

“AM I IMMORTAL?”. AUGUSTINE’S RESPONSES IN THE EARLY DIALOGUES

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Summary: *In our article we follow Augustine’s arguments in favor of the immortality of the soul, linked to the experience of Cassiciacus; methodologically, we focus the unity of discourse on the question in the first person (“Am I immortal?”) and on the Neoplatonic line of reflection. There we recognize three instances: esse cum Deo or the soul that lives by faith, non esse sine Deo or the soul that seeks wisdom without having found faith, and regressus in rationem or turn of the soul that takes up the fact of faith by the rational way. Despite the difficulty of the solutions, proportional to the size of the problem, and the predominance of the aporetic argument, the author confirms the need for an absolute starting point in reasoning. This conclusion will be the basis for the treatment of the problem in later works, providing the key to the first person in the question of immortality.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *Augustin de Hippona, dialoguri timpurii, suflet, nemurire, participarea lui Dumnezeu.*

Rezumat: *„Sunt nemuritor?”. Răspunsurile lui Augustin în dialogurile timpurii. În articolul nostru urmărim argumentele lui Augustin în favoarea nemuririi sufletului, legate de experiența lui Cassiciacus; metodologic, focalizăm unitatea discursului pe întrebarea la persoana întâi („Sunt nemuritor?”) și pe linia de reflecție neoplatonică. Acolo recunoaștem trei exemple: esse cum Deo sau sufletul care trăiește prin credință, non esse sine Deo sau sufletul care caută înțelepciunea fără să-și fi găsit credința și regressus in rationem sau turnul sufletului care preia faptul credinței pe cale rațională. În ciuda dificultății soluțiilor, proporțională cu dimensiunea problemei, și a predominanței argumentului aporetic, autorul confirmă necesitatea unui punct de plecare absolut în raționament. Această concluzie va sta la baza tratării problemei în lucrările ulterioare, oferind cheia primei persoane în problema nemuririi.*

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1. Introduction

Since Augustine's break with Manichaeism, the problem of nature, origin, and destiny of the soul, which is also a question about the way in which it works, has occupied a central place in his reflections. If the understanding of the ontological character of the participation of wisdom and the pleasure of its possession (*frui*) was the fundamental concern of Saint Augustine in *De beata uita* (*beata u.*), in *De ordine* (*ord.*), he will reflect on the same subject, but from a much broader horizon. The investigation in *ord.* will offer a new dimension, which we could call "cosmic", of the participation of wisdom; it is clear, from the title of this dialogue, that the theme is order and that, therefore, it deals with the unity that is God and with the reality of the world as creation, that is, insofar as it is governed by Providence. The various difficulties that arise when trying to establish the world as an order lead us to consider the almighty and kind character of God in the face of the drama of evil; it cannot go unanswered when someone tries to reach a certain degree of metaphysical depth.

The statement about the dedication of Augustine to philosophy does not imply, on our part, to consider his thought as a system, in the sense that this term acquired from Modernity, that is, a construct whose development depends on a purely rational method. The philosophical nature of his writings entails an important observation: in the interpretation of texts, especially when they are related to each other, it is necessary to consider context and chronology, since the continuity of arguments and ideas over time should not be assumed. For this reason, we support the interpretative unity of our work, based on the following statement: the central lines of Augustine's proposal about the soul were defined around the year 386¹.

At the time of Cassiciacus, Augustine was thirty-two years old, had abandoned the teaching of rhetoric and had retired to the country house of Verecundus, with his friends and his mother, to dedicate himself to philosophy, that is, to meditate about his recent conversion². Augustine called this retreat of a few weeks *christianae vitae otium*³;

¹ Kurt Flasch, *Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken*, Nördlingen, Reclam Verlag, 1980, 172-226; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1987, 4-6.

² *Sol.* 1. 7.

³ *Retr.* 1. 1.1

during this time, the dialogues *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita* and *De ordine* emerged. The philosophical task was dedicated to a double inquiry, as two sides of the same coin: God and the soul. The treatment of the first leads to self-knowledge and the treatment of the second leads us to our absolute origin⁴; now, what is the scope of the expression “to know the soul”?

“How important do you judge the order to learn these things? Where does the soul originate? What does it do down here? How distant it is from God? What is it in its own right that makes it go towards one or another nature? To what extent does it die? In what way can his immortality be proved?”⁵.

From the writing of the *sol.* (1.7), Augustine basically supported these two topics, whose treatment has a Neoplatonic and a biblical root. According to the first, introspection coincides with contemplation of the One (knowing one’s own soul leads to its source or origin)⁶; on the second, Augustine makes the biblical doctrine of the creation of man his own⁷ and this implies that, through the task of contemplating oneself, it is possible to understand something of the nature of God⁸. However, despite the common vocabulary, we must not think that Augustine considered possible a direct correlation or one without careful examination between Neoplatonism and the Bible⁹; in effect, Augustine cannot accept a simple fusion between the two, because Plotinus did not identify the human soul with the One, but this is the continuity of the hypostases; for the man of Hippo, such continuity between God, transcendent and immutable, and the permanent

⁴ *Ord.* 2. 47; *sol.* 1. 15; 2. 27; *lib. arb.* 2. 25.

⁵ *Ord.* 2. 17: *Anima vero unde originem ducat quidve hic agat, quantum distet a Deo, quid habeat proprium, quod alternat in utramque naturam, quatenus moriatur et quomodo immortalis probetur, quam magni putatis esse ordinis, ut ista discantur?*

⁶ *Enn.* 6. 9. 7. Shortly before, Plotinus affirmed the validity of the inverse route (5.6.5).

⁷ *Gn.* 1. 26.

⁸ *Civ.* 11. 26.

⁹ Yves Meessen, *Platon et Augustin : mêmes mots, autre sens*, *RSPH*, 89/3, 2005, 434-436; Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1980, 60-74; Gerard O’Daly, *op. cit.*, 2-4; Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1985, 217.

change of the human being is not possible¹⁰. While there is no complete separation between the pursuit of self-knowledge and the rational knowledge of God in Augustine's thought, he nevertheless draws an important distinction between understanding the human soul and probing, albeit in a faulty way, the divine substance. From the affirmation of this deep asymmetry, Augustine elaborated the most characteristic feature of his philosophy; he shared with the Stoic and Platonic philosophers the assumption that reality is ordered and that the divine being, and the human mind have particular places in that order; he treated the questions of rational psychology through an elucidation of the reality of man, regardless of the ontological implications that the latter had.

2. The Modes of Augustinian Argumentation on the Immortality of the Soul

In conjunction with the previous observations, we also affirm that Augustinian research on the soul is carried out within the broader framework of Greco-Latin culture; as we saw in the appointment of *ord.* 2.17, the questions had already been formulated by Hellenistic philosophy: the origin of the soul; the material character (or not) of its substance and, in relation to the last statement, whether it is mortal or immortal; the reason why souls must inhabit bodies; what or who decides which body each soul should inhabit; if they can have a separate existence; what link it has with the divine. It is evident that Augustine was familiar with the views of Hellenistic philosophy on such matters; on some questions, Augustine offered answers of which he seemed certain: the soul is a created substance, not an emanation of the divine substance; it is immaterial and immortal, but not immutable; it does not incarnate because of a fault in a previous life. On other issues, he hesitates and even adopts an agnostic point of view: he hesitates to affirm or deny, for example, whether souls are created individually as each new life is born, or all made at the instant of cre-

¹⁰ *Conf.* 7.16. In this context, the rational understanding of God is always partial and it is possible to achieve it – this is what is important for Augustine – through a properly directed self-knowledge, since God is within us; however, the soul must transcend itself, even to attain this deficient knowledge of God. Gerard O'Daly, *op. cit.*, 5; Rafael Alvira, *Unidad y diversidad en el neoplatonismo cristiano*, *Anuario Filosófico*, 33, 2000, 29-41.

ation and directed, in the appropriate time, by God, or if they are conceived from the souls of the parents; also about how our bodies are created¹¹. Augustine does not change the conceptual structure of the classical world, but he applies it to subjects foreign to that world, which had been erected within the framework of *physis*: the absolute transcendence of God and the creaturely condition of the universe¹². From this meeting, a new philosophy emerged, as reflected in the subject of the soul.

Saint Augustine demonstrated, in *ord.*, that without wisdom it is not possible to understand what order is, because it is the knot where all the problems are concentrated, not only of the reality of the world, but also of God and the soul. From this perspective, it is evident that the man of Hippo needed to deepen the notion of wisdom, which he began to call *esse cum deo*¹³. He wanted his disciples to understand that it is possible not to “be with God,” but that this did not necessarily mean to be “without God”. At this point, Augustine resumed the discussion as he had left it in *beata u.* But with the vocation of distinguishing between men who possess God from those who, without possessing him, seek him with the instrument of the Liberal Arts or, with the Augustinian style, “they are held by God”, as we will see a little later.

We find, then, two possibilities of participating of God: a) the participation of wisdom (*esse cum Deo*) and b) the participation of existence (*non esse sine Deo*).

“but since we have already established what it is to be with God, let us now examine if we can understand what it is to be without God, although I already consider it evident. Surely you will say that all those who are not with God are without God.

“If I did not fail to speak”, he answered, “I would tell you what you might not disapprove of.” But I ask you to support my childishness and with a quick mind, as it suits you, penetrate things themselves. Because it does not seem to me that these are with God, and yet they are held by God. Thus, I am not saying that those whom God possesses are not with God; nor do I say that they are with God, because they do not have God. Well, we already defined, in the most pleasant conversa-

¹¹ Cf. *Ep.* 166.3-10; 190.1-4.

¹² Werner Jaeger, *The Greek Ideas of Immortality: The Ingersoll Lecture for 1958*, *HThR*, 52/3, 1959, 135-147 (www.jstor.org/stable/1508497. Accessed 11 Sept. 2021); Claudio Calabrese, *Los supuestos hermenéuticos de Agustín de Hipona. Desentrañar la palabra y transmitir su misterio*, *Espíritu*, 64/150, 2015, 227-229.

¹³ *Ord* 2.2-2,3; 2.4-2; 2.8.

tion of your birth, that possessing God is equivalent to enjoying him. However, I confess that these contrary propositions scare me, such as not being without God and not being with God”¹⁴.

We should note that the understanding of the participation of wisdom is placed in close correspondence with the problem of evil, since the subject is defined in relation to men who are estranged from God. In this same context, Augustine considered that a life lived with its back to order lacks virtue and the stability that it grants is: *minime ordinata or minime constans*¹⁵. The man of Hippo considered that the solution of both problems is intimately linked, since the external or internal disorder has the place that has been foreseen by Providence: this gives it a negligible location in the order, opposite to what they would have occupied if they had complied with the will of God, that is, if they had accepted “to be with God”¹⁶.

The life devoid of consistency is one that is built on the realities that do not remain and, therefore, rooted in the lower spheres of being; In opposition to this inconsistency, the figure of the wise man is presented: thanks to the knowledge of himself, conquered by means of the knowledge of the liberal Arts, he has reached the contemplation of God in his eternity¹⁷. This implies, in turn, the following affirmation: the wise man who contemplates participates in the attributes

¹⁴ *Ord. 2. 20: Sed illius uideamus, quoniam definitum est a nobis, quid sit esse cum deo, utrum scire possimus etiam, quid sit esse sine deo, quamuis iam manifestum esse arbitror. nam credo uideri tibi eos, qui cum deo non sunt, esse sine deo. si possent, inquit, mihi uerba suppetere, dicerem quod tibi fortasse non displiceret. sed peto perferas infantiam meam resque ipsas, ut te decet, ueloci mente praeripias. nam isti nec cum deo mihi uidentur esse et a deo tamen haberi, itaque non possum eos sine deo esse dicere, quos deus habet. cum deo item non dico, quia ipsi non habent deum, siquidem deum habere iam inter nos pridem in sermone illo, quem die natali tuo iucundissimum habuimus, placuit nihil aliud esse quam deo perfrui. sed fateor me formidare ista contraria, quomodo quisque nec sine deo sit nec cum deo. an. quant. 34,77: ... cum quo esse non omnes possunt, et sine quo esse nemo potest: et si quid de illo incredibilius, convenientius tamen atque aptius homines dicere ualemus. “... With Him they cannot be all and without Him they cannot be anyone; and if some of the things that we men are capable of saying about Him are incredible, they are, nevertheless, the most convenient and the best adapted”.*

¹⁵ *Ord. 2. 11.*

¹⁶ *Ord. 2. 11.*

¹⁷ Robert J. O’Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1987.

of God; In the same passage, Augustine defines the divine being as “the one who truly is” or *qui vere est*¹⁸. It is important to remember that, in this dialogue, a balance is made of the possibility and scope of participation, based on virtue and vice or, in broader terms, of being and not being¹⁹.

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The lives of the wise and the fool and the problem of evil in those, as the presence or absence of virtue, require new details for the understanding of the soul, since – affirms Augustine – faith by itself is insufficient to clarify it:

“I, however, if I can advise my people on something, how much it seems to me and how much I think, I consider that they should be instructed in all disciplines. Otherwise, they will not be able to understand these things, to make them clearer than light”²¹.

Such a statement implies that it is necessary to deepen the data offered by the true and authentic philosophy:

“The true and, so to speak, authentic philosophy, does not seek nothing but teaching what the principle without principle of all things is, and the greatness of wisdom that remains in it, and the goods without its detriment that have been derived for our salvation. This unique God, omnipotent, three times powerful, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is made known to us by the sacred mysteries, whose sincere and unshakable faith saves the peoples, avoiding the confusion of some and the harm of others”²².

¹⁸ *Ord. 2. 6: Ille igitur sapiens amplectitur deum eoque, perfruitur, qui semper manet nec expectatur, ut sit, nec metuitur, ne desit, sed eo ipso, quo uere est, semper est praesens. curat autem immobilis et in se manens serui sui quodammodo peculium, ut eo tamquam frugi et diligens famulus bene utatur parceque custodiat.*

¹⁹ Émilie Zum Brunn, *Le dilemme de l’Être et du Néant chez Saint Augustin. Des premiers dialogues aux « Confessions »*, Amsterdam, Verlag B. R. Grüner, 1984, 26.

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ *Ord. 2. 15: Ergo autem, si quid meos monere possum, quantum mihi apparet quantumque sentio, censco illos disciplinis omnibus erudiendos. Aliter quippe ista sic intelligi, ut luce clariora sint, nullo modo possunt.*

²² *Ord. 2.16: ...nullumque aliud habet negotium, quae uera et, ut ita dicam, germana philosophia est, quam ut doceat, quod sit omnium rerum principium sine principio quantus in eo maneant intellectus quidue inde in nostram salutem*

This philosophy, as happens in the time linked to the experience of Cassiciacus, is clearly Neoplatonic, the only one that provides the intellectual tools that allow a glimpse of God and the soul; this conviction has its nuances, since, at the same time, Augustine warned about the philosophers of this school who rejected the Incarnation out of intellectual pride²³. Neoplatonism opened a path for the philosophical understanding of the mystery, although only in an exceptional way, that is, only if it was accompanied by the cultivation of the liberal Arts²⁴; Only the joint work of all disciplines would allow us to achieve, with great effort and dedication, the notions that lead to the understanding of reality; In relation to our topic, it seems significant to us that “nothing” (*nihil*) opened the list of notions that Augustine makes:

“But he does not know what nothing is, formless matter, what is endowed with form and has no soul, what a body is, what form is in the body, what is the place, the time, the being. in the place and in time, what is the movement in the place and not in the place, what is the stable movement, the unlimited time, which means not to be in a place and not in a place, to be outside of time and always be, nowhere to be and nowhere not to be, and to be always and always not to be: someone who does not know this and begins to investigate, I do not say to the high God, who is best known by ignoring, but from his own soul, will fall into all kinds of errors. He more easily will know these things, whoever has understood the simple and intelligible numbers”²⁵.

sine ulla degeneratione manuerit, quem unum deum omnipotentem, cum quo tripotentem patrem et filium et sanctum spiritum, ueneranda mysteria, quae fide sincera et inconcussa populos liberant, nec confuse, ut quidam, nec contumeliose, ut multi, praedicant.

²³ *Ord.* 2. 16. En este punto, seguimos la interpretación de por Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, Paris, Études augustinienes, 1966, 125, n° 1: los *quidam* que predicán de manera confusa la Trinidad y los *multi*, que la agravian, son los Neoplatónicos. En el mismo sentido, Frederick Van Fleteren, *Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine*, *AugStud*, 4, 1973, 48-49.

²⁴ Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Paris, Éditions E. de Boccard, 1983, 237-276.

²⁵ *Ord.* 2. 44: *nesciens tamen quid sit nihil, quid informis materia, quid formatum exanime, quid corpus, quid exanime in corpore, quid locus, quid tempus, quid in loco, quid in tempore, quid motus secundum locum, quid motus non secundum locum, quid stabilis motus, quid sit aeuum, quid sit nec in loco esse nec nusquam, quid sit praeter tempus et semper, quid sit et nusquam esse et nusquam*

For Augustine, insofar as he expresses a speculative spirit of a Neoplatonic nature, the initial problem does not refer to Being, but to beings, since what is truly supposed is the very evidence of the Being; what is surprising lies in the existence of beings that are not truly, that possessing being in some sense are close to nothing. Augustine considers that this matter is the real problem. The reason for the non-being of beings, that is, for their alterity and their mutability, is that they have been created from nothing²⁶.

2.1. Nihil as a key to understanding

Indeed, the concept of “nothing” will be a key to understand the problem of evil, which had become a true personal drama, because, since the break with Manichaeism, he had not been able to respond to “substantial evil”, which they raised and that rendered the action of Providence inoperative²⁷. As another face of the same problem, the conception of evil as the absence of good, allowed Augustine a metaphysical understanding of the soul, since, in this cognitive structure, it has the possibility of establishing its own destiny; if he chooses the path of Good or “being with God”, the one who truly is, he moves away from nothing, which is mere illusion and vice. Without a doubt, the resource of Neoplatonism applied to the understanding of the soul understood in a Christian key is novel, since, on the one hand, it allowed to leave behind the Manichean idea of the soul as a “divine spark”, that is, as consubstantial with God²⁸ and, on the other hand, it established the consequences of the participation of the divine being, insofar as it is achieved or, on the contrary, insofar as it remains close to nothing.

non esse et numquam esse et numquam non esse, quisquis ergo ista nesciens, non dico de summo illo deo, qui scitur melius nesciendo, sed de anima ipsa sua quaerere ac disputare uoluerit, tantum errabit, quantum errari plurimum potest. facilius autem ista cognoscet, qui numeros simplices, atque intelligibiles comprehenderit.

²⁶ Étienne Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Augustine*, Paris, Vrin, 1949, 213.

²⁷ Lorenzo Peña, *El significado de 'nihil' en diversos escritos de S. Agustín*, *EHum*, 9, 1987, 155-168.

²⁸ *Ord.* 2. 46.

In Augustine's mode of access to knowledge, only the *ratio*, which has been compared with the Plotinian *logos*²⁹, makes it possible to deepen these notions and, consequently, the consciousness that the soul achieves of itself. In Plotinus, the central nuclei of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophy are integrated into a new model of thought and even of spiritual life. Indeed, "thinking the one", in a universal sense, despite the multiple possibilities of this expression, is intimately linked to an understanding of being as a whole: a reflection on the different manifestations of unity in the cosmos, in the dimension of pure thought (free of time and therefore identical to itself) opens the vision towards an absolute One. Every form of unity is based on this One; it is the beginning and, at the same time, the goal of a movement: it emanates from it and returns to it. This movement is also a resource to explain the conscious life of man: "We are founded on Him [on the Self], if we bow towards Him" – ἐνιδρῦμεθα δὲ οἱ ἄν συννεύωμεν ἐκεῖ (V 1, 11, 14 and following); life becomes conscious and effective in us through the power of the One. For Plotinus, doing philosophy is being aware that the One, as the principle of everything real, cannot be thought and said by us with precision. However, this experience of the limit in understanding challenges man's own "infinite longing for the One"; for this, an extreme effort of the concept towards an experience of unity with the Self is necessary³⁰. Following the first hypothesis of the Platonic Parmenides (137c - 160b)³¹, in a metaphysical interpretation model, it systematically excludes the absolute from all forms of plurality: a unity free of alterity, immanent and pre-ordered. This negative procedure of approaching the One does not aim to build an absolute void, but rather wants to show the One as the nothing of everything, because it is the abundance of what

²⁹ The *ratio* as the "look of the soul" (*aspectus animi*) is the closest thing to *logos*, in the meaning that it has in Plotinus (*sol.* 1. 13; *an. quant.* 14. 24; 27. 53); the turn goes back to Plato, *Rep.* VII, 533 d. We also find the concept of "immutable reason" as a principle of being in *ord.* 2. 50; *imm. an.* 6. 11; 7. 12; *conf.* 11. 10. The identification between *ratio* and *Verbum* is found in *ep.* 118. 17. This passage has been carefully studied by Olivier du Roy, *op. cit.*, 109-149. The author considers that Augustine identifies the Holy Spirit with the Plotinian Logos; In this sense, the commentary by André Mandouze, Saint Augustin, *L'aventure de la raison et de la grâce*, Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1968, 494-498 is also oriented.

³⁰ Werner Beierwaltes, *op. cit.*, 218.

³¹ Reginal E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides. Translation and Analysis*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983; Rafael Alvira, *op. cit.*, 30-33.

remains³². In continuity with this thought, Augustine insists on the immanence of the *ratio* (it is in the soul or, perhaps, strictly speaking, it is the soul³³), but he also affirms the transcendence; the resource of one or another concept is related to the dialectics of uses that the wise or the fool make of it; In the second case, it would be what remains in the field of illusion, since fools imagine doing everything for a reason, but they do not know the true reason³⁴. On the contrary, the sage possesses a knowledge of the *ratio*, since it exceeds its empirical and also artistic use, since reason orders the means of the artist’s work and even life itself³⁵.

In fact, the *ratio* has both a speculative and a practical character, since its nature is divine; Following the Platonic position, Augustine takes up the idea that our soul has fallen into us, rational beings, although far from itself, that is, in the domain of the sensible and must return to the divine in ourselves³⁶. The Platonic form of the expression should not erase the differences with the interpretation of Augustine, in the light of the Bible: for Plato the soul is immortal by nature³⁷ and the Christian conception starts from the will of God. When Augustine confidently proclaims immortality, the central arguments, however, do not come from Plato; indeed, it is very significant that he leaves aside the contribution of the *Phaedrus* (245 c - 246 a)³⁸, starting from the self-movement of the soul³⁹. Indeed, the Augustinian in-

³² Werner Beierwaltes, *Plotins Theorie des Schönen und der Kunst*, in Filip Karfik, Euree Song, *Plato Revived: Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O’Meara*, Berlin-Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2013, 3-26, esp. 3-6.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ord.* 2. 30.

³⁵ *Ord.* 2. 30.

³⁶ *Ord.* 2. 31.

³⁷ The exception to this statement is in *Timaeus* 41 a-d, here we read that the soul is immortal by the will of the demiurge.

³⁸ Reginald Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

³⁹ In *imm. an.* 8, 15, Augustine explicitly denies the notion of self-movement: *Quod autem per se est, ne motu quidem opus habet ullo, omni copia sibi seipso existens; Quia motus omnis ad aliud est, cuius indiget quod movetur* (“What exists by itself, on the contrary, does not need any type of movement, since in everything it is self-sufficient: to move is to look for something that what moves lacks”). Michèle Pépin (Augustin d’Hippone, *De immortalitate animae*, texte, traduction et commentaire, Paris, Université de Paris IV, 1984, 186) warns that the word *copy*

terpretation of time clearly resides in Aristotle: the soul moves the body, but not itself⁴⁰.

Since the composition of *sol.*, Augustine had doubted that the proof of the immortality of the soul is necessarily connected with the idea of life, which is one of the main arguments of the *Phaedo* dialogue. According to Augustine, the soul does not accept death during its existence, but it is only extinguished, in the same way that when a light is turned off, the existence of darkness is not declared, during the time that its absence lasts⁴¹. In *imm. an.*, then, the argument to sustain immortality does not run through the Platonic model, since here the soul is not considered necessarily connected with the idea of life, but is equated with life⁴². "Perhaps we should believe that life is a certain composition of the body, as some have argued"⁴³. We understand that Augustine makes a critical review of the evidence of the *Phaedo*; of these tests (78b - 80b), he only accepts those that are based on the opposition between sensible and intelligible and on the affinity of the soul with the eternal being; indeed, the soul's ability to contemplate intelligible reality implies its separation from the body and its proximity to what it contemplates: the object of intellection remains unchanged, while the body changes permanently⁴⁴. In *imm.*

indicates a certain fullness of being. He takes up this idea in *div. qu.* 8, but interprets it as will.

⁴⁰ *Imm. an.* 3, 3-4.

⁴¹ *Sol.* 2. 23.

⁴² *Imm. an.* 9, 16. Lenka Karfíková, *Das Verhältnis von Seele und ratio in Augustins Abhandlung De immortalitate animae*, in Filip Karfík, Euree Song, *op. cit.*, 119-121.

⁴³ *Imm. an.* 10, 17: *Nisi forte vitam temperationem aliquam corporis, ut nonnulli opinati sunt, debemus credere.* Con el giro *corporis temperatio*, Cicero had designated the concept of health (*Tusc.* IV. 13. 30). As Augustine himself explains a little later, the *corporis temperatio* consists of a certain composition of the four elements that make up the body; this is distinguished from the *harmonia corporis*, since it is immaterial (*Phaed.* 85 e - 86 a), while the *temperatio* results from the proportionate combination of the elements. Both modalities are inseparable from the body. Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391*, Cambridge (Mass.), Belknap Press, 1968, 140-142.

⁴⁴ *Imm. an.* 10. 17 and 14. 23; by ep. 7.2, we know that Augustine ascribes this knowledge to Plato. The metaphor of the flow of contingent things and the stability of the true comes from *Phaed.* 80 a-b, through Cicero *acad.* I. 8. 20-31 and *or.* 3.10. We find this record of sources in Jean Doignon, *Un faisceau de métaphores platoniciennes dans les écrits d'Augustin de 386*, *REAug.* 50, 1994, 39-43. While

an., we can also follow traces of the demonstrations of the *Phaedrus*; these were surely read in the translation of Cicero⁴⁵ and Augustine takes up three concepts from these readings: a) that which is moved by another and does not, in turn, produce movement, is mortal⁴⁶; b) that which has no origin is eternal⁴⁷; c) the soul cannot be deprived of life, because it is life (the soul does not abandon itself).

In an obvious way, Augustine presents the intellectual capacity of the human soul and thus emphasizes that in no way can it be only a component of the body. The Augustinian argumentation closely follows two elements of the Platonic proposal, the *anamnesis* and the link of the soul with the immutable ideas; however, Augustine gives a twist to the original meaning of the terms, starting from the rereading of *Enn.* IV, 7; there Plotinus, in effect, reinterprets the questions of self-movement and *anamnesis*⁴⁸; we also find a variation on the argument based on the likeness or deduction that a soul capable of virtue must necessarily be related to the divine and the eternal. From the above, Plotinus transformed the argument about the soul, which was essentially related to the idea of life, since he affirmed that the soul is a simple nature, which realizes its being in the act of life (μία καὶ ἀπλῆ ἐνεργεῖα οὐσα ἐν τῷ ζῆν φύσις⁴⁹); for this reason, it cannot perish, that is, it cannot undergo a change that leads to its destruction (ἢ ἀλλοίωσις φθείρουσα). Nor did Augustine take the Plotinian proofs on immortality literally, but these allowed him to maintain, against the Stoic tradition, that the human being is not a mixture of substances (the whole soul is in every part of the body)⁵⁰.

2.2. *Immortality as regressus in rationem*

Philosophical conversion, then, is a return from *ratio* to its own nature; Augustine claims this *regressus in rationem* from his disci-

Gerard O’Daly (*op. cit.*, 60) agrees with Plato’s transmission through Cicero, he also studies Plotinus’s passages on the immortality of the soul.

⁴⁵ *Resp.* VI, xxv, 27 – XXVI, 28; *nat. Deor.* II, XII, 32. Giovanni Catapano, *Introduzione*, in Agostino, *Sull’anima*, Milano, Bompiani, 2012, 27.

⁴⁶ *Imm. an.* 3.3.

⁴⁷ *Imm. an.* 8. 14-15.

⁴⁸ About self-movement, IV 7, 9, 5-13; 12, 1-2; about *anámnēsis*, IV 7, 12, 8-11.

⁴⁹ *Enn.* IV, 7. Werner Beierwaltes, *op. cit.*, in Filip Karfik, Eureka Song, *op. cit.*, 3-26.

⁵⁰ Lenka Karfíková, *op. cit.*, 120-121.

ples, since in this movement lies the speculative and practical solution to the problem of evil, although the practicality of this knowledge is exercised on the plane of being. Abandoning vice and returning to virtue, the soul rises, from the lower degrees of being, to its divine source; the soul begins this path following the tracks of the *ratio* in the sensible world, through the knowledge and use of the liberal arts; this follow-up leads to a progressive clarity, as the knowledge of the different degrees of being or, in other words, of its divine origin advances. The soul understands, in this ascension, the formative role of the *ratio*, that is, the construction of culture; indeed, from the last steps of the knowledge of wisdom (science of numbers and dialectics), the *ratio* can lead to the proof of the immortality of the soul, since it is identified, in this process, with the supreme principle or, at least, makes it possible to achieve it⁵¹.

The aforementioned text leads us to consider the nature of the conjunction that links soul and *ratio*; here lies the greatest difficulty in substantiating the theme of the participation of wisdom (*esse cum deo*). Although Augustine has not yet clarified the nature of this bond (that the soul is the *ratio* or that the *ratio* is in the soul), the *regressus in rationem* is the way of being with God and, therefore, the way of immortality⁵². This is the theme that Augustine will deepen when he seeks to delimit with greater precision the conditions of the *beata vita*, that is, the participation of wisdom and its consequence, immortality.

Augustine ardently desired, after his early encounter with Cicero's Hortensius, the immortality of wisdom and will long for this encounter to his disciples of Cassiciacus. We clearly notice this will from the first dedication of *Contra Academicos* (*acad.*) to Romanianus; there, Augustine wants his friend to have a premonition of "another life", the only truly happy one⁵³, and for him to wake up from the dream that this life is and aspire to "I don't know what is divine"⁵⁴. In *ord.* 1.8, Augustine had explicitly affirmed the link between happy

⁵¹ *Ord.* 2. 50.

⁵² *Ord.* 2.50. Olivier du Roy (*op. cit.*, 132, n. 3) studies the Plotinian and Porphyrian sources of these passages and the hypotheses of their reception in Augustine. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, Einleitung und Kommentar von Karin Schlapbach, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2003, 31, n. 10.

⁵³ *Acad.* 1.2.

⁵⁴ *Acad.* 1.3 y *acad.* 8.23.

life and immortality; there he maintains that immortality is the fruit of knowledge and that, therefore, it is only accessible to those who have consecrated their lives to wisdom, according to the model already present in classical and Hellenistic philosophy. This means that the wise are already united to wisdom, from this sensible world; on the contrary, those who have not deepened their faith in collaboration with the *ratio* are the *nondum beati*⁵⁵, although they remained faithful to God; those who are sustained by a faith that does not cooperate with reason face the difficulty of credulity⁵⁶. But simple affirmations are never enough for Augustine: he always looks for the evidence that metaphysical knowledge requires, more certain than the knowledge of mathematics⁵⁷. Augustine always tries, in the understanding of the soul, to overcome doubt through the certainty of proof⁵⁸.

2.3. “Am I immortal?”

The exercises that Augustine practices with his disciples seek *regressus in rationem*; for this, the proof of the immortality of the soul occupies a central place, which can only be achieved through a complete dedication to philosophy, since this progressive approach to the One is the peak of the activity of the *ratio*. However, Augustine only in *sol.* faces this difficult task, without the company of his disciples, in dialogue only with the *ratio*. In the first person, the central question is “am I immortal?”⁵⁹. Augustine does not aspire to an impersonal form of survival, but he wishes to pose, with the greatest precision, the possibility of a conscious mode of existence; indeed, if he remained ignorant after death, this would be a greater misery than reduction to nothingness⁶⁰. The immortality that Augustine seeks is synonymous with knowledge; however, we must bear in mind that there is an initial prayer that manifests the identity between the notions of being and immortality. This is expressed with a synthesis of Platonic and Pauline language; although we think about the whole of

⁵⁵ *Beata u.* 3. 21.

⁵⁶ *Ord.* 2.27-28.

⁵⁷ *Ord.* 2. 44.

⁵⁸ *Ord.* 2. 17.

⁵⁹ *Sol.* 2.1: ... *Utrum immortalis sim?*

⁶⁰ *Sol.* 2.1: (*R*) ... *si uita ipsa talis esse inueniatur, ut in ea tibi nihil amplius quam nosti, nosse liceat, temperabis a lacrimis?* Vid. *sol.* 2. 36.

the sun. 1. 2-3, it seems to us that the passage "... God, who strips us of what is not and clothe us with what is"⁶¹ dialogues especially with "Because it is necessary for this corruptible to clothe itself with incorruptibility and for this mortal to be clothed in immortality. And when this corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility and this mortal is clothed with immortality, then the word that is written will be realized: "Death has sunk in victory. Where is, oh death, your victory?"⁶².

Augustine takes up the vocabulary of the Pauline prayer, in the light of which he redefines properly philosophical elements, which in previous dialogues had been attributed to being, although now applied to God. Is it possible to achieve this supreme fulfillment by faith, by self-improvement, or by the liberal arts? Augustine did not find, at the time associated with Cassiciacus, a satisfactory answer; the only safe thing is the attempt to pass from the changeable (temporary) to the immutable (eternal).

Augustine sought to deepen the equivalences that he had maintained between truth, being and immortality. The proof that the truth, which is immortal, dwells in us is the core of the proof. These attempts have a very marked technical character and, therefore, training in liberal arts is very necessary to express them and to follow them; these arguments do not seek to demonstrate the existence of an object already constituted as true, since, for Augustine, "to prove" does not mean to passively record the existence or truth of something. On the contrary, the test is a spiritual exercise that allows to have control over immortality, that is, to find something as true again, redirecting it to the intelligible world. To do this, he follows the Platonic teaching about what it means to "substantiate a test": the soul must participate in that truth that it wants to prove itself.

The *ratio* teaches Augustine that he is immortal, only if he first recognizes that the truth dwells in him⁶³. This awareness and this ratification of one's own life path are the characteristics of conversion to the world of the spirit or return to oneself. These are essential to

⁶¹ *Sol.* 1.3: ... *deus, qui nos eo, quod non est, exiis et eo, quod est, induis. Ver uer. rel.* 12.25.

⁶² *1 Cor.* 15. 53-54: *Oportet enim corruptibile hoc induere incorruptelam et mortale induere immortalitatem. Cum autem corruptibile hoc induerit immortalitatem, tunc fiet sermo qui scriptus est: "Absorta est mors in victoria. Ubi est, mors, victoria tua".*

⁶³ *Sol.* 2. 33

achieve, from the permanent changes of the sensible world, true immortality⁶⁴. Now, if in Platonic terms this is the condition for not dying, what happens, in Christian terms, with the soul that forgets? We must bear in mind that only *regressus in rationem* allows the soul to reach immortality. But if this is the way someone does not die, what happens to the soul that forgets it, that does not make its way back to unity? Augustine interrogates *ratio* in this way: “I listen, I regain my senses, I begin to reflect. However, I ask you, explain the rest to me, so that I understand the discipline and the truth of an incompetent soul, because we cannot say that this is mortal”⁶⁵.

This means that the proof of the soul’s ascent to immortality requires a certain death of the soul; this *aporia* arises from the absolute equivalence that Augustine establishes between knowledge and immortality. It is a question that was already in the reverse of the arguments of the *Beata u.* on the constitutive virtue of being and on the vice that annihilates the possible and stable link with being⁶⁶. If we bear in mind that neither Neoplatonic philosophy nor Christianity affirm that any soul is mortal, what implicit knowledge does the ignorant soul then possess? We do not find a complete answer to this question in *ord.*; yes, Augustine outlines the core of the solution through an adaptation of the reminiscence theory.

2.4. Arguments about the existence of the soul in *De immortalitate animae* (imm.an.)

In *de imm. an.*, Augustine seeks new paths that lead to the demonstration of immortality, as he tries to ontologically establish an immiscible substrate of the soul, considered independently of its conversion to the truth. Reading *Retractations*⁶⁷, we know that Augustine

⁶⁴ Émilie Zum Brunn, *op. cit.*, 33-34.

⁶⁵ *Sol.* 2. 33: *Audire, resipisco, recolere incipio. Sed, quaeso, illa quae restant expeditas, quomodo in animo imperito – non enim eum mortalem dicere possumus – disciplina et ueritas esse intellegantur.*

⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁷ *Retr.* 1. 1. Augustine’s distancing from his own work has reinforced the hypothesis that the text is a summary of Porfirian arguments with explanatory notes by Augustine himself. Heinrich Dörrie, *Porphyrios’ “Symmikta Zetemata”*, München, C. H. Beck, 1959, 159. We follow Dörrie *imm. an.* gives us a new perspective on Augustine’s way of working, at least during the time before the writing of *Confessiones* (*conf.*). Olivier Duroy, *op. cit.*, 173-206. The author presents the ques-

did not recognize his own writing, since his work was obscure to him; It is evident that it is a set of Porphyrian arguments, but we also find here the Augustinian vocation that seeks to solve or, at least, to repose the problem that led to *sol.* to an aporia. While *retr.* collects the position of an Augustine immersed for years in reading and commenting on Scripture and occupied by his task as bishop, *imm. an.* it had a very important role in the elaboration of an ontological perspective on the soul. In principle, there is no force capable of pulling the soul from the transcendent truth or ratio, because it is immutable. Indeed, reason could not deprive the soul of the permanent contemplation that it enjoys (*frui*), since, in Augustinian terms, when something “more is” proportionally “makes be” what it has attached to: this is the state opposite to the ontological fragility⁶⁸. The soul could not voluntarily break the bond that binds it to reason; indeed, the separation of these entities, even if they are not spatial realities, is, for Augustine, a metaphysical impossibility; it is possible to argue that this link could eventually be dissolved by annihilation. Augustine responds by developing a new idea: the ontological force of the *ratio* forces everything that is under its aegis to be; indeed, the conjunction between the soul that sees and the truth that is seen can either be considered in terms of subject-object or the opposite (truth as subject and soul as object), while considering that both are substances; in all cases it is evident that, since reason and the soul do not exist separately, it is necessary that it always live: there is no force capable of separating them⁶⁹.

The reference of *imm. an.* still makes evident the difficulty of Augustine to distinguish the two planes of the reality of the soul; on the one hand, the moment of creation (this act indissolubly binds it to being), when the soul has not been able to choose and, on the other hand, the will can only intervene at the level of conversion, which is achieved by action joint knowledge and love (both principles link, in the most intimate way, the soul to its origin). This distinction is absent in the Augustinian argument about the immortality of the soul, since

tion, always difficult to elucidate, about the influences of Plotinus and Porphyry on Augustine.

⁶⁸ *Imm. an.* 11: ... *deinde quo magis est, eo magis quicquid sibi coniungitur, facit, ut sit, cui rei contrarius est interitus.*

⁶⁹ *Imm. an.* 11. En *retr.* 1.2, Agustín apelará a la Escritura para fundamentar que el alma no puede separarse voluntariamente de Dios.

he has concentrated entirely on the second aspect or conversion⁷⁰; indeed, he seeks to clarify the ontological causality of the ratio and does not achieve it, perhaps because his argument is only supported by the idea of “union with God”. From the moment that he leaves aside the non-voluntary instant of the creation of the soul, the metaphysical explanation sustained solely in conversion; it cannot maintain the immortality of the soul. This seems the only compelling objection that can be opposed to the affirmation of the immortality of the soul; after having searched for various proofs of unitive knowledge, he finds no other resource than to distinguish two levels of reality in the soul⁷¹. Augustine maintains this distinction that establishes a first participation of the soul with the divine *esse*, on the plane of existence, independently of its participation in wisdom; in effect, Augustine unfolds the argument about the existence of the opposite of truth, not as truth, but as “it is”: if no essence as such has an opposite, even less that first Essence which is Truth; the conclusion is that all essence is such for the simple fact of being⁷².

Augustine thinks of the immortality of the soul from the perspective of creation; We observe this procedure in the previous quote, where the proof is founded on the Essence without opposite. Nothing returns to nothing, not even the smallest detail of the bodily being. This development causes us admiration, because Augustine himself had repeatedly pointed out the inconsistency of everything that is not absolute. However, based on the notion of mutability, Augustine establishes the link between the “non-being” of becoming and the ontological value of the most insignificant particle of being created. This

⁷⁰ Émilie Zum Brunn, *op. cit.*, 35-36.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 37; John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St Augustine*, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007, 141-182.

⁷² *Imm. an. 11: at si ueritati contrarium ita quaeramus, non in quantum ueritas est, sed in quantum summe maximeque quantum uera sunt, tamen nullo modo id defugerim, quod mihi euidentiussuffragatur. nam si nulla essentia, in quantum essentia est, aliquid habet contrarium, multo minus contraria illi substantiae, quae maxime ac primitus est... non igitur potest interire.* In this passage, Augustine refers to the double immanence: man participates in being through the immanence of God in him and of him in God. As Aimé Solignac pointed out, there is obviously an imperfect reciprocity here that leaves the absolute transcendence of God safe (the being of God conditions man, without this being reciprocal); in this same sense, immanence is double, both incomplete and inalienable (in the original: *à la fois admissible et inadmissible*). See Aimé Solignac, *L’existentialisme de saint Augustin*, *NRTh*, 80, 1948, 10.

first development of the notion of mutability only concerns bodily realities, since Augustine has not yet applied it to the soul⁷³. The soul participates, then, in the incorruptibility of the Being without contrary. In this proposed solution to the dilemma of Being and nothingness, Augustine inserted the proof that the soul is immortal but not by itself, since the soul cannot be its own *causa existendi*⁷⁴. Indeed, this explanation of Platonic origin makes it possible to avoid the aporia of the return to nothingness; the second aspect of the test, the analogy with the body is thought from the creation.

3. Conclusions

Augustine argued that there are two fundamental questions in philosophy, God and the soul; knowing God is knowing the creator and knowing the soul implies self-knowledge; the support of this affirmation (in the singular, because in reality it is only one) recognizes two roots: one Neoplatonic and the other biblical. According to the first, introspection leads to contemplation of the One; on the second, Augustine makes the biblical doctrine of the creation of man his own: through the task of contemplating himself, man can intuit something of the nature of God. The formal proximity of the vocabulary should not be confusing regarding a possible correlation between Neoplatonism and the Bible, since Augustine could not allow a simple fusion between the two, because Plotinus did not identify the human soul with the One, but as a continuity of the hypostases. For Augustine, such continuity between God, transcendent and immutable, and the permanent change of the human being is not possible. In Augustine's rational knowledge of God, there is a significant distinction between understanding the human soul and inquiring, albeit in a faulty way, the divine substance. In this sense, he shared with the Stoic and Platonic philosophers the assumption that reality is ordered and that the divine being and the human mind have particular places in that order.

If the point of arrival is decided or at least hinted at at the starting point, the absence of philosophical determinations other than

⁷³ *Imm. an.* 15.

⁷⁴ *Imm. an.* 15 and 18. As Émilie Zum Brunn points out (*op. cit.*, 41), "...elle (l'âme) ne s'abandonne jamais elle-même..."; c'est l'expression de Platon, *Phèdre*, 245 c: οὐκ ἀπολεῖται ἑαυτό.

those offered by Neoplatonism did not lead the young Augustine’s arguments to a theological determination, in the modern perspective of this term (speculative speech about God); on the contrary and in a strict sense, this means that the Augustinian texts of the time of Cassiciacus, which we have traveled through and which lead to the tests of the immortality of the soul, establish the specificity of what, in a Neoplatonic trace, Augustine understands that it must be tried; Indeed, in our journey we have considered that although he argues “about the soul and its immortality”, we meet him in the first person, becoming the subject he presents, that is, allowing himself to be interpreted by the nature of the question: “I’m immortal?”. The vicissitudes of the soul’s return to God, later dramatized in the *Confessions*, do not seem, at least in the texts of his youth, a conversion in the strict sense, since he does not frame them as objectifiable questions, but rather forms part of the flow of a narrative, where the fundamental question is expressed in the first person. This procedure anticipates, to a large extent, the central originality of *conf.*: Augustine himself is the problem. For this reason, our author is never satisfied with the appearance of evidence (the various ones that we have found in this work) and transports the aporias to the last instance of the argument, since the question of one’s own immortality presupposes a conviction: the necessity from a starting point outside himself, which absolutely precedes him, that is, creation; if he cannot free himself from the starting point where he had no decision, this means that he starts from himself, that nothing precedes him as a search and that, nevertheless, he is a return.

The proofs of the immortality of the soul, as an indication of a solution, expose a thought, the *regressus in rationem* or movement in whose unfolding lies the speculative and practical solution to the central problem and the problems that depend on it. Here, finally, resides the hermeneutical centrality of Augustine: without the Scriptures there is no possible approach to God and the soul, but, in the process of this “going towards”, the need for training in the Liberal Arts and thus the search is transformed in terms of spirituality: the answer is not in part of creation, but in all of it.