Augustine’s *Confessions* is a book rich in images and metaphors. Yet, despite the scholarly attention lavished on it, this aspect of its style has not always received the attention which it deserves. There are notable exceptions. One such is Denis O’Brien’s characteristically perceptive argument that the image of the ‘weight’ (*pondus*) of the soul in *Confessions* 13.9.10 may derive from Iamblichus. It seems, therefore, appropriate to offer Dr O’Brien the following observations on another striking Augustinian image, that of the *luminosus limes amicitiae* in *Confessions* 2.2.2.

The sentence that contains the image of the *luminosus limes* is puzzling, as a glance at a few representative commentaries and translations shows. The part of the sentence in question runs: *sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usque ad animum, quatenus est luminosus limes amicitiae*. Henry Chadwick translates ‘But no restraint was imposed by the exchange of mind with mind, which marks the brightly lit pathway of friendship’. Philip Burton has ‘But my love did not keep within the bounds marked out by the shining frontier of friendship, the affection of one mind for another’.

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* I should like to thank Emmanuel Bermon for valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.


2 All citations from *Conf.* are from the Teubner edn. of M. Skutella, revised by H. Jürgens and W. Schaub (Stuttgart 1969).
The 19th century translation of E.B. Pusey runs ‘but I kept not the measure of love, of mind to mind, friendship’s bright boundary’. Gilllian Clark’s commentary translates ‘the limit was not maintained from mind to mind, as far as the shining frontier of friendship is’. J. Gibb and W. Montgomery have ‘friendship’s fair bound’. James O’Donnell, in his commentary, understands the phrase *luminosus limes* to refer to a bright boundary. The most recent French translator, Patrice Cambronne, has ‘Mais je ne me tenais pas / Dans la mesure de l’échange / Qui va de l’âme a l’âme: / Là est le lumineux sentier de l’amitié’. There are merits in all these translations and in the commentaries, but they do not, in my view, exhaust the possible meanings of Augustine’s words, much less make clear their significance in the developing narrative of Book 2 of the *Confessions*. Further investigation is called for.

To begin with, although *limes* can mean ‘pathway’, in this sentence it must mean ‘frontier, boundary’. For Augustine goes on, in the same sentence, to say that he did not, at the time of his youth to which he is referring (he was aged 15, as specific references in *Confessions* 2.2.4, 2.3.6, and 2.6.12 stress), distinguish between the ‘brightness of love’ and the ‘darkness of desire’ (*ut non discerneretur serenitas dilectio a caligine libidinis*). Frontiers and boundaries mark distinctions; pathways do not, or at least not necessarily. *Limes* is a moral metaphor here. Moreover, *modus* in our sentence most likely means ‘limit, bounds’, as a key

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4 *Limes* can also refer to the track or trail of a shooting-star, which would be *luminosus* but that is hardly the sense here. Cicero in *De Amicitia*—a work that greatly influenced Augustine’s understanding of friendship—refers to the *fines* and *termini* of *amicitia*; but that is not a source of Augustine’s *limes* image, for Cicero is referring to various definitions of *amicitia*, as the context makes clear (*Amicit. 16.56–17.61*).

5 This distinction is the point of the word-play that contrasts *luminosus limes* with *limosa concupiscencia* in 2.2.2; see further n. 27 below.

6 For the use of *limes* in the sense of a moral-cum-legal boundary see Augustine, *Sermo* 51.13.22: *ceterum qui uxoris carnem amplius appetit quam praebuit limes ille, liberorum procreandorum causa, contra ipsas tabulas facit quibus eam duxit uxorem.*