS. No, they each signify something.

AUGUSTINE. Is there any difference between these names and the things signified by them?

ADEODATUS. There is a great difference.

AUGUSTINE. I should like to hear from you what it is.

ADEODATUS. Well, in the first place, the fact that the former are signs whereas the latter are not.

AUGUSTINE. Do you mind if we call things that can be signified by signs and yet aren't signs 'signifiable,' as we call things that can be seen 'visible,' so that we may discuss these things more easily from now on?

ADEODATUS. Not at all.

AUGUSTINE. Well, those four signs you cited a little earlier [4.8]—['Romulus,' 'Rome,' 'virtue,' 'river']—aren't they signified by any other signs?

ADEODATUS. I'm surprised you think I have already forgotten that we found written [inscriptions] to be signs of spoken signs [4.8].

AUGUSTINE. Tell me what the difference between them is.

ADEODATUS. That the former are visible whereas the latter are 'audible'—why don't you also allow this name, given that we allowed 'signifiable'?¹³

AUGUSTINE. I do allow it, and I'm grateful [for the suggestion]. Yet I ask again: can't these four signs be signified by another audible sign, just as the visible signs you remembered?

ADEODATUS. I remember that this too was mentioned recently. I had answered that 'name' signifies something and put these four names under its signification [4.8]. Furthermore, I know that both the former and the latter, if they are actually uttered by a sound, are audible.

AUGUSTINE. Then what's the difference between an audible sign and audible significates that in turn are signs?

ADEODATUS. I see this difference between what we call a 'name' and these four names that we put under its signification. The former is an audible sign of audible signs. The latter are audible signs, but not of signs: some are audible signs of visible things (such as Romulus, Rome, and a river) and others are audible signs of intelligible things (such as virtue).

[4.9] AUGUSTINE. I accept and approve [your distinction]. Yet do you know that all things that are uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate are called 'words'?

ADEODATUS. I do.

AUGUSTINE. Then a name is also a word whenever we see that it is uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate. When we say that an eloquent man employs 'good words,' he surely is also employing names; when the slave in Terence replied to his aged master:¹⁴

Good words, if you please!

the latter had also spoken many names.

ADEODATUS. I agree.

AUGUSTINE. Then you grant that with the one syllable we utter when we say 'word' a name is signified as well, and so the former ['word'] is a sign of the latter ['name'].

ADEODATUS. I do grant this.

AUGUSTINE. I would like your answer on this point as well. 'Word' is a sign of 'name' and 'name' is a sign of 'river,' and 'river' is a sign of a thing that can

13. Adeodatus proposes coining the term 'audible' (*audibile*), on a par with Augustine's earlier coinage 'signifiable.' See Ambrose, *Noah* 15.52: "Sight sees the visible and the listener hears the audible."

14. Terence, *The Lady of Andros* 204. Davos uses the formula *bona verba quaeso* ironically to his master Simo, who is angrily threatening him with dire punishments and calling him names.

be seen. You have already said what the difference is between this thing [the river] and 'river' (the sign of [the river]). [You have also said what the difference is] between the sign ['river'] and 'name,' which is the sign of the sign ['river']. Now what do you suppose is the difference between the sign of a name—which we found to be 'word'—and 'name' itself, of which ['word'] is the sign?¹⁵

ADEODATUS. I understand this to be the difference [between words and names]. On the one hand, things signified by 'name' are also signified by 'word.' A name is a word, and thus [the name] 'river' is a word. On the other hand, not all the things signified by 'word' are also signified by 'name.' The 'if' at the very beginning of the line of verse you mentioned, and the 'from'—we've come upon these matters after our lengthy discussion of the ['from'], guided by the argument—[the 'if' and 'from'] are both words, but they aren't names. Many such cases are found. Consequently, since all names are words but not all words are names, I think it's obvious what the difference between 'word' and 'name' is—namely, [the difference] between the sign of a sign that signifies no other signs, and the sign of a sign that in turn signifies other signs.

AUGUSTINE. Don't you grant that every horse is an animal, but that not every animal is a horse?

ADEODATUS. Who will doubt it?

AUGUSTINE. Then the difference between a name and a word is the same as the difference between a horse and an animal. Yet perhaps you're kept from agreeing by the fact that we also say 'word' [*verbum*]¹⁶

15. This paragraph involves several ambiguities, including some (deliberate?) confusion of use and mention, that are difficult to preserve in translation. Augustine considers three cases: (i) 'word' signifies names, perhaps among other things; (ii) 'name' signifies the particular name 'river,' among other things; (iii) the particular name 'river' signifies this very river; e.g., the Nile, among other rivers. Now Adeodatus has already explained (iii) and (ii): names are not to be confused with what they name, and a particular name is picked out by the general term 'name.' Therefore Augustine is asking Adeodatus about (i), that is, about the difference between words and names.

16. The single Latin term *verbum* does duty for both English terms 'word' and 'verb.'

in another way, one in which it signifies things inflected by tenses, as for example 'I write, I have written' and 'I read, I have read': these are clearly not names.

ADEODATUS. You have said precisely what was making me doubtful.

AUGUSTINE. Don't be troubled on that score. We do generally call 'signs' all those things that signify something—the condition we also found words to be in. Again, we speak of 'military banners' [*signa militaria*]¹⁷ that are then named 'signs' in the strict sense, a condition to which words do not pertain. Yet if I were to say to you that just as every horse is an animal but not every animal is a horse, so too every word is a sign but not every sign is a word, I think you wouldn't hesitate to agree.

ADEODATUS. Now I understand. I agree completely that the difference between *word* in general and *name* is the same as the difference between *animal* and *horse*.

[4.10] AUGUSTINE. Do you also know that when we say '*an-i-mal*,' this three-syllable name uttered by the voice is one thing and what it signifies is another?

ADEODATUS. I have already granted this point for all signs and all things that are signifiable.

AUGUSTINE. Now it doesn't seem to you that all signs signify something other than what they are, does it? For example, when we say '*an-i-mal*,' this three-syllable word in no way signifies the very thing that it itself is.

ADEODATUS. Not exactly. When we say '*sign*,' not only does it signify the other signs, whatever they are, it also signifies itself, for it is a word, and certainly all words are signs.

AUGUSTINE. Well, when we say '*word*,' doesn't something of the sort happen in the case of this monosyllable? If everything that is uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate is signified by this monosyllable ['*word*'], then ['*word*'] itself is included in this class.

ADEODATUS. That's true.

AUGUSTINE. Well, isn't it likewise for 'name'? For ['*name*'] signifies names of all classes, and 'name' it-

17. The Latin term *signum* may refer to a banner or standard, as well as having the more general sense 'sign.'

self is a name of neuter gender.¹⁸ Alternatively, if I should ask you what part of speech a name is, could you answer anything but ‘name’ correctly?

ADEODATUS. You’re right.

AUGUSTINE. Then there are signs that also signify themselves with the other things they signify.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. Surely you don’t think that when we say ‘*con-junc-tion*’ this three-syllable sign is this kind of sign, do you?

ADEODATUS. Not at all, because while [‘conjunction’] is a name, the things it signifies aren’t names.

[5.11] AUGUSTINE. You have been properly attentive. Now see whether we find [two] signs that signify each other mutually, such that the former signifies the latter, while at the same time the latter signifies the former. This three-syllable word (when we say ‘*con-junc-tion*’) and the words signified by [‘conjunction’] (when we say ‘if,’ ‘or,’ ‘for,’ ‘surely,’ ‘unless,’ ‘therefore,’ ‘since,’ and similar words) are not related to one another in this way. The reason for this is that these words are signified by that one three-syllable word [‘*con-junc-tion*’], although it isn’t signified by any of them.

ADEODATUS. I see, but I want to know which signs do signify each other mutually.

AUGUSTINE. Then don’t you know that when we say ‘name’ and ‘word’ we are saying two words?

ADEODATUS. I know that.

AUGUSTINE. Well, don’t you know that when we say ‘name’ and ‘word’ we are saying two names?

ADEODATUS. I know that too.

AUGUSTINE. Then you know that ‘name’ is signified by ‘word’ as well as ‘word’ by ‘name.’

ADEODATUS. I agree.

AUGUSTINE. Can you say what the difference between them is, apart from the fact that they are written and pronounced differently?

ADEODATUS. Perhaps I can, for I see that it’s what I said a little while ago. When we say ‘words,’ we sig-

nify everything that is uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate. Accordingly, every name—and when we say ‘name,’ that too—is a word. Yet not every word is a name, although when we say ‘word’ it is a name.

[5.12] AUGUSTINE. Well, if anyone should say to you and prove that just as every name is a word, so too every word is a name, will you be able to discover in what respect they differ, apart from the differing sound of the letters?

ADEODATUS. No. I don’t think they differ in any respect at all.

AUGUSTINE. Well, if all things uttered by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate are both words and names, but are words for one reason and names for another reason, will a name and a word differ at all?

ADEODATUS. I don’t understand how that could be.

AUGUSTINE. At least you understand this: everything colored is visible and everything visible is colored, even though these two words [‘colored’ and ‘visible’] signify distinctly and differently.

ADEODATUS. I do understand this.

AUGUSTINE. Then what if every word is a name and every name is a word in this fashion, even though these two names or two words themselves—‘name’ and ‘word’—have a different signification?

ADEODATUS. Now I see that this can happen. I’m waiting for you to show me how it happens.

AUGUSTINE. You observe, I think, that everything expressed by an articulated sound accompanied by some significate (i) strikes the ear so that it can be perceived, and (ii) is committed to memory so that it can be known.

ADEODATUS. I do.

AUGUSTINE. Then these two things happen when we utter something by such a sound.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. What if words are so called because of one of these and names are so called because of the other—‘words’ from striking [the ear] and ‘names’ from knowing¹⁹—so that the former deserve to be

18. This translation depends on taking *genus* in two distinct ways: as ‘kind’ or ‘class,’ and as the gender of the name. If we insist on a uniform reading, the latter part of the sentence might be translated: “and ‘name’ is a name of neither class [i.e., neither *word* nor *sign*].”

19. The false etymological connection proposed here may seem more plausible in Latin: words (*verba*) are so

called after the ears, whereas the latter deserve to be called after the mind?

[5.13] ADEODATUS. I'll grant this once you have shown me how we can correctly call all words 'names.'

AUGUSTINE. That's easy. I believe you have accepted and do maintain that what can take the place of a name is called a 'pronoun,'²⁰ although it marks out a thing with a less complete signification than a name does. The person whom you paid to be your grammar teacher, I believe, defined it as follows: a pronoun is that part of speech which, when put in place of a name, signifies the same object but less completely.

ADEODATUS. I remember this, and approve of it.

AUGUSTINE. Then you see that according to this definition pronouns can only serve in place of names and can be put only in the place of names. For example, we say "this man," "the king himself," "the same woman," "this gold," "that silver." Now 'this,' 'himself,' 'the same,' and 'that' are pronouns;²¹ 'man,' 'king,' 'woman,' 'gold,' and 'silver' are names. Things are signified more completely by these [names] than by the pronouns.

ADEODATUS. I see and agree with you.

AUGUSTINE. Now then: enunciate a few conjunctions for me—whichever you like.

ADEODATUS. 'And,' 'too,' 'but,' 'also.'

AUGUSTINE. Doesn't it seem to you that all these you have mentioned are names?

ADEODATUS. Not at all.

AUGUSTINE. Doesn't it seem to you that I spoke correctly when I said, "all these you have mentioned"?

ADEODATUS. Quite correctly. Now I understand how surprisingly you have shown me to have enunciated names, for otherwise 'all these' could not have been said of them correctly.

Yet I still suspect that the reason it seems to me that you spoke correctly is as follows. I don't deny that these four conjunctions are also words. Hence 'all these'

may be correctly said of them, because 'all these words' is correctly said of them. Now if you should ask me what part of speech 'words' is, I'll answer that it's only a name. Thus perhaps the pronoun ['these'] was [implicitly] attached to this name ['words'], so that your locution ['all these (words)'] was correct.

[5.14] AUGUSTINE. Your mistake is subtle. Pay closer attention to what I say so that you may stop being mistaken—at least, if I should be able to say it as I wish; for discussing words with words is as entangled as interlocking one's fingers and rubbing them together, where hardly anyone but the person doing it can distinguish the fingers that itch from the fingers scratching the itch.

ADEODATUS. Well, I'm paying close attention, for your analogy has aroused my interest.

AUGUSTINE. Words surely consist of sound and letters.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. Then, to employ in the best way the authority most dear to us, when the Apostle Paul says:²²

In Christ there was not Yea and Nay, but in Him was Yea,

I don't suppose it should be thought that when we say 'Yea' these three letters [y-e-a] we enunciate were in Christ, but what is signified by them.

ADEODATUS. You're right.

AUGUSTINE. Then you understand that a person who says "in Him was Yea" only said that what we call 'Yea' was in Him. In the same way, if he had said "in Him was virtue," he certainly would be taken to have only said that what we call 'virtue' was in Him, nor

called from striking the ear (*verberando*), and names (*nomina*) are so called from knowing (*noscendo*).

20. A pronoun (*pronomen*) is what can take the place of a name (*nomen*), which is why it is so called (*pro-nomen*).

21. That is, they are pronouns when used by themselves. In 'this man,' 'this' is an adjective.

22. 2 Cor. 1:19. The Greek text has: Ναὶ καὶ Οὐ, which means "Yea or Nay." Yet there is no straightforward way to say "yes" in Latin; locutions saying that something is the case were typically used instead—*sic*, *est*, *ita*. Various translators used the standard substitute, "It is so" (*est*), which can also simply be translated "is." Thus the Latin text reads "There was not in Christ *is* and *is not*, but in Him was *is* only." That is why Augustine argues later that it has the dual force of both verb (as 'is') and name (as 'yes').

should we think that these two syllables we enunciate when we say ‘*vir-tue*’ were in Him rather than what is signified by these two syllables.

ADEODATUS. I understand, and I follow you.

AUGUSTINE. Don’t you also understand that it makes no difference whether anyone says “it is called ‘virtue’” and “it is named ‘virtue’”?

ADEODATUS. That’s obvious.

AUGUSTINE. Then it’s obvious that it makes no difference whether one says “what is called ‘Yea’ was in Him” and “what is named ‘Yea’ was in Him.”

ADEODATUS. I see that this too makes no difference.

AUGUSTINE. Now do you see what I want to show you?

ADEODATUS. Not quite yet.

AUGUSTINE. Really? Don’t you see that a name is that by which a thing is named?

ADEODATUS. I see clearly that nothing is more certain than this!

AUGUSTINE. Then you see that ‘Yea’ is a name, given that what was in Christ is named ‘Yea.’

ADEODATUS. I can’t deny it.

AUGUSTINE. Well, if I should ask you what part of speech ‘Yea’ (*est*) is, I think you would say that it isn’t a name but a verb, although the argument has taught us that it is also a name.²³

ADEODATUS. It’s exactly as you say.

AUGUSTINE. Do you still doubt that other parts of speech are also names in the same way in which we have demonstrated [a verb to be a name]?

ADEODATUS. I don’t doubt it, insofar as I admit they signify something. Now if you should inquire what each of the things they signify is called (i.e., what they are named), I can only reply that they are the very parts of speech we do not call ‘names’—but I see we’re proven to be wrong [with this answer].

[5.15] AUGUSTINE. Aren’t you at all troubled that there might be someone who would make our argument totter by saying that authority over things rather than words should be attributed to the apostles? So the basis of our conviction isn’t as secure as we think, be-

cause it may happen that Paul, although he lived and taught most correctly, spoke less correctly when he says “in Him was Yea,” especially since he admits himself to be unskilled in speech.²⁴ How then do you think this objector should be refuted?

ADEODATUS. I have nothing to say against him! Please find someone among those to whom the most profound knowledge of words is granted, by whose authority instead you might bring about what you wish.

AUGUSTINE. Does the argument itself seem less adequate to you once the authorities are put aside? It demonstrates that every part of speech signifies something and that it is so called on this basis. Yet if a part of speech is called something, then it is named; if named, surely it is named by a name.

This is most easily recognized in the case of different languages. Anyone can see that if I should ask, “What do the Greeks name what we name ‘who’?” the answer given to me is *τίς*; and likewise for ‘I want’ *θέλω*; for ‘well’ *καλῶς*; for ‘written’ *το γεγραμμένον*; for ‘and’ *καί*; for ‘by’ *ἀπό*; for ‘alas’ *οἶ*. Yet in all these parts of speech I have just listed,²⁵ it can’t be that anyone who asks what they are in this way would speak correctly unless they were names. We can therefore maintain by this argument that the Apostle Paul spoke correctly, while putting aside the authority belonging to all eloquent people. What need is there to ask who supports our view?

[5.16] If there is someone slower or more impudent who still doesn’t give in, and asserts that he isn’t going to give in at all except to those authors who everyone agrees are paradigms of proper language—what in the Latin language more excellent than Cicero can be found? Yet in his noblest speeches he called ‘in the presence of’ (*coram*)—which is a preposition, or rather in this passage is an adverb—a name.²⁶

24. 2 Cor. 11:6.

25. The seven question-answer pairs above correspond to seven of the eight parts of speech, respectively: pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, conjunction, preposition, interjection. The other part of speech is the name, which surely includes names, and so can be left out of Augustine’s argument.

26. When Cicero describes Verres’ forgery of judicial

23. Augustine’s point is that ‘*est*’ is, strictly speaking, a verb. See the preceding note.

Now perhaps I don't understand that passage from Cicero sufficiently well, and I myself or another person might explain it differently at other times. Yet there is, I think, another point to which no reply can be made. The most eminent teachers of dialectic hand it down that a complete sentence, which may be affirmed and denied, consists of a name and a verb. (Cicero somewhere calls this kind of thing a 'proposition'.²⁷) When the verb is in the third person, they say that the nominative case of the name ought to accompany it. This is correct. If you should consider with me that when we say "The man sits" or "The horse runs," I think you recognize that they are two propositions.

ADEODATUS. I do recognize that.

AUGUSTINE. You observe in each case that there is a single name, 'man' in the one and 'horse' in the other, and that there is a single verb, 'sits' in the one and 'runs' in the other.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. Then if I were to say only 'sits' or only 'runs,' you would correctly ask me "Who?" or "What?" To that question I would reply "the man" or "the horse" or "the animal" or anything else, so that a name, when added to the verb, could complete the proposition. That is to say, it could complete a sentence that can be affirmed and denied.

ADEODATUS. I understand.

AUGUSTINE. Pay attention to the rest: imagine that we see something far away and are uncertain whether it is an animal or a stone or something else, and I say to you: "Because it is a man, it is an animal." Wouldn't I be speaking carelessly?

ADEODATUS. Very carelessly. You clearly wouldn't be speaking carelessly if you were to say: "If it is a man, it is an animal."

records to make it appear that Sthenius, tried *in absentia*, was instead present at the trial, he writes: "Don't you see this whole name 'in the presence of' [*coram*] is in the text where [Verres] put it?" [*Viditisne totum hoc nomen coram ubi facit delatum esse in litura?*, *The Action against Verres* 2.2.104]. Augustine admits that he is unsure about his reading of the passage.

27. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.7.14.

AUGUSTINE. You're right. So the 'if' in your statement is acceptable to me and acceptable to you, whereas the 'because' in mine is unacceptable to both of us.

ADEODATUS. I agree.

AUGUSTINE. Now see whether these two sentences are complete propositions: "If is acceptable" and "Because is unacceptable."

ADEODATUS. They are complete.

AUGUSTINE. Now do this: tell me which are the verbs and which are the names in those sentences.

ADEODATUS. I see that there the verbs are 'is acceptable' and 'is unacceptable.' What else are the names but 'if' and 'because'?

AUGUSTINE. Then it has been adequately proved that these two conjunctions ['if' and 'because'] are also names.

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. Can't you derive for yourself the self-same result in the case of the other parts of speech, so as to establish the same rule for them all?

ADEODATUS. I can.

[6.17] AUGUSTINE. Then let's move on from here. Now tell me whether it seems to you that, just as we have found that all words are names and that all names are words, so too all names are terms [*vocabula*] and all terms are names.

ADEODATUS. I don't see what difference there is between ['name' and 'term'], aside from the different sound of the syllables.

AUGUSTINE. I don't raise any objection to your reply for the time being. Although there is no lack of people who distinguish them even by signification, there is no need to consider their view now. Surely you're aware that we have now come to signs that signify one another mutually, differing in nothing but sound, and that signify themselves along with all the other parts of speech.²⁸

ADEODATUS. I don't understand.

AUGUSTINE. Then don't you understand that 'name' is signified by 'term' and 'term' is signified by 'name' in such a way that there is no difference between them, aside from the sound of their letters? At

28. See 5.11.

least, so far as ‘name’ in general is concerned—for we also say ‘name’ specifically as one of the eight parts of speech, such that it does not contain the other seven parts of speech.

ADEODATUS. I understand.

AUGUSTINE. This is what I said: that ‘term’ and ‘name’ signify each other mutually.

[6.18] ADEODATUS. I understand that, but I’m asking what you meant when [you said] they also “signify themselves along with the other parts of speech” [6.17].

AUGUSTINE. Hasn’t the argument above taught us that all parts of speech can be called names as well as terms—that is to say, they can be signified by both ‘name’ and ‘term’?

ADEODATUS. That’s true.

AUGUSTINE. What if I should ask you what you call name itself, that is, the sound expressed by the single syllable [‘name’]? Won’t you correctly answer me ‘name’?

ADEODATUS. Yes.

AUGUSTINE. When we say ‘con-junc-tion,’ this sign that we enunciate with three syllables doesn’t signify itself in this fashion, does it? The name [‘con-junction’] can’t be counted among the things that it signifies.

ADEODATUS. I accept that.

AUGUSTINE. That is, [you accept] what has been said: that ‘name’ signifies itself along with the other things it signifies. You also may understand this for yourself regarding ‘term.’

ADEODATUS. Come on! That’s easy. Yet now it strikes me that ‘name’ is said both generally and specifically, whereas ‘term’ isn’t taken to be among the eight parts of speech. Accordingly, I think that [‘name’ and ‘term’] also differ from one another in this regard, aside from the difference in sound.

AUGUSTINE. Well, do you think that ‘name’ [*nomen*] and ὄνομα differ from one another in any regard, aside from the sound by which the two languages are also distinguished?

ADEODATUS. Here I see no other difference.

AUGUSTINE. Then we have arrived at signs: (a) that signify themselves; (b) each of which is mutually signified by the other; (c) wherein whatever is signified by the one is also signified by the other; and (d) that differ from each other in nothing aside from sound. To

be sure we have discovered only (d), for (a)–(c) are also understood for ‘name’ and ‘word.’

ADEODATUS. Absolutely.

[7.19] AUGUSTINE. Now I should like you to review what we have found out in our discussion.

ADEODATUS. I’ll do so as best I can.

First, I remember that we spent some time inquiring why we speak. It was found that we speak for the sake of teaching or reminding, given that when we ask questions we do so only in order that the person who is asked may learn what we wish to hear.

Now in the case of singing, which it seems we do for pleasure (and this is not a proper feature of speaking), and in the case of praying to God, Who we cannot suppose is taught or reminded, words are for the purpose either of reminding ourselves or that others may be reminded or taught by us.

Next, since we were sufficiently in agreement that words are only signs and that things not signifying anything can’t be signs, you put forward a line of verse.²⁹

If nothing from so great a city it pleases the gods
be left . . .

and I undertook to show what each word in this line of verse signifies. Though the second word of this line of verse, [‘nothing’], is familiar and obvious, in the end we didn’t uncover what it signifies. Since it seemed to me that we don’t use it pointlessly when we speak, but with it we teach something to the person who is listening, you replied that when one finds or thinks oneself to have found that the thing one seeks doesn’t exist, perhaps a state of mind is indicated by this word. Yet you avoided any depth there may be to the question with a joke and postponed it to be explained at another time—don’t think that I have forgotten your obligation too!

Then, since I was hard pressed to explain the third word in this line of verse, [‘from’], you urged me to show you not another word that had the same meaning but instead the thing itself signified by the word. Because I had said that we could not do this while engaged in discussion, we came to those things that are

29. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.659.

exhibited to people raising such questions by [pointing] a finger. I thought all these things were corporeal, but we found that they are only the visible things.

From here we moved on—I don't know how—to the case of deaf people and actors, who signify with wordless gesturing not only things that can be seen, but many other things besides, and nearly everything that we talk about. Just the same, we found that gestures themselves are signs.

At that point we began again to inquire how we could show without any signs the things themselves that are signified by the signs, since it was proved that even a wall, or color, or anything visible that is shown by aiming the finger is shown by a definite sign. Here I was mistaken since I had said that nothing of the sort could be found.

Eventually we agreed that we can point out without a sign those things we aren't doing when we are asked about them but we can do after the inquiry. Yet it was apparent that speaking isn't that kind of thing, given that when we're asked what speaking is while we're speaking, it's easy to illustrate speaking through itself.

[7.20] After that, our attention was called to the fact that either [1] signs are exhibited by means of signs, or [2] things that we can do after a question [has been raised] are exhibited without a sign, or [3] other things, which are not signs, are exhibited with signs.³⁰ We undertook to consider and discuss carefully [1].

In the debate [regarding (a)], it was revealed that on the one hand there are signs that could not in turn be signified by the signs they signify, as for example when we say the three-syllable word '*con-junc-tion*'; on the other hand there are signs that could in turn be signified by the signs they signify; for example when we say '*sign*' we also signify '*word*' and when we say '*word*' we also signify '*sign*' (for '*sign*' and '*word*' are both two signs and two words).

However, in this class of signs that signify each other mutually, it was established that some mean not so much, some mean just as much, and some even

mean the same.³¹ The fact is that when we say this one-syllable word '*sign*,' which makes a certain sound, it signifies absolutely everything by means of which anything is signified. Yet when we say '*word*,' it isn't a sign of all signs but only of signs uttered by an articulated sound. Accordingly, it's clear that although '*word*' is signified by '*sign*' and '*sign*' is signified by '*word*'—that is to say, the former syllable is signified by the latter and the latter syllable is signified by the former—'*sign*' nevertheless means more than '*word*' does, given that the former syllable signifies more things than the latter.

Yet '*word*' in general means just as much as '*name*' in general. The argument has taught us that all the parts of speech are also names, since (a) pronouns can be added to [names]; (b) it can be said of all parts of speech that they name something; (c) there is no [part of speech] that can't complete a proposition by means of an added verb.

Although '*name*' and '*word*' mean just as much, in that all things that are words are also names, they don't mean the same. We probably discussed sufficiently the

30. Adeodatus gives [3] before [2] in his summary here; I have reversed the order to conform to Augustine's earlier presentation of the fundamental division.

31. The phrases 'not so much,' 'just so much,' and 'the same' are adverbial modifiers, describing the kind of signification possessed by terms. Adeodatus seems to be talking on the one hand about inclusion-relations among the class of significates, and on the other hand about sense (or intension). Let *x* and *y* signify each other mutually. The class of *x*-significates may be a subclass of the class of *y*-significates, so that *x* "means not so much" as *y*; or the class of *x*-significates and the class of *y*-significates may be the same, so that *x* and *y* "mean just as much." (Adeodatus does not mention the case in which the classes overlap, but neither is completely contained within the other.) The Latin term '*tantum*' indicates quantity, and suggests this extensional reading. However, the case in which terms "mean the same" is not a case in which the extensions are equal (that case is covered by terms that "mean just as much"). Adeodatus offers two ways in which terms can fail to mean the same: (a) they may have a sense that is derived from their initial use, revealed by etymology; (b) they are not interchangeable in ordinary contexts. Hence this case seems to include a difference in 'meaning' beyond the comparison of significate-classes. Thus it appears to be a difference not in extension, but in intension or sense.

reason some are called ‘words’ and others ‘names,’ if it has been ascertained that one of these is for marking out the striking of the ear, the other for marking out the mind’s recollection [*commemorationem*]. Or perhaps the point can be understood on this basis, namely, that when we want to commit something to memory, we speak most correctly when we say “What is this thing’s name?” whereas we are not accustomed to saying, “What is this thing’s word?”³²

We found that ‘name’ and ὄνομα signify not only just as much but also exactly the same, and there is no difference between them aside from the sound of the letters. The point had really slipped my mind that in the class of signs that signify one another mutually we found no sign that doesn’t also signify itself, among the other things that it signifies.

I’ve recalled these things as best I could. You, I believe, haven’t said anything in this discussion except with knowledge and assurance. Now see whether I have reviewed these matters properly and in order.

[8.21] AUGUSTINE. You have accurately recalled from memory all I wanted. I must admit to you that these distinctions now seem much clearer to me than they were when the two of us, by inquiry and discussion, unearthed them from whatever their hiding places were.

However, with so many detours, it’s difficult to say at this point where you and I are trying to get to! Maybe you think we’re playing around and diverting the mind from serious matters by some little puzzles that seem childish, or that we’re pursuing some result that is only small or modest—or, if you suspect that this discussion might issue in some important result, you want to know straightaway what it is (or at least to hear me say what it is!). Well, I’d like you to believe that I haven’t set to work on mere trivialities in this conversation. Though we do perhaps play around, this should itself not be regarded as childish. Nor are we thinking about small or modest goods. Yet if I were to say that there is a happy and everlasting life, and I want us to be led there under the guidance of God (namely Truth Himself) by stages that are suitable to our weak steps, I’m afraid I might seem laughable for having set out on

such a long journey by considering signs rather than the things themselves that are signified.

So then, you’ll pardon me if I play around with you at first—not for the sake of playing around,³³ but to exercise the mind’s strength and sharpness, with which we’re able not only to withstand but also to love the heat and light of that region where the happy life is.

ADEODATUS. Continue as you have begun! I would never think to belittle what you think ought to be said or done.

[Discussion of Division [2]]³⁴

[8.22] AUGUSTINE. Then come now, let’s consider the division [of signs] where signs do not signify other signs but instead things, which we call ‘signifiables.’ First tell me whether man is man.

ADEODATUS. Now I don’t know whether you’re playing around with me.

AUGUSTINE. Why so?

ADEODATUS. Because you think it necessary to ask me whether man is anything but man!

AUGUSTINE. Then I believe you’d also think I was merely playing around with you if I were to ask whether the first syllable of this name [‘man’] [*homo*] is anything but ‘ho-’ and the second syllable anything but ‘-mo.’

ADEODATUS. Yes! I would!

AUGUSTINE. Yet those two syllables [‘ho-’ and ‘-mo’] conjoined are man [*homo*]. Will you deny it?

ADEODATUS. Who could deny it?

AUGUSTINE. Then I ask the question: are you those two conjoined syllables?

33. There is some untranslatable wordplay here: *si prae-ludo tecum, non ludendi gratia*.

34. Division [2] deals with significates that are non-signs. More precisely, it deals with the extent to which things that may be signifiable (but are not themselves signs) can be known, either (a) in their own right or (b) through signs. Before Augustine and Adeodatus can address (a) and (b), a possible source of confusion has to be ruled out, namely, the case in which a sign is used to exhibit itself *qua* sound (8.22–24). See 4.7 above.

32. The argument given in this sentence is new.