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## The Methodology of the “Original” Sin and Grace Dogmatics According to Blessed Augustine

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### Abstract

This study contains the analysis of the Augustinian texts before his conversion, and they were read in the original - “at first hand” - without taking into account the theological perspectives of Augustine’s epigones or challengers. We have recourse to this exegetical method because the Augustinian theological laconism allowed a number of exaggerated theological approaches and interpretations of the original text. At the same time, Augustine’s contestants are fighting ideas he had never affirmed, or are struggling with “Augustinian” thinking systems that he would never have dared to adhere to. Both Augustine’s apologists and his adversaries come to defend or challenge a phantasm - a system of thought that never existed as such. The fact that Augustine’s philosophy and theology is now so distorted is due to the poor “creativity” of his epigones who wrote what they thought Augustine wanted to say - in a particular issue he actually left open.

### Keywords

Dogma, spirituality, philosophy, platonism, theology, theological system, soul, man

## **I. Augustinian Soliloquies**

*Soliloquies* are written before Augustine was baptized, so they could not have been a standard even for Western theology! The fact they became normative in time is due to the methodological “naturalism” of Western theology - which claims that human nature was not affected by the sin. Both in the texts of *Soliloquies*, and in his later works, we can notice Augustine has “stereotypes” in the very syntax of thought: even after conversion and baptism his thinking process still remained exclusively philosophical, although his texts are occasionally interrupted by fervent prayer... Augustine’s words and their significance do not stem from the dialectics and dianoetic of Plato’s Reason (Noūs). Augustine does not converse with the Supreme Reason of Godhead - with the Son and Word of God Who would have revealed to him - but with his own hypostasized reason!

*Soliloquies*<sup>1</sup> represents the philosophical meditation of self-seeking: “For many days I had been debating within myself many and diverse things, seeking constantly, and with anxiety, to find out my real self, my best good, and the evil to be avoided, when suddenly one- I know not, but eagerly strive to know, whether it were myself or another, within me or without - said to me.”<sup>2</sup>

There follows a dialogue with the “goddess” Reason who advises him to trust the memory faculty - whom he had previously entrusted his discoveries - and who proposes him to write his reflections in the condition of absolute solitude. The hypostasized reason the author enters into a dialogue with, invites him to pray to God - the Creator of the Universe, to God-Truth, and God-Wisdom. She promises him the intellectual contemplation:

“For Reason, who speaks to you, promises that God Himself shall be even so demonstrated to your mind as is the sun to your

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<sup>1</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, Ire Série: Opuscules, V. Dialogues philosophiques, II. Dieu et l’ame, Soliloques & De immortalitate animae & De quantitate animae, Texte de l’édition bénédictine, traduction, introduction et notes de Pierre de Labriolle, Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie, Bruges, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, Ire Série, p. 25: „Volventi mihi multa ac varia mecum diu, ac per multos dies sedulo quaraenti memetipsum ac bonum meum, quidve mali evitandum esset; ait mihi subito, sive ego ipse, sive alius quis extrinsecus, sive intrinsecus, nescio: nam hoc ipsum est quod magnopere molior, ait ergo mihi.

eyes. For the eyes of the mind are the senses of the soul. Now the truths of science are made visible to the mind, as the light of the sun makes visible to the eyes the earth and terrestrial objects. But it is God Himself who shines. And I, Reason, am such to the mind as is sight to the eyes: for to have eyes that you may look is one thing, and to so look that you may see is another. And so it is that the task of the soul is threefold, that it possess eyes fit for use, that it look, that it see.”<sup>3</sup>

For intelligence Reason is what sight is for the bodily eyes. The promise made by the hypostasized Reason to Augustine - that the eyes of the mind would see God - is conditioned by the purification of the soul from the passions for the terrestrial things and the redemption of any vices. The virtues needed to acquire God’s vision are: faith, hope, and love. However, vision itself is not what we the orthodox understand through “vision” or “revelation” but it represents the intellectual conception of God:

“Such looking is followed by the vision of God Himself, who is the goal of the soul’s gaze, not because it could not continue to look, but because there is nothing beyond this on which it can fix its gaze. This is truly perfected Reason- Virtue- attaining its proper end, on which the happy life follows. And this intellectual vision is that which is in the soul a conjunction of the seer and the seen: as seeing with the eyes results from the conjunction of the sense of sight and the sensible object, either of which being lacking, nothing can be seen.. VII. 14. When now it has come about that the soul sees, that is, intellectually apprehends God, let us see whether these three things are still necessary to her...”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), pp. 49-50: „Promittit enim ratio quae tecum loquitur, ita se demonstraturam Deum tuae menti, ut oculis sol demonstratur. Nam mentis quasi sui sunt oculi sensus animae; disciplinarum autem quaeque certissima talia sunt, qualia illa quae sole illustrantur, ut videri possint, veluti terra est atque terrena omnia: Deus autem est ipse qui illustrat. Ego autem ratio ita sum in mentibus, ut in oculis est aspectus. Non enim hoc est habere oculos quod aspicere; aut item hoc est aspicere quod videre”.

<sup>4</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 53: „Jam aspectum sequitur ipsa visio Dei, qui est finis aspectus; non quod jam sit, sed quod nihil amplius habeat quo se intendat: et haec est vere perfecta virtus, ratio perveniens ad finem suum, quam beata vita consequitur. Ipsa autem visio, intellectus est ille qui in anima est, qui conficitur ex intelligente et eo quod intelligitur: ut in oculis videre quod dicitur, ex ipso sensu constat atque sensibili, quorum detracto quolibet, videri nihil potest. VII. 14. Ergo cum animae Deum

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For Augustine “the vision of God” represents his intellectual conception. In this perspective, the three attributes of God would be: “He is, that He is apprehended, that He causes other things to be apprehended”<sup>5</sup>. The comparison with the sun - which exists, shines and illuminates thus discovering all things - is taken from Plato. Our intelligence understands that God exists, it understands to some extent how He exists - so as to sustain things in existence - and understands the existence of things through Him. But the wisdom of God is ineffable. His wisdom is like this: “there is an intellectual illumination of an ineffable and mysterious sort.”<sup>6</sup>

The ineffable character of God’s mind is also taken from Plato.

In this perspective, the immortality of the soul can only be grounded on the immortality of the truth it bears in it: “... Also, the mind is believed to be immortal if Truth, which cannot perish, is really proved to be in it.”<sup>7</sup> The immortality of the soul is grounded on the eternity of truth (which is also in it!), and the truth in question is platonic-pythagorean, being that of mathematical demonstrations. Thus, the immortality of the soul is guaranteed by the fact that it contains the geometric figures, which are absolutely true (they contain the truth, which is eternal!):

“For whether the figures of geometry are in the Truth, or the Truth is in them, no man doubts, that they are contained in the soul, that is, in the intelligence. And thus Truth is, of necessity, forced to be in the mind. For if any science whatever is inseparable from the mind as subject, and if the Truth cannot die, why, I ask, do we - by I know not what familiarity with death -- doubt concerning the everlasting life of the mind ? Or do the line and rectangle and circle possess other features which they imitate in order that they may be true?”<sup>8</sup>

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videre, hoc est Deum intelligere contingerit, videamus utrum adhuc ei tria illa sint necessaria.”

<sup>5</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 55: „Ergo quomodo in hoc sole tria quaedam licet animadvertere; quod est, quod fulget, quod illuminat: ita in illo secretissimo Deo quem vis intelligere, tria quaedam sunt: quod est, quod intelligitur, et quod caetera facit intelligi”.

<sup>6</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 71: „Lux est quaedam ineffabilis et incomprehensibilis mentium”.

<sup>7</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 151: „Animus autem immortalis creditur, si veritas quae interiore non potest, etiam in illo esse probatur”.

<sup>8</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 155: „Sive enim figurae geometricae in veritate, sive in eis veritas sit, anima nostra, id est intelligentia nostra, contineri nemo ambi-

The personal soul is immortal because it contains the universals - this is the conclusion of the Augustinian *Soliloquies* and the fruit of loneliness meditations alongside the hypostasized Reason. His dialogue with the inner voice cannot avoid the end when the feeling of waiting is predominant: Augustine prays to God, he prays intensely, with a prayer full of fervour and beauty, and he receives the Platonic geometric reason!

## II. Augustinian Anthropology of the First Works

In the book *“The Immortality of the Soul”* – also written before baptism – Augustine carries out his geometric perspective on reason itself. His thinking algorithm would be as following: Death does not touch the immutable things. It means that the soul lives eternally, whether it is reason itself - which is immutable as geometry! - or it bears reason in it! “Nor can death occur to things not subject to change. The mind, therefore, always lives, whether it itself is reason, or whether reason is inseparably attached to it”<sup>9</sup>.

The Platonic considerations are moderated to some extent by the idea that the soul is protected against nothingness by the power of the “intangible nature” of Him who created it:

“Hence, the whole body has been made by some force and nature more powerful and more excellent, at least not corporeal. If body was made by body, the whole body could not have come into existence. For, our statement at the outset of our reasoning, namely, that nothing could by itself come into being, is indeed true. This force and incorporeal nature which affected the whole body, however preserves the whole by its ever-present power. For, after the making, it did not vanish and did not desert the thing made.”<sup>10</sup>

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guit, ac per hoc in nostro animo etiam veritas esse cogitur. Quod si quaelibet disciplina ita est in animo, ut in subjecto inseparabiliter, nec interire veritas potest; quid, quaeso, de animi perpetua vita, nescio qua mortis familiaritate dubitamus? An illa linea vel quadratura vel rotunditas habent alia quae imitentur ut vera sint?”

<sup>9</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 175: „Nec mors potest accidere immutabilibus rebus. Semper ergo animus vivit, sive ipse ratio sit, sive in eo ratio inseparabiliter”.

<sup>10</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 197: „Haec autem vis et natura incorporea effectrix corporis universi praesente potentia tenet universum. Non enim fecit, atque dis-

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The impression the treatise gives us is that the conclusions of the Christian common sense are grafted onto the philosophical meditations “body” of the author - derived from the experience of Augustine the “catechist” before his conversion.

The book “*The Magnitude of the Soul*” (“*De quantitate animae*”) is an anthropology and ascetic work which concludes that the greatness of the soul resides in virtue and contemplation. “God, its Creator, is, so to speak the soul’s proper habitation and its home”<sup>11</sup>, which means that the most important work of the soul is to contemplate God and to possess the Supreme Good.

Augustine defines the soul as a “certain kind of substance, sharing in reason, fitted to rule the body”<sup>12</sup>.

The seven degrees or powers of the soul are as following: 1) the organization of the body („*Quomodo anima corpus hoc terrenum praesentia sua vivicet*”); 2) sensation („*Quid possit anima in sensibus*”); 3) art and science („*Quomodo artem scientiamque foveat*”); 4) the effort of purification (“*De negotio purgationis*”); 5) the state of purity (“*Quomodo anima maculis diluta se in seipsa beatissime teneat*”); 6) soul’s vision of God (“*Quid possit cogitatio hominis ab omni cupiditate ac faece rerum mortalium liberata*”); 7) possession of the Supreme Good or the enjoyment of contemplating the Truth (“*Voluptas Veritatis contemplandae*”)<sup>13</sup>

The fundamental acts of the soul are:

“To teach these grades to anyone, let the acts of the soul, from the lowest to the highest, be called, first, Animation; the second, Sensation; the third, Art; the fourth, Virtue; the fifth, Tranquillity; the sixth, Approach; the seventh, Contemplation. They can be named also in this way: ‘of the body’; ‘through the body’;

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cessit effectumque deseruit. Ea quippe substantia quae corpus non est, neque, ut ita dicam, localiter movetur, ut ab ea substantia quae locum obtinet, separari queat; et illa effectoria vis vacare non potest, quin id quod ab ea factum est, tueatur, et specie carere non sinat, qua est in quantumcumque est. Quod enim per se non est, si destituatur ab eo per quod est, profecto non erit: et non possumus dicere id accepisse corpus cum factum est, ut seipso jam contentum esse posset, etiamsi a conditore desereretur”.

<sup>11</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 229: „Propriam quamdam habitationem animae ac patriam, Deum ipsum credo esse a quo creata est”.

<sup>12</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 273: „Nam mihi videtur esse substantia quaedam rationis particeps, regendo corpori accommodata”.

<sup>13</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 375 urm.

‘about the body!; ‘toward itself; ‘in itself; ‘toward God’; ‘in God’. Or again, in this way: ‘beautifully of another, beautifully through another, beautifully about another, beautifully toward a beautiful, beautifully in a beautiful, beautifully toward Beauty, beautifully in Beauty”<sup>14</sup>

The degrees of the soul ascension to its own Cause are systematized according to the canon of ancient philosophy: they lead to the Platonic Triad - Good, Truth and Beauty. “The only Master of Truth is Christ”<sup>15</sup>, said Augustine in his work “*De Magistro*”, and He lives “in the inner man” (Ephes. 3, 16-17). Augustine’s statement seems to open the path of Revelation: Christ is the Master “of inner education”<sup>16</sup>, while our words can only give outward warning. The outer words are meant to evoke images from the memory of the other:

“XII. 39 ... So it is that we bear these images in the deep recesses of the memory as witnesses, so to speak, of things previously experienced by the senses. When reflecting upon these images in our mind, we can speak of them in good conscience, without lying. But these images are only witnesses for ourselves. If the one who hears what I am recounting has seen these things for himself and was there on the spot, he does not learn them from my words but recognizes them himself by the images he took away with him from these things. But if he has not experienced them with his senses, then it is clearly a matter of his believing my words rather than of learning. 40. But when it is a question of things which we behold with the mind, namely, with our intellect and reason, we give verbal expression to realities which we directly perceive as present in that inner light of truth<sup>5</sup> by

<sup>14</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1948), p. 393: „Ascendentibus igitur sursum versus, primus actus, docendi causa, dicatur animatio; secundus, sensus; tertius, ars; quartus, virtus; quintus, tranquillitas; sextus, ingressio; septimus, contemplatio. Possunt et hoc modo appellari: de corpore; per corpus; circa corpus; ad seipsam; in seipsa; ad Deum; apud Deum. Possunt et sic: pulchre de alio; pulchre per aliud; pulchre circa aliud; pulchre ad pulchrum; pulchre in pulchro; pulchre ad pulchritudinem; pulchre apud pulchritudinem”.

<sup>15</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, VI., Dialogues philosophiques, III., De l’âme a Dieu, De magistro & De libero arbitrio, Texte de l’édition bénédictine, traduction, introduction et notes de F.J. Thonnard, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie, Paris 1952, p. 103: “Veritatis Magister solus est Christus”.

<sup>16</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 117.

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which the inner man, as he is called, is enlightened and made happy. But, here again, if the one who hears my words sees those things himself with that clear and inner eye of the soul, he knows the things whereof I speak by contemplating them himself, and not by my words”<sup>17</sup>

Augustine’s statements relate to the philosophical and theological common sense: in order to understand another’s spiritual experience, you should have experienced something similar! Difficulties arise only when we discover that “inner Master” silently supervises the thesis and antithesis of Augustine, who indulges further in a kind of Platonic dianoea – which lacks not only the radiance of personal spiritual experiences, but also the lights of Gospel texts.

**III. Dogmatic and metaphysical dilemmas**

In his book “*On the Free Choice of the Will*” (*De libero arbitrio*) Augustine asserts that the inner learning of Truth has been given to all men. The inner truth is the Sovereign master of all men, which means that all our words are made only to provoke the reaction of inner light. In Augustine’s dialectical dispute with Evodius, his interlocutor, the former states that he could respond to him, but innerly instructed by Truth, Evodius might rather answer himself!<sup>18</sup> Augustine here practices a kind of implicit

<sup>17</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 107: „XII. 39. Cum vero nom de iis quae coram sentimus, sed de his quae aliquando sensimus quaeritur; non jam res ipsas, sed imagines ab iis impressas memoriaeque mandatas loquimur: quae omnino quomodo vera dicamus, cum falsa intueamur, ignoro; nisi quia non nos ea videre ac sentire, sed vidisse ac sensisse narramus. Ita illas imagines in memoriae penetralibus rerum ante sensarum quaedam documenta gestamus, quae animo contemplantes bona conscientia non mentimur cum loquimur: sed nobis sunt ista documenta; is enim qui audit, si ea sensit atque adfuit, non discit meis verbis, sed recognoscit ablatis secum et ipse imaginibus: si autem illa non sensit, quis non eum credere potius verbis quam discere intelligat? 40. Cum vero de iis agitur quae mente conspiciamus, id est intellectu atque ratione, ea quidem loquimur quae praesentia contuemur in illa interiore luce veritatis qua ipse qui dicitur homo interior, illustratur et fruitur: sed tunc quoque noster auctor, si et ipse illa secreto ac simplici oculo videt, novit quod dico sua contemplatione, non verbis meis”.

<sup>18</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 213: „II. 4. Donabit quidem Deus, ut spero, ut tibi valeam respondere, vel potius ut ipse tibi eadem, quae summa omnium magistra



“naturalism” where there is a sign of equality between the present nature of man and his primordial nature – of Eden, both being at least similar to “the man of resurrection”: and from the perspective of thinking which states the original sin did not affect human nature, memory and reason remaining intact, - only the will collapsed -, the recourse to philosophical reflection and meditation is natural, and the platonic dianoea is entitled to a theological career.

If sin is the subsumption [and subjugation] of reason by the passions of concupiscence<sup>19</sup>, wisdom is that state constituted by the sovereignty of reason in man<sup>20</sup>. Will and free will represent the faculty of provoking sin and falling into concupiscence<sup>21</sup>, but it can also be the source of merit: “XIV. 30. Certainly, the eternal law, which it is now time to consider again, has unalterably decreed that merit is in the will, whereas reward and punishment are identified with happiness and unhappiness”<sup>22</sup>. In Augustine’s vision, people are divided into two fundamental categories: friends of eternal things or friends of temporary things<sup>23</sup>. The former are endowed with what is called “good will” and characterized by the desire (“appetite”) to live for justice and honour<sup>24</sup>. It is no longer clear whether “good will” is a gift, an inner tendency of the soul, or the fruit of a deliberation of the mind. If it is a grace, then the difficulties of understanding become insurmountable and we are obliged to believe in the doctrine of absolute predestination and absolute arbitrariness of divinity. If “benevolence” is an opening of the soul to heaven, then other difficulties arise: those concerning the inner

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est, veritate intus docente respondeas”.

<sup>19</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 145 urm.

<sup>20</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 175: „X. 20. Jam enim et regnum mentis humanae humanam esse sapientiam, et eam posse etiam non regnare, compertum est.”

<sup>21</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 179: „X. 21. ... deci nu există nimic altceva care să facă din spirit un servitor al patimilor decât voința proprie și liberul arbitru”. („X. 20. ...nulla res alia mentem cupiditas comitem faciat, quam propria voluntas et liberum arbitrium”.)

<sup>22</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 197: „XIV. 30. Hoc enim aeterna lex illa, ad cuius considerationem redire jam tempus est, incommutabili stabilitate firmavit, ut in voluntate meritum sit; in beatitudine autem et miseria praemium atque supplicium”.

<sup>23</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 199: „XV. 31. ... amatores rerum aeternarum, alios temporalium...”

<sup>24</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 193: „XIII. 29. Vide etiam aliud: nam credo te memoria tenere quam dixerimus esse bonam voluntatem: opinor enim, ea dicta est qua recte atque honeste vivere appetimus”.

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mechanisms of the spirit which awake the consciousness of ascension to God.

At the beginning of his treatise, Augustine put the troublesome problem of the origin of sin: “if sins come from souls created by God, while these souls in turn come from God, how is it that sins are not at once chargeable to God?”<sup>25</sup> Augustine’s apology will seek to prove that God is not the author of evil, and the souls created by Him have fallen by the exercise of free will, misusing their free will, and transforming the reason into an “amplifier” of concupiscence passion.

Augustine’s apology goes too far, and its claims become dangerous or even false. The Holy Fathers call this phenomenon of thinking and soul “the temptation from the right” and it means to fall in a sin that had as starting point a certain virtue. All virtues can lead us to pride and vain glory, and this kind of fall is more serious than the first fall - of the sin acknowledged as sin. To illustrate one of the “temptations from the right” of Augustine’s Apologetics we will quote the very text from “De libero arbitrio” treatise’s beginning, in which it is stated that God is not the author of “the first kind of evil” [of the sin of the creatures He created], but He is the author of “the second kind of evil” [of the punishment]. Augustine’s apologetic zeal goes like this to the distortion of the notion of divine justice. In this case the fall in the “temptation from the right” is amplified by the apologetic zeal: 1) Augustine had planned to defend God from the charge that He would have been the first author of evil, and sin, and He would have been planted in His created beings predisposition to sin, or that He would have been given them spiritual faculties capable of passion [imagination, concupiscence...]; 2) Augustine shows that the will of the creature and her free will is guilty of sin [the first evil], and thus he “exonerates” God; 3) Augustine unconsciously accuses God of being the author of the “second evil” that is, of the punishment, and through this he gets to the mystification of the divine justice, which is put somehow against love and is reduced to a terrible severity: “Everybody deserved to die...”; 4) Augustine resorts to the subterfuge of “grace that predestines”, trying to save a part of the idea of divine love; but in philosophy being the same as in mathematics, the clarified questions call other questions,

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<sup>25</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 143: „II. 4. Movet autem animum, si peccata ex iis animabus sunt quas Deus creavit, illae autem animae ex Deo, quomodo non parvo intervallo peccata referantur in Deum”.

and those, once clarified, give birth to other dilemmas, thus arriving in a sequence of regression to infinity; Augustine's laconism allowed the regression of dogmatic and metaphysical dilemmas to reach the theses of predestination from current Protestantism - and that is because he did not illustrate the concrete way the righteousness of the Divine Providence works in the world.

Even at the beginning of the book, God is described as the Author of "the second evil" [of the punishment as a form of divine justice]:

"I. 1. But if you know or take it on faith that God is good (and it would be irreligious to think differently), then He does no evil. Again, if we acknowledge that God is just (and to deny this would be sacrilegious), then, as He bestows rewards upon the good, so does He mete out punishments to the wicked. To those who suffer them, such punishments are of course evil. Accordingly, if no one suffers penalties unjustly (and this we must believe since we believe that the universe is ruled by Divine Providence), God is not at all the Cause of the first kind of evil, though He is of the second"<sup>26</sup>.

The theological and spiritual dilemmas are perfectly explained if we understand what kind of wisdom he aims throughout the treatise: that wisdom which, like the Pitagorean numbers, comes from the immutable truth!

"XI. 32. ... Though we are unable to see clearly whether number is contained in wisdom, or is derived from it, or whether wisdom itself derives from number, and is contained in it, or whether it can be shown that both are names of the same thing, this much at least is clear, that both are true and are unchangeably true"<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 137: „I. 1. At si Deum bonum esse nosti vel credis, neque enim aliter fas est, male non facit: rursus, si Deum justum fatemur, nam et hoc negare sacrilegium est, ut bonis praemita, ita supplicia malis tribuit; quae utique supplicia patientibus mala sunt. Quamobrem si nemi injuste poenas luit, quod necesse est credamus, quandoquidem divina providentia hoc universum regi credimus, illius primi generis malorum nullo modo, hujus autem secundi auctor est Deus”.

<sup>27</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 279: XI. 32. Tantum illud attende, quod et quaestioni quam suscepimus satis est, et humilioribus etiam mentibus, quales nos sumus sese manifestat, quia etsi clarum nobis esse non potest utrum in sapientia numerus, an ipsa sapientia ex numero, an in numero sit, an utrumque nomen unius rei possit ostendi; illud certe manifestum est utrumque verum esse, et incommutabiliter verum”.

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Numbers are the vestiges of Providence, and one who is able to contemplate the beauty of their harmony within the nature will rise to the state of wisdom: “XVI. 41. Turn where you will, wisdom speaks to you by the imprint it has left on its works, and, when you are slipping back into what is outward, it entices you to return within by the beauty of those very forms found in things external. This is done so you may recognize that whatever delights you in a body and attracts you by the bodily senses is imbued with number. Thus, you must search for its source and return within yourself and come to see that it is not possible to pass judgment, favorable or unfavorable, on things known by the bodily senses unless you have at your disposal a knowledge of certain laws governing beauty to which you refer whatever objects you perceive outwardly”<sup>28</sup>. For Augustine the contemplation of aesthetic reason from natural objects which makes proportions and numbers to be the basis of beauty and harmony, is the path of getting close to wisdom.

**IV. The Augustinian approach is exclusively apologetic**

From the observation of wisdom and Providence in the aesthetic contemplation of nature, Augustine will move to the temptation of Preknowledge. He rightly states that God’s preknowledge does not predetermine: “Part III. III. 7. ... though God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not thereby follow that we are not willing something freely”<sup>29</sup>. Then Augustine rightly condemns “petty jealousy” (“invida infirmitas”) of those who on the basis of “reason” claim that God could have created things and beings better so that there was no fall<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 297: „XVI. 41. Quoquo enim te verteris, vestigiis quibusdam, quae operibus suis impressit, loquitur tibi, et te in exteriora relabentem, ipsis exteriorum formis revocat; ut quidquid te delectat in corpore, et per corpore, et per corporeos illicit sensus, videas esse numerosum, et quaeras unde sit, et in teipsum redeas, atque intelligas te id quod attingis sensibus corporis, probare aut improbare non posse, nisi apud te habeas quasdam pulchritudinis leges, ad quas referas quaeque pulchra sentis exterioris”.

<sup>29</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 339: „III. III. 7. Quamobrem, quamvis praesciat Deus nostras voluntates futuras, non ex eo tamen conficitur ut non voluntate aliquid velimus”.

<sup>30</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 349 (III. V. 13.).

Augustine also denounces the lie and the ingratitude of those who say they would have rather prefer not to exist instead of being so unhappy<sup>31</sup>. They actually accuse God for the creation of the world, claiming in their selfishness that rather being only one unhappy being contemporary to a happy crowd, it was better not to be anything! However, it is completely wrong to reproach God He created a weak will as long as man has been called into existence with the vocation to eat the bread of angels and to be exalted to their dignity<sup>32</sup>. The first men were conquered by the devil not by violence and force but by persuasion, and they consented to evil thus becoming the slaves of sin and of the one who insinuated it to them. The people who will be born from the protoparents who disobeyed God will be born as “devil’s prey” and will be under his influence as fruits of the tree of sin<sup>33</sup>. “... Thus, by suffering death for a time, these discharge their debt, and, by living for all eternity, they live in Him who paid a debt for them, which He Himself did not owe”<sup>34</sup>. The primordial state involved participation to the beauty and harmony of the Universe, and no creature, either virtuous or sinful, can escape this order<sup>35</sup>. “Every nature is good. I use the term “nature” to indicate what is also commonly called “substance”. Hence every substance is either God or from God, since every good is either God or from God”<sup>36</sup>. This anti-Manicheistic statement has the role of emphasizing the primordial beauty and goodness of the world created by God. Furthermore: God, Who is the unchanged Truth, gave His creatures the power to want - the power of wanting good<sup>37</sup>. That is why the cause of sin

<sup>31</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 359 (III. VI. 18.).

<sup>32</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 383: „III. X. 30. Sic enim posset panem Angelorum homo manducare, nondum Angelis adaequatus, si pani ipse Angelorum hominibus dignaretur aequari.”

<sup>33</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 385: „III. X. 31. ...cui subjugaverat ille quos ceperat, ut quidquid inde nasceretur, tanquam suae arboris fructus, prava quidem habendi cupiditate, sed tamen non iniquo possidendi jure retineret”.

<sup>34</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 387: „III. X. 31. Justissime itaque dimittere cogitur credentes in eum quem injustissime occidit, ut et quod temporaliter moriuntur, debitum exsolvant, et quod semper vivunt, in illo vivant, qui pro eis quod non debebat exsolvit”.

<sup>35</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 387 (III. XI. 32.).

<sup>36</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 395: „III.XIII. 36. Omnis ergo natura bona est: naturam voco quae et substantia dici solet. Omnis igitur substantia aut Deus, aut ex Deo; quia omne bonum aut Deus, aut ex Deo”.

<sup>37</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 413 (III. XVI. 46).

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is free will, and the guilty acts committed through ignorance or weakness are already the punishment of the sin committed consciously: “These two punishments, ignorance and difficulty, are truly present in every soul that sins. Through ignorance, the soul is tainted with error; through difficulty, it suffers anguish”<sup>38</sup>. However, Adam and his descendants, born “in turning away from God” have been given the power to overcome their condition.

“Though under a sentence of condemnation, the first man was not deprived of the happiness of having children. It was possible that even from his offspring, however carnal and mortal, something should appear and, in its own way, be a thing of beauty and an adornment for the earth. Yet, equity would not allow Adam to beget offspring better than himself. But it was only right that, from the moment of turning to God, each one should not only be unhampered in his desire but should even be aided in overcoming the punishment which man had merited at the beginning by turning away from God...”<sup>39</sup>

The descendants of the protoparents had the call to transcend the existential condition of the ancestral sin: their birth “in turning away from God” could be forgotten through a life marked by the “good will”. There are two ways of learning: 1) to do good; 2) to do evil<sup>40</sup>, and those who choose the good are enlivened by the three cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance and justice. Prudence is “the knowledge of things that we should desire and avoid”, temperance is “that disposition which restrains and checks our desire for those things that are shameful for us to desire”, and justice is “a virtue whereby each one is given what is his own”. Here is the moral theology that will establish modern morality.

Nevertheless Augustine is not too much concerned about dogmatics. He reacts to the pressure of events and does not endeavor to compile

<sup>38</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 423: „III. XVIII. 52. Nam sunt revera omni peccanti animae duo ista poenalia, ignorantia et difficultas. Ex ignorantia dehonestat error, ex difficultate cruciatus affligit”.

<sup>39</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 429: „III. XX. 55. Non enim damnato primo homini sic adempta est beatitudo, ut etiam fecunditas adimeretur. Poterat enim et de prole ejus, quamvis carnali et mortali, aliquod in suo genere fieri decus ornamentumque terrarum. Jamvero ut meliores gigneret quam ipse esset, non erat aequitatis: sed ex conversione ad Deum, ut vinceret quisque supplicium quod origo ejus ex aversione meruerat, non solum volentem non prohiberi, sed etiam adjuvari oportebat...”

<sup>40</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 141 (I. I. 3.).

treatises that setup dogmatics. He pursues the Gospel's finality, that is, his efforts are exclusively directed to the setting of the conditions absolutely necessary for our salvation. For example, he leaves the issue of the origin of souls in suspense: it does not matter which of the four hypotheses of the origin of the souls is true; the important thing is the problem of their destination! "III. XXI. 59. No one should rashly affirm anyone of these four views about the soul: 1) souls come into existence by generation; 2) souls are newly created for each one who is born; 3) souls already existing elsewhere are sent by God into bodies; 4) souls descend into bodies of their own accord.<sup>1</sup> Either this question has not yet been explained and clarified by Catholic commentators of the Sacred Scripture, as the obscurity and perplexity of the matter warrant, or, if this has been done, such writings have not yet come into my hands"<sup>41</sup>. Augustine's attitude is not of dogmatic configuration: he avoids making sentences in matters unconfirmed by the exegetes. His attitude is exclusively apologetic, and therefore those who consider it normative from the point of view of dogmatic theology "find" Augustine where he is not. There are still many theologians who speak in his name without being his own; others use his name to proclaim their own theses under his famous name; and finally there are theologians who contest all the ideas and theses proclaimed by their forerunners believing they dispute Augustine. However, Augustine comes from a history time of the universal Church when dogmas and theologoumena were barely outlined and placed in official texts, a time when the truths were barely recognized as such, having to be confirmed in the Holy Synods and reconfirmed in the subsequent Synods...

Regardless the errors, Augustine must be entirely forgiven, because he only sought to configure the vocation and ultimate destination of souls as well as the way of their Mysteries, his constant care being the glory of God:

"III. XXII. 65. But the soul's Creator is to be praised in every respect, either because He endowed the soul from the very

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<sup>41</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 435: „III. XXI. 59. Harum autem quator de anima sententiarum, utrum de propagine veniant, an in singulis quibusque nascentibus novae fiant, an in corpora nascentium jam alicubi existentes vel mittantur divinitus, vel sua sponte labantur, nullam temere affirmare oportebit. Aut enim nondum ista quaestio a divinatorum Librorum catholicis tractatoribus pro merito suae obscuritatis et perplexitatis evoluta atque illustrata est; aut si jam factum est, nondum in manus nostras hujusmodi litterae pervenerunt”.

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beginning with a capacity for the highest good, or because He helps it to advance, or because He implements its progress and brings it to perfection, or because He subjects it to order by condemning it according to its just deserts whenever it sins, that is, when it either refuses to raise itself from its initial state to perfection, or when it falls back after it has made some progress.”<sup>42</sup>

Augustine’s considerations about the primordial state of man are particularly brief: he only wants to prove that sin cannot be imputed to God, but to human freedom:

“III. XXIV. 72. Accordingly, if a man was created in a state where, though yet unwise, he could receive a command that he ought certainly to obey, it is neither surprising that he could be seduced, nor an injustice that he should suffer punishment for failing to obey. Neither is the Creator the cause of his vice, since it was not yet a vice for man to be without wisdom when he had not yet received the power to have it. Yet he did have something that would enable him to advance towards what he did not yet have, provided he was willing to make good use of it. It is one thing for a man to be rational, it is something else to be wise. Through reason, man became a fit subject for commands, and he must show himself faithful to these and so fulfill all that is commanded of him. Just as it is natural for reason to grasp a command, so too, it is the observance of such a command that gains for us the possession of wisdom. What nature does in the way of grasping the command is accomplished by the will in carrying it out. And as rational nature merits, in a way, to receive a command, so too, it is the observance of it that merits the bestowal of wisdom”<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 447: „III. XXII. 65. Creator vero ejus ubique laudatur, vel quod eam ab ipsis exordiis ad summi boni capacitatem inchoaverit, vel quod ejus profectum adjuvet, vel quod impleat proficientem atque perficiat, vel quod peccatam, id est aut ab initiis suis sese ad perfectionem attollere recusantem, aut jam ex profectu aliquo relabentem, justissima damnatione pro meritis ordinat”.

<sup>43</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952), p. 459-461: „III. XXII. 72. Si ergo ita factus est homo, ut quamvis sapiens nondum esset, praeceptum tamen posset accipere, cui utique obtemperare deberet; nec illud jam mirum est, quel seduci potuit; nec illud injustum, quod praecepto non obtemperans poenas luit; nec Creator ejus auctor vi-



The nature of reason gives the quality or the merit of receiving the divine imperative, and the will gives the merit or the quality of the soul to obey this precept and to come close to God. “Now, from the time a man begins to be capable of receiving a command, from that moment he begins to have the power to sin”<sup>44</sup>.

“The malice of sin consists in a man’s failure either to accept the command, or to observe it, or to be steadfast in the contemplation of wisdom. This enables us to see how the first man could be seduced by sin, even though he was created wise. Since this sin was within his free choice, it entailed a just penalty by reason of God’s law”<sup>45</sup>.

In the absence of a special charisma, it is very difficult if not impossible for our fallen reason to understand what reason was before the fall. And it is very easy to yield the temptation to believe it was the same.

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tiorum est, quia non habere sapientiam, nondum erat vitium hominis, si nondum ut habere posset, acceperat. Sed tamen habebat aliquid quo si bene uti vellet, ad id quod non habebat ascenderet. Aliud est enim esse rationalem, aliud esse sapientem. Ratione fit quisque praecepti capax, cui fidem debet, ut quod praecipitur, faciat. Sicut autem natura rationis praeceptum capit, sic praecepti observatio sapientiam. Quod est autem natura ad capiendum praeceptum, hoc est voluntas ad observandum. Et sicut rationalis natura tanquam meritum est praecepti accipiendi, sic praecepti observatio meritum est accipiendae sapientiae”.

<sup>44</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952): „Ex quo autem incipit homo praecepti esse capax, ex illo incipit posse peccare”.

<sup>45</sup> *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (1952): „Peccatum autem malum est in negligentia vel ad capiendum praeceptum, vel ad observandum, vel ad custodiendam contemplationem sapientiae. Ex quo intelligitur, etiamsi sapiens primus homo factus est, potuisse tamen seduci. Quod peccatum cum esset in libero arbitrio, justa, divina lege, poena consecuta est”.