
SOUL AND IDENTITY IN SAINT AUGUSTINE

CASE STUDY - SOLILOQUIES

Anton Adămuț*

University 'Al. I. Cuza', Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, Bd. Carol I no. 11,
Iasi, 700506, Romania

(Received 13 May 2021, revised 26 May 2021)

Abstract

With Augustine you do not have a stake, with him you have a commitment, an insurance, in the form of an alliance, of a new one. No constraint is here. God is simply an assurance, the assurance that He 'is', no matter where. The fact that He 'is' covers any deficiency. With such a God, Augustine goes to explore his own soul. And he can afford, how nice!, to carry the souls of all who desire together with his soul. I talk about soul and its identity in this text, starting especially from a few places in 'Soliloquies'.

Keywords: Saint Augustine, soul, spirit, body, harmony

1. Introduction

In the *Soliloquies* (II, 1) a well-known prayer of Augustine appears: "God, you who are always the same, behold me, I would like to know myself and at the same time to know You. This is my prayer" - *Deus semper idem, noverim me, noverim te. Oratum est* [1]. Chapter 2 of Book I is a preparatory invocation after which Augustine starts to approach the subject he intended, namely to make an analysis of his own conscience with the confessed purpose of giving a rational foundation to Christianity (this after in Book I, 1, right at the beginning, Augustine, troubling his mind, wants to know which is the best part of him and reason asks him if, in the event that he finds out something, he knows who to entrust what he finds, Augustine answers that to memory - *memoriae scilicet*). The matter is raised in identical terms in *Confessions* X, 1: "I will know you, oh, you, who know me, I will know you as I know you. Strength of my soul." [2] Augustine's dialogue with Reason thus follows:

Augustine: "This is how I asked God" / *Ecce oravi Deum.*

Reason: "So, what exactly do you want to know?" / *Quid ergo scire vis?*

Augustine: "All that I wanted to know" / *Haec ipsa omnia quae oravi.*

Reason: "List them briefly!" / *Breviter ea collige.*

Augustine: "I want to know God and what the soul is" / *Deum et animam scire cupido.*

*E-mail: antonadamut@yahoo.com

Reason: “Nothing more?” / *Nihilne plus?*

Augustine: “Absolutely nothing” / *Nihil omnio*.

And *Reason* tells him: “So start investigating” / *Ergo incipe quaerere* [1, p. 58-59].

2. The soul ‘sees’, the body ‘looks’

Then he says that he loves the *soul* and not necessarily the *animated ones*. Here is a play on words allowed by the Latin language, because *animalis* (derived from *anima-ae*) initially meant everything that was animated, alive, only then referring just to the animals. Augustine will distinguish between *anima* and *animus*, between soul and thought. He makes this distinction because he knows from pagan philosophers that *anima sentit et animus cogitat*. Augustine wants to solve only one problem: the knowledge of the truth about God and the human soul (and knowledge is not that understood with the intellect, but all that entrusted to memory and adapted to faith). The path towards truth is not an external one, it is an internal one, it is not an intersubjective experience but an intrasubjective one. In *De Vera Religione* (XXXIX, 72) he will say that it is not outside of us that we must wander; we must turn to ourselves, because in the inner man the truth is found - *Noli foras ire; in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas; et si tuam naturam mutabilem inveneris, transcede et te ipsum* [3]. In short, Augustine is searching. However, he knows well that she, “the search did not aim at the absolute of man, but at the Absolute present in man [...]. While for the philosophers of antiquity the soul was a metaphysical concept, for Augustine the soul is a personal possession of himself. It is no longer a soul in me, it is *my* soul. It is no longer a spiritual element that can be conceived in a cosmic and general way, an element of which I also own a part, it is the soul that I possess exclusively and personally.” [4] The soul does not feel, the soul is for itself.

Mihi quaestio factus sum, he says in *Confessions*, X, 33, “I have become a question to myself” [2, p. 504]. Where does Augustine start from? From the transformation of reason into something objective and the dispute with reason must end with the knowledge of God and the soul. And this is because it is impossible for a spirit that knows how to reason and which, therefore, actually reasons, not to reach the knowledge of the truth - *quo enim pervenit omnis bonus ratiocinator, nisi ad veritatem* - cf. *Of True Religion*, XXXIX, 72 [3, p. 152-153]. The soul is the place where God manifests in man - I want to know the soul because only the soul can contemplate God. This implies the belief that God is not an object among other things. God is our own *a priori*, He is closer to the subject than the subject is to itself. *Quaestio de Deo, quaestio de anima*, here is everything! Only God alone is better than the soul. Angels are equal to the soul and the rest of the Universe is inferior. The soul is known before the body, without body and better than the body. And here Augustine seems to make one of the finest distinctions not only in his texts, the distinction between ‘looking’ and ‘seeing’: “for having eyes is not the same as seeing; or, likewise, to look is

not the same as to see” - *non enim hoc est habere oculos, quod aspicere; aut item hoc est aspicere, quod videre* - cf. *Soliloquies*, I 6 [1, p. 76-77]. (The distinction may work more successfully in Romanian, in Augustine the verb *aspicio/ere* is very rare, the current formula is *deum videre* which is the same as *deum intelligere* [1, p. 80-81].) And Augustine says that there are three things that the soul needs and all three are in the difference between ‘looking’ - *video/ere* (which is a strictly biological function) and ‘seeing’ - *aspicio/ere* (which is a spiritual function, preserves the biological one as it transforms it). The eye has to be used properly, it has to look (*video*) and to see (*aspicio*) towards the three which are faith, hope, love (*fides, spes et caritas*), and nothing is as necessary as love - *nihil omnino tam necessarium*. The body ‘looks’ (*video*), the soul ‘sees’ (*aspicio*), the body looks forward, the soul sees the sky as ‘seeing’ (God) means ‘understanding’. (Augustine resumes the problem in *Confessions*, Book X, 34 where he discusses the pleasures of the gaze and how the most refined temptations also come to us through the gaze (liber X, 35). I find the distinction in *Confessions*, Book XI, 2: *vide, Pater, aspice et vide* (PL, tomus XXXII, 1841, col. 810).) The two verbs are in their function similar to the relation between nature (*video*) and culture (*aspicio*). *Aspicio/ere* means ‘to see’, ‘to see with admiration/to admire’, ‘to see carefully’, ‘to examine’, ‘to research’, ‘to see towards’ with the meaning of God-oriented gaze. *Video/ere* has the meaning of ‘looking’ (as a sense of sight), of ‘perceiving with the eyes’, of ‘looking observing’, *aspicio* is seeing upwards, *video* is the view directed downwards and forwards [5]. So, concludes Augustine, “the three conditions refer to the soul: to be healthy, to look and to see (*ut sana sit, ut aspiciat, ut videat*). But the other three - *fides, spes et caritas* - are always necessary, both for the first of the three conditions and for the second one; for the third one, all are necessary in this life; after this life, only love - *post hanc, vitam sola caritas*” [1, p. 82-83].

The idea of God is the culmination of Augustine’s doctrine, and the knowledge of the soul is the path that leads to the knowledge of God. The spirituality of the soul is one of the theories on which Augustine had no doubt, and strongly affirms the essential separation between the soul and the rest of the world, the material world. The soul is a simple substance, devoid of matter and is united with the body that it vivifies, communicates to it a sensitive, vegetative life and a corporeal being. The nature of the union of the soul with the body remains a mystery to Augustine. The soul is simple, not composed, and man appears to Augustine as a composed nature in which matter and spirit unite without confusion. Therefore, there are two types of life in the soul, one that the soul communicates to the body, another through which it itself lives. The soul is the life of the body, God is the life of the soul, and tears are the blood of our soul. Saint Augustine will reject the Platonic and Origenist dichotomy according to which the body is a prison of the soul, and will even acknowledge that there is a natural inclination in the soul to live in a body. In this way, the body is not foreign to man, it is man himself, but incomplete. The soul united to the body is the spiritual soul, the only one that Augustine recognizes. *De Duabus Animabus*

(PL, tomus XLII, 1865; liber unus, caput XIII, 19, col. 108) - *Ex deliberatione in malam et in bonam partem non haberi duo animarum genera. Concesso genere animarum illicitum ad turpia, non sequi has esse natura malas, alias esse summum bonum* (Based on the deliberation regarding Good and Evil, we must not consider that there are two kinds of souls. Admitting that there is a class of souls urging evil, does not mean that they are Evil by nature, [and] the others are the Supreme Good.) rejects the theory of the two souls in the sense given to this Manichean theory: the good soul, emanating from God, and the evil soul, coming from the dark principle. *De Anima et eius Origine* (PL, tomus XLIV, 1865; liber IV, 2, 3, col. 525) introduces a difference: *Natura certe tota hominis est spiritus, anima et corpus: quisquis ergo a natura humana corpus alienare vult, desipit* (The entire nature of man is certainly spirit, soul, and body; therefore, whoever would alienate the body from man's nature, is unwise). *Spiritus* is a unique reality, one that thinks, unlike *anima* that animates *corpus*. The spiritual soul belongs to the inner man, the body represents only the outer man. Through this soul, the body itself subsists: *per animam ergo corpus subsistit, et ea ipso est, quo animator* (Thus, the body subsists through the soul, and it exists through the mere fact of being animated). The soul-body relationship is thus formulated: *Et cum corpus et anima sit unus homo, quamvis corpus et anima non sint unum* (And because flesh and soul are one, even if flesh and soul are not one and the same thing). This formula may seem excessive, but its purpose is to exclude a mixture that would annihilate the perfect spirituality of the soul. (The formula appears in *The Epistle to Pascentius*, II, 12. It is epistle CCXXXVIII and the mentioned place deals with *Patris Filiique natura: analoga corporis animaeque unitas* (PL, tomus XXX, 1865, col. 1042).)

It is understood that this union of two such different entities has always seemed to Augustine an impenetrable mystery. The seat of the soul, then, is not a special part of the body, head or heart for example, but the whole body, and this is a consequence of the indivisible simplicity of the soul [6]. The soul is not essentially simple, but it is so only in relation to the body, for simple in itself can be called only that nature which is said to possess all that is itself, or which cannot lose anything of itself because all she has is herself. But this can only be said of God. The soul itself, subjected *only* from this perspective to change, has in itself the difference of subject and predicate, of substance and of property [Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 6, 8 - *Quomodo simplex et multiplex sit substantia Dei* (PL, tomus XLII, 1886, col. 928-929)]. The idea also appears in *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 10 - *Deus unus est et trinus, cuius natura simplex est et immutabilis* (PL, tomus XLI, 1864, col. 325-327).

We can distinguish rigorously in Augustine, in the soul, a *pars inferior* (the soul is for the body the principle of vegetative and sensitive life) and a *pars superior* (the rational soul, the fact that the body submits to a rational power that commands it, and here we have memory, intelligence and will). Thus the spirit (spiritual soul, *pars superior*) relates to the body as thinking relates to action. The soul (*pars inferior*) is in the body the principle of the functions that determine life; spirit is the soul when it is considered as intelligence, in which

case it shows itself to be the master of the soul and is the image of God in man. Freedom belongs only to the soul, and even when man abuses freedom, it remains a privilege, that even the most fallen soul must be regarded as far superior to the most beautiful of bodies [Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, III, 15 (PL, tomus XXXII, 1841, col. 1291-1293)]. Augustine beautifully says in the place mentioned in *De Libero Arbitrio*: although God knows that his creature will be a sinner, He did not refrain from creating it. For a rogue horse is better than a stone destitute of its own motion and will. The creature who sins by free will is more excellent than the one who does not sin by the defect of free will. The wine is to be praised as well, not the man who got drunk. *In vino veritas*, correct, only the proverb has a complement: *sed in ebrietatis stupiditas*.

In *Soliloquies* (I, 2, 7, col. 873), this idea is thus expressed: "Yes, men are also animals, but I love them not because they are so, but because they are human, that is, because they have rational souls, which I value even in the case of robbers. For I am allowed to love only reason, in whatever it may be." (*Et hominem sunt, et eos amo, non eo quod animalia, sed eo quod homines sunt; id est, ex eo quod rationales animas habent, quas amo etiam in latronibus. Licet enim mihi in quovis amare rationem.*) The soul has supremacy over the body, but a greater supremacy has the reason that is in the soul, and in the soul the rational substance is directly recognized. The rational (spiritual) soul is the noblest part we find in man, and man's 'perfection' can only be surpassed by divine perfection.

3. Conclusions

In short, the rational (spiritual) soul is the organ through which God manifests Himself in man. The rational soul is better than the body, but it is also infinitely better than nothing. The fact of personal existence is for Augustine inseparable from thinking. Moreover, he recognizes the existence of the soul and the outside world not because he proves it, but because he acknowledges it. Created by God, the soul tends towards God as towards its goal, and in this process Augustine finds seven distinct moments:

1. the soul constitutes the unity of the body;
 2. the life of the soul manifests itself indistinctly in the sense organs;
 3. the soul makes possible the interventions in art, civil life etc.;
 4. the soul feels in itself the desire for good which is God;
 5. the soul acquires an incredible spring for God;
 6. the soul sees in God what God is in fact;
 7. the soul is fixed in God and God is the place of the happiness of the soul.
- Augustine speaks of all this, in detail, in *De quantitate Animae: Quanta sit anima septem gradus demonstrant* (PL, tomus XXXII, 1841; liber unus, caput XXXIII, 70 - XXXIV, 81, col. 1075-1080).

In conclusion, *Anima solus Deus melior, adeoque solus ei colendus est* - only God is better than the soul [Augustine, *De quantitate Animae*, PL, tomus XXXII, 1841, liber unus, caput XXXIV, 78, col. 1078]; therefore the soul must

be cultivated towards God. Augustine does not cease to state that the soul finds in the knowledge of itself the principle of the knowledge of God: *noverim me, noverim te!* It is about a *unifying* knowledge towards which the soul aspires: *experimentalis Dei notitia* (experiential knowledge of God).

References

- [1] Saint Augustine, *Soliloquies*, Romanian translation, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1993, 128-129.
- [2] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Romanian translation, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2018, 437.
- [3] Saint Augustine, *Despre adevărata religie (Of True Religion)*, bilingual edition, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007, 152-153.
- [4] V.-E. Dumitrescu, *Mărturia. Aspecte semantico-hermeneutice*, Serafica, Roman, 2008, 35-36.
- [5] G. Guțu. *Dicționar Latin-Român*, 2nd edn., Humanitas, Bucharest, 2003, 121-122, 1420-1421.
- [6] E. Portalié, *Saint Augustin*, in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1931, col. 2356-2361.