The problematic of freedom in St. Augustine: Towards a new hermeneutics*

Freedom, as an essential characteristic of the human person, was not always recognized as such. Ancient thought stressed freedom as a natural part of the existence itself. Augustine offers an original answer to this problematic. In the following pages I shall analyse the augustinian approach.

I. « De libero arbitrio »: A General Presentation

First it is necessary to establish a distinction between liberum arbitrium, or the capacity of free choice, and libertas, i.e. the combined effect of supernatural Grace and human action. In one text, for example, we find reference to one of these aspects: « Plane si haec ita sunt, soluta quae est quam proposuisti. Si enim homo aliquid bonum est et non posset, nisi cum vellet, recte facere, debuit habere liberam voluntatem, sine qua recte facere non posset1 ».

Christ restores freedom and allows man to reach his liberation: « Quid ergo securius quam esse in ea vita ubi non possit tibi evenire quod non vis? Sed quoniam non sicut sponte homo cecidit ita etiam surgere potest porrectam nobis desuper dexteram Dei, id est Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, firma fide teneamus et exspectemus certa spe et caritate ardentí desideremus2 ».

It is important for man to be purified through the constant practice of love: « Si enim credendo diligimus, quod nondum videmus, quanto magis cum videre coeperimus? et si sperando diligimus, quo nondum pervenimus, quanto magis

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cum pervenerimus? » We must keep in mind that Augustine in the De lib. arb. studies the problem of free and voluntary choice related to the subject of evil. Firstly he considers the will in itself: we all have « voluntas » but the will's salvific dimension is related to the search of good: « Voluntas, qua adpetimus recte honesteque vivere et ad summam sapientiam pervenire. Modo tu vide, utrum rectam honestamque vitam non adpetas aut esse sapiens non vehementer velis aut certe negare audeas, cum haec volumus, nos habere voluntatem bonam ». The capacity of choice provides the grounds for dignity and personal responsability.

The liberum arbitrium can incline to Evil. It denotes, therefore, imperfection and indigence. Otherwise, when it opts for justice, it reveals perfection and what is inherent to the essence of the person. This doesn’t mean that the man is naturally free. The soul can tend towards the higher or the lower realities. Freedom implies the will's self control and complete self possession.

God, in his knowledge of the future, knows our deeds: He is our Creator. So our reference to freedom for that which is good is an assertion about the human being and his will: « Cum autem de libera voluntate recte faciendi loquimur, de illa scilicet in qua homo factus est loquimur ».

Libertas perfects man and allows him ultimately to possess wisdom: « Eos enim sapientes voco, quos veritas vocari iubet, id est, qui regno mentis omni libidinis subiugatione pacati sunt ».

In Plotinus, for example, we do not find the affirmation of this control but the separation of soul and matter. For Augustine freedom is reached neither by this separation nor by the undervaluation of temporal realities but by the search for the authentic good.

Through the self-identification of reason with itself as object, freedom realizes also itself through the self-control of the will: « Noli ergo mirari, si ceteris per liberam voluntatem utimur, etiam ipsa libera voluntate per eam ipsam uti nos

7. De lib. arb., III, 1, 2 : CC, 29, 274.
8. Ibid.
13. Ibid., I, 16, 34 : CC, 29, 234.
posse, ut quodam modo se ipsa utatur voluntas quae utitur ceteris, sicut se ipsam cognoscit ratio quae cognoscit et cetera\textsuperscript{14} ».

These are the means to become free\textsuperscript{15}. Virtue is characterized by a rational control that allows the will to move towards Good\textsuperscript{16}. Augustine values virtue in his relation with divine love. This love allows the intellect to apprehend truth\textsuperscript{17}. Man can, helped by the Creator, develop his capacities and gifts, surpassing this way difficulty and ignorance. God is the cause of good and the happiness of those who are beloved Him: « Neque omnino potuit nisi Deus omnipotens esse etiam talium creator animarum quas et non dilectus ipse faciat et dilectus ipse perficiat, qui et non existentibus praestat ut sint et amantibus eum a quo sunt praestat ut beatae sint\textsuperscript{18} ».

One of the essential characteristics of freedom is the predominance of happiness\textsuperscript{19}, which consists basically in communion with the Divinity\textsuperscript{20}. Freedom, notwithstanding, was lost by a lack of harmony between God and man; between the intellect and the will\textsuperscript{21}. Love can restore man's harmony with God and so facilitates life lived in freedom. Love is the source of justice and reconciliation. Through his will, man can subordinate the sensorial realities to spiritual purposes.

We deal with a subordination or service and not with a separation between body and soul. Therefore, in the resurrection, the spiritualized body expresses the spirit's influence on the corporeality.

Concluding: Man's will basically is free\textsuperscript{22}: it is the source of all man's options. Really for Augustine, that man is free who without coercion practises justice and lives in truth. When human acts are following a rational direction we have a participation in eternal law. The will allows man to enjoy his freedom\textsuperscript{23}. All man's capacities are sublimated by the love of God\textsuperscript{24} and the illumination of each new truth develops personal freedom\textsuperscript{25}. Man progresses in freedom as God gives him the necessary aid to reach that purpose\textsuperscript{26}. The libertas is lost when the will acts

\textsuperscript{14} De lib. arb., II, 19, 51 : CC, 29, 271.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., I, 13, 29 : CC, 29, 230-31.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., II, 19, 50 : CC, 29, 270-71.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., III, 18, 52 : CC, 29, 305-6.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., III, 20, 56 : CC, 29, 307-8.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., I, 13, 28 : CC, 29, 230.
\textsuperscript{20} De lib. arb., II, 14 : CC, 29, 262-3.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., I, 16, 35 : CC, 29, 235 ; I, 10, 20 : CC, 29, 224-5.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., III, 1, 3 : CC, 29, 274.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., III, 24, 72 : CC, 29, 317-8.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., III, 24, 72-4 : CC, 29, 317-9.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., I, 13, 29 : CC, 29, 230-31.
\textsuperscript{26} De lib. arb., III, 19, 53 : CC, 29, 306 ; Retract., I, 9, 4 : CC, 57, 26-7.
towards evil. Authentic freedom is the choice in favor of wisdom: «Voluntas, qua adpetimus recte honesteque vivere et ad summam sapientiam pervenire²⁷». Freedom is distinguished by the happiness that it gives to men²⁸ participating in eternal law²⁹.

II. The other Dialogues

In the other Dialogues Augustine offers a conception of freedom related to truth and wisdom in an eudemonist perspective. So, for example, in Contra Academicos, freedom allows man his realization depending on God. God, as Creator, is the source of freedom³⁰. In De beata vita³¹ God restores man's identity and gives him blessedness or happiness³². Man is happy when he is in communion with God: «Nam cum ratio demonstrasset eum beatum esse, qui Deum haberet, nec huic quisquam vestrum sententiae restitisset, quaesitum est quisnam vobis videretur Deum habere³³».

The soul living in truth is wise and communicates with the Prime truth. Between truth and freedom exists an important relation. For Plotinus it is necessary — it is necessary to stress — free will has its roots in the control over the perceivable world through the liberating principle of man. This control implies natural efforts. For Augustine, by way of contrast, free will is subordinate to the ethic dimension of soul through supernatural grace.

Man recognizes the one God that leads him to truth: «Sed quid putatis esse sapientiam nisi veritatem?... Veritas autem ut sit, fit per aliquem summum modum, a quo procedit et in quem se perfecta convertitur³⁴».

Man, as a created being, receives his being and continues to receive it by divine action and conservation. Perfection of being implies communion with the Divinity³⁵. God wishes that communion: the best response is through love. For Augustine free choice expresses man's wholeness and his personal nature³⁶. The

²⁹. Ibid., I, 15, 32 : CC, 29, 233.
³². Ibid., 1, 5 : CC, 29, 67-8.
³⁴. De beata vita, 4, 34 : CC, 29, 84.
³⁵. Ibid., 4, 35 : CC, 29, 84.
³⁶. De ordine, I, 8, 23 : CC, 29, 16.
will is a basic factor in understanding freedom as coming from love and is the free will's fulfilment, not its negation. The libertas is essentially a divine Grace implying personal consent. It is not properly in itself psychological, social or political freedom but rather theological.

III. « Libertas » in the « Confessions »

The Confessions illustrate the shades of that theological freedom, especially stressing the necessity of divine Grace in order to act correctly. Augustine tells us that he forgot Divine Law and experienced a break in his will, which was impotent to really act. The body reacts more quickly to the mind's orders than the will: « Unde hoc monstrum? Et quare istuc? Imperat animus corpori, et paretur statim: imperat animus sibi, et resistitur ».

The act of the will unifies wishes and choices. Augustine, notwithstanding, did not experience such an act. The will in Augustine did not want really and so he considered freedom lost. The question of evil is an existential problem and not primarily a theoretical one. Scripture offers him a positive statement: through the submission to God man reaches self-control. He recognizes his impotence to love the One infinitely lovable.

He applies himself to prayer and obtains as grace a benevolent influence over his will that projects him to Divine Love: « Tu enim, Domine, delevisti omnia mala merita mea, ne retribueres manibus meis, in quibus a te defeci, et praevenisti omnia bona merita mea, ut retribueres manibus tuis, quibus me fecisti... ».

The will is the principal factor in the personality's formation and development. Therefore love has an essential place in this process. Augustine, in accordance with his inner growth, progressed in his knowledge of God the Creator and Redeemer.

38. Confess., VIII, 8: CC, 27, 125-6.
41. Ibid., VI, 12: CC, 27, 87-8; VII, 3: CC, 27, 94-5.
42. Cf. De musica, VI, 5, 13-14: PL, 32, 1170-71. This approach perfects the Plotinian perspectives that helped Augustine to understand the will as the source of evil: Confess., VII, 16: CC, 27, 106.
43. Confess., VIII, 4-5: CC, 27, 118-121.
He understands freedom through that knowledge. Freedom is, in this context, a divine attribute and the model for human freedom⁴⁵.

Concluding: In the Confessions Augustine transmits us his experience of an impotent will. God precedes the human act and inspires in man the desire for God⁴⁶. That desire unifies his divided will. God is the only one who acts profoundly on the infirm will: is His answer to the man’s outcry?

IV. Originality of the Augustinian Doctrine

The human person is characterized by the possession of freedom. This fact is based on the experience and revealed faith. The freedom, as a perfect gift, is related to grace and so is not merely a psychological experience⁴⁷. This freedom is the plenitude of the person and his basis for the possibility of free choice.

In the Manichaean controversy Augustine deals with the free will to explain the source of evil and in the Pelagian controversy considers the libertas as the fruit of Grace (theological freedom). Pelagius thinks that Augustine denies free will. Notwithstanding Augustine affirms the act of faith as depending on the will⁴⁸. It is necessary to study the whole Augustinian thought to reach a full notion of his concept of freedom. Basically, for Augustine, the will does not realize good in an inexorable manner excluding the free will. Man can choose between good and evil. In this way the freedom grows⁴⁹: « Liberos dixit iustitiae, non « liberatos », a peccato autem non liberos, ne sibi hoc tribuerent, sed vigilantissime maluit dicere

⁴⁶. Cf. De dono persever., 23, 64 : PL, 45, 1032 : « Attendat ergo quomodo falluntur, qui putant esse a nobis, non dari nobis, ut petamus, quaeramus, pulsemus ; et hoc, esse dicunt, quod gratia praeceditur merito nostro... ».
« liberatos » referens hoc ad illam Domini sententiam: Si vos filius liberaverit tunc vere liberi eritis

Augustine affirms the cause of evil is the preference for the lesser good: the will is far from God and does not search for Him as the ultimate purpose. Man loses the libertas because of sin but the liberum arbitrium remains within him: « Nam, si, ut dicis, boni malique voluntarii possibiltas sola libertas est, non habet libertatem Deus, in quo peccandi possibilitas non est. Hominis vero liberum arbitrium congenitum et omnino inamissibile si quaerimus, illud est quo beati omnes esse volunt, etiam hi qui ea nolunt quae ad beatitudinem ducent.»

This distinction is fundamental to understanding Augustinian doctrine. To ignore it leads to affirm Augustine denied free will after the sin of Adam. Man, still exercising his free will, is not fully free. One of the means to reach this fullness is through conversion to God: « Hoc enim restat in ista mortali vita libero arbitrio, non ut impleat homo justitiam cum voluerit, sed ut se supplici pietate convertat ad eum cuius dono eam possit implere.»

The libertas has a supernatural dimension comprising the good and the capacity to integrate it into one's life. God helped man in his volitional process. The role Augustine gives the liberum arbitrium in this process characterizes his new contribution to the subject. He gives us an authentic conception of freedom with the integration of both liberum arbitrium and libertas. God has the initiative and man can answer actively. The conversion to God is distinguished by freedom and love towards God, which means that there is no identity with Him. In his research about the freedom Augustine establishes that both being and the world are created and temporal: this is his original conception in comparison with the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition. The liberum arbitrium is the basis for responsibility. But man alone is limited and needs the help of divine Grace. The will is conditioned by ignorance and difficulty.

AUGUSTINE AND THE PROBLEMATIC OF FREEDOM

For Augustine it is essential to affirm man is able to choose freely⁵⁹ but that God is the cause of all created good⁶⁰. It is interesting concerning this to remember that in his first Commentary on Romans he does not consider the initium fidelis as supernatural grace whilst in the Second Book to Simplicianus he recognizes it as such⁶¹.

The grace forms in us the desire of action without annulling personal freedom. God knows the person and invites the choice for good: «...condelector legi Dei secundum intiorem hominem, cum ipsa delectatio boni, qua etiam non consentit ad malum non timore poenae, sed amore iustitiae — hoc est enim condelectari — non nisi gratiae deputanda sit⁶².»

In the Pelagian controversy Augustine emphasizes the ethical limits of freedom and the fact that the will is impotent to realize good. It is important to recognize that between Augustine and the Pelagians there exists a basic philosophical divergence on the concept of will⁶³. In the previously quoted text from De correpit et grat., XII, 38, Augustine does not oppose gratia and liberum arbitrium but liberum arbitrium and sin. The will, helped by grace, can overcome sin. The Augustinian terminology uses «aditiorium quo» speaking about effective Grace in man. Grace is not irresistible⁶⁴.

There are some expressions denoting the God-man relationship: the relationship of collaboration and communion: «Tamen quia agis ibi aliud voluntate, ideo et tibi aliud tributum est. Ideo autem tibi tributum est, ut dicas

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sicut in Psalmo, Adiutor meas esto, ne derelinquas me (Psal., XXVI, 9). Si dicis, Adiutor meas esto, aliquid agis: nam si nihil agis, quomodo ille adiuvat?»

Augustine speaks of libertas a necessitate related to personal autonomy acting under grace. In his antipelagian works he does not demonstrate the existence of freedom but does not signify he ignores its existence. Always he searches for his metaphysical basis. With ethic-historical arguments he affirms the difficulty of reconciling grace and liberum arbitrium. In the Pelagian controversy he emphasizes grace’s primacy without a metaphysical elaboration of libertas a necessitate. In De corrept. et grat. he speaks about our personal solidarity with Adam’s sin. Here the auxilium sine qua non, that does not give full personal responsability, is complementary with the auxilium quo that strengthens the will.

V. Towards complete Freedom

Man experiences his freedom under grace. In this situation, how much is he free? For Augustine, freedom is an existential matter: supernatural love gives significance and shapes existence allowing man to be fully free. So Augustine offers to us an integral freedom comprising the aspects of the whole human existence: his origin and final purpose. Through freedom the will participates in the divine life, and between the Creator and the creature there is a relation of filiation. The origin of this fact is not man’s natural desire for God but the real desire existing in God for man. God gives man the transcendental capacity to answer the divine desire: this is the ontological basis which allows man to come to God.

Moral experience and the Scripture testify to the existence of free choice in man. What is its dynamics? It is the response to the divine invitation. Through a full answer in love freedom reaches its goal. It is a love strengthened for the


69. The Jansenists found a basis for their doctrine in the quoted De corrept. et grat., 12, 38: indeclinabiliter et insuperabiliter are a good source for their disquisitions. But the key word is ageretur: it opposes Adam and new man. Cf. M. CLARK, o.c., p. 114: she quotes, supporting her point of view, De Broglie.


formation of freedom. In the divine design then does not exist a necessary foreordination of man by God. The being created according to God’s image develops the whole richness of that image and so reaches full freedom which depends on the practice of truth. Without God, this is metaphysically impossible. Adam sought a total independence from God, so denying his created condition. His will was weakened and was not able to act rightly. The subsequent salvation has a trinitarian dimension.

The resulting choice of the good is the fruit of a spiritual freedom through which man unites himself with the Absolute and finds his personal fulfilment in the Community. Through faith, hope and love, man responds to God. Then the will is entirely free. Man is called to a higher destiny; superior to a total autonomy. That destiny is man’s participation in the life of God, being infinitely free: « ut hac sibi velut arra data gratuiti muneri inardescat inhaerere creatori atque inflammetur accedere ad participationem illius veri luminis, ut ex illo ei bene sit, a quo habet ut sit ».

The will, under the influence of grace, cooperates with God. Concerning the essence of complete freedom we must emphasize some important elements:
A) The source of man’s free choice is in God’s knowledge and desire.
B) The will tends always towards an objective good.
C) The love of good integrates and unifies the personality.
D) That love formed the basis for a human interpersonal community.

The Supreme Good is the love of God that organizes human values. The eudemonic basis of freedom is the objective will and its search for good. Freedom perfects itself in truth and good.

76. Cf. De corrept. et grat., 8, 17: PL, 44, 926.
VI. Plotinian Influences

In Plotinus, human freedom is previous to the consideration of the freedom in the One. To be free signifies to have the fulness of power. Notwithstanding, the adverse circumstances weakening this power are grounds for doubting man's self-possession. Freedom is an attribute of Intellectual Principle and our freedom is in this Principle\(^{81}\). Virtue is called will because it reveals the Intellectual Principle in the volitional phase\(^{82}\). The soul reaches its freedom moving from that Principle towards the Good\(^{83}\). Self-control implies the victory over the passions and material tendencies. The will, therefore, unifies itself with the Essence that dominates over all. Self-knowledge means the knowledge of Good: here is freedom\(^{84}\) whose tendency towards Good surpasses impotence. When Good is possessed, the soul finds its self-satisfaction in divine freedom\(^{85}\).

The One is Omnipotent. Therefore, the absolute freedom in God is essentially to be this unique Reality\(^{86}\). Man elevates himself from the human experiences to the freedom in the One where he finds freedom from the memory and singularity. Plotinus appreciates reason’s role in freedom\(^{87}\).

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81. Cf. Ennead., VI, 8, 5 (Ed. Henry-Schwyzer, III, 244-6) : « Ἄρ' οὖν ἐν νῷ μόνῳ νοοῦντι τὸ αὐτεξόσιον καὶ τὸ ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν νῷ... ».

82. Cf. Ennead., VI, 8, 6 (III, 246-7).

83. Ibid., VI, 8, 7 (III, 247-9).

84. Ibid., V, 6, 5 (II, 260-61).

85. Ibid., VI, 8, 13 (III, 256-8). According to Prof. Dr. Werner Beierwaltes, the well-known specialist in Plotinus and the Plotinian tradition from the University of Munich; « göttliche Freiheit würde ich nicht unmittelbar mit der Selbstverwirklichung der Seele identifizieren, sondern diese, d.h., die göttliche und damit eigentliche Form von Freiheit als die Ermöglichung der Selbstverwirklichung der Seele verstehen : die Seele muss sich in einem Akt der homoiosis auf diese göttliche Form von Freiheit hinwenden, ' sich selbst hervorbringen', wie das göttliche Eine ' sich selbst hervorgebracht ' hat. Allerdings muss man dieses ' Sichselbst-Hervorbringen ' im Bezug auf das göttliche Eine mit dem Vorbehalt verstehen, mit dem Plotin in VI, 8 all diese positiven Prädicate versieht (hoion !) » (Dr. Beierwaltes’s personal communication). Cf. « τὸς δ’ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ οἶον βουλήσει αὐτοῦ... ».

86. Ennead., VI, 8, 15 (III, 260-61). This text’s interpretation is variegated. According to Beierwaltes, « die Absolute Freiheit in Gott ist nicht die einzige Wirklichkeit (in abgestufter Form ist der Nus und die psyché ebenso wirklich, durch Andersheit freilich vom göttlichen Prinzip getrennt, durch Bild-sein allerdings immer noch mit ihm verbunden). Das Erste (Eine) ist allerdings im höchsten Sinne Wirklichkeit und insofern ‘ allein gelassen ’ (13: monum), autarkes. Freiheit ist das Erste im eigentlichen, und, wenn man diesen Begriff qualitativ nimmt, einzigen Sinne (VI, 8, 21.31) » (Personal communication).

87. Cf. P. Henry, SJ, Le Problème de la Liberté chez Plotin, in Revue Néo-Scholastique de Philosophie, 33, 1931, p. 213 : « À vrai dire, il cite ici Aristote plus souvent que Platon ». Cf. p. 212 : « c’est à bon droit qu’il insiste, à la suite d’Aristote, sur le rôle essentiel joué par la raison dans l’acte libre ». 
Plotinus elaborated a new conception of freedom: it is a quality of nous that liberates the soul from intellectual activity. Necessity and freedom are reconciled in the definition of the free act in relation to good. Freedom is the self-transcendency through which the soul loses itself in God once the past is forgotten. The possession of good leads also to self-possession. For Plotinus the essence of freedom is not free choice because this can choose wrongly. Authentic freedom implicates the search and possession of the truth. Plotinus does not deny the existence of free will and personal responsibility. He criticizes the determinist’s affirmation that the soul descends to the body and, after residing in him, leaves it: so it is free and in need because it is pressured by Providence as well as by rational and internal Law.

Plotinus did not glimpse the world’s non-necessity because he did not understand the difference between freedom and necessity and did not affirm the free act of creation. Good and intelligible are identified and so the inclination towards good is inclination to the intellectual love of good. Good is the source of freedom but always is presented as an object of the intellect.

Man is related to good but without entering into communion with it. On the other hand, for Augustine the interpersonal love is essential. The person’s greatest experiences are knowledge and love. Augustine would coincide with Plotinus, if he reads the treatise on freedom, that this properly consists of following and identifying with the person’s ontological dimensions. Considering the will as a faculty able to decide, evil can be voluntary.

If the free will does not exist, then there is nothing problematic. The tragedy originated by wrong decisions is man’s work. Augustine recognizes the important role of the will in this process. Man only is fully free when he is helped by the good to choose justly. Free will, in its essence, needs divine grace. For Plotinus good is the source of freedom; for Augustine, freedom is the fruit of love. Under certain conditions, the free will subordinates itself to the full man’s freedom that reached its last end. His dignity and transcendence consists in the possibility of the perfection of freedom. Plotinus and Augustine affirm that wrong choices reveal man’s imperfection but Augustine recognizes that free will can be also a personal choice in favor of the Infinite. God is principle of freedom but man always is the...

88. Cf. Ennead., III, 1 (About Destiny); IV, 8 (About the Soul’s descent on the body); IV, 3 (Related problems to the soul); I, 4, 8 (About Happiness); III, 2, 3 (About Providence).
subject of decision. These options reveal not only the existence of a choice within a chain of good but also that good is the person’s ultimate purpose.

The love of good is the fundamental element in free choice and the multifaceted nature of good is not necessarily an obstacle to reaching the final purpose. For Plotinus the exercise of the will is the ego’s internalizing and identifying itself with the Intellectual Principle. Freedom is inclination towards good. For Augustine it is possible for man to withdraw from the multiplicity of objects through a superior love: « Itaque, quando fueris talis ut nihil te prorsus terrenorum delectet, mihi crede, eodem momento, eodem puncto temporis videbis quod cupis ».

Through love the will achieves self-control. Plotinus did not speak about God’s will but identifies it with the One. The Cosmos emanates from the One by a natural necessity but the One does not decrease. This contrasts with the augustinian conception according to which God is Creator by love and not by a necessary process. The distinction between finite and infinite is clear. The soul returns to God freely and voluntarily. Freedom does not appear, for example, in the Plotinian Universe’s origin and also it is absent in the return to the One. For Augustine we arrive at the good not through an escape, according to the plotinian style, but by love. Here the will is fundamental.

In the plotinian system the contingent things do not have a place and there does not exist a philosophical basis for free choice. There is no distinction, moreover, between moral and metaphysical evil. Man is responsible for evil but this always is related to matter. Evil’s flight is equivalent to matter’s flight. For Augustine

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100. Cf. *Ennead.*, I, 8, 7 (I, 116-7). Cf. also H. Armstrong, *Spiritual or intelligible matter in Plotinus and Augustine*, in *Augustinus Magister*, I, p. 277-8. Armstrong emphasizes « the thought of Plotinus is at this point much closer (he speaks from the plotinian conception of a formless element in the intellectual or spiritual beings) to Christian doctrine than it is in his account of matter in the sense-world as an independent principle of evil, and it is interesting to note in passing that it is also much more consistent with itself. Not only the Christians but the later pagan Neo-Platonists rejected the doctrine of matter as principle of evil independent of the Source of being and goodness, and it is in fact an ill-fitting anomaly in Plotinian Neoplatonism, though we should not for that reason deny that it is really there ». 
matter does not identify itself neither with evil or with non-being\textsuperscript{101}. Love gives man freedom and so he can do good. Freedom has a different meaning in Plotinus and Augustine. Augustine found in Ambrose’s \textit{Sermons} a Philosophy that explains his praise of the neoplatonic books in the \textit{Confessions}.

Ambrose was Marius Victorinus' friend, the translator of Plotinus and Porphyrius; and so probably Ambrose was the link which brought about the first encounter between Augustine and Plotinus. Ambrose’s \textit{Sermons} offer parallel passages with the \textit{Enneades} and with \textit{De regressu animae} of Porphyrius. Augustine normally cites these passages according the ambrosian interpretation\textsuperscript{102}. Augustine read the \textit{Enneades} only to the interpretation of Ambrose\textsuperscript{103}.

Through this he knew Manlius Theodorus who in turn led Augustine to Marius Victorinus' translation. According to P. Henry, Augustine read at this time \textit{On Beauty} and \textit{On the three principals of hypostasis}\textsuperscript{104}. It is probable that the treatise \textit{On Beauty} I, 6 was particularly important because Ambrose utilizes it in a modified version in \textit{De Isaac}, VIII, 77, 78 and Augustine echoes this quotation in \textit{Ennarr. in ps.}, CXLIX, 3; \textit{Confess.}, I, 18, 28 and \textit{De civ. Dei}, IX, 17\textsuperscript{105}. In the well-known text from \textit{Confess.}, VII, Augustine tells us that in the reading of Paul he found the truth he read in Plotinus\textsuperscript{106}.


\textsuperscript{102} Cf. A. SOLIGNAC, SJ, \textit{Nouveaux Parallèles entre S. Ambroise et Plotin. Le De Jacob et vita beata et le περὶ εὐδαιμονίας} (Ennéade, I, IV), in \textit{Archives de Philosophie}, 19, 1956, p. 156: «...c'est ainsi des morceaux entiers de Plotin qu'Ambroise réemploie dans ses traités. Il semble difficile de nier que les textes mêmes fussent sous ses yeux au moment de la rédaction. Il est fort probable que des recherches portant sur les écrits d'Ambroise qui se situent autour de 386 (c'est-à-dire autour de l'année qui marque la conversion de S. Augustin) amènerait encore de nouvelles de l'influence plotinienne.».

\textsuperscript{103} Cf. \textit{Ep.}, 147, 52: \textit{CSEL}, 44, 329-30.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Plotin et l'Occident}, Louvain, 1934, p. 128: «Il est fort possible que le περὶ τῶν τριῶν ἀρχικῶν ὑποστάσεων et le περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ soient les seuls livres de Plotin qu'Augustin ait lus avant sa conversion au catholicisme. Ils suffisent, en tout cas, à illustrer concrètement le récit des Confessions.».


\textsuperscript{106} Cf. \textit{Confess.}, VIII, 10, 22: \textit{CC}, 27, 127; VII, 3, 5: \textit{CC}, 27, 94-5; X, 32, 48: \textit{CC}, 27, 180-81 (about God as Truth's source and as aid from those who search it). Cf. R.J. O'CONNELL, SJ, \textit{S. Augustine's Early Theory of Man A.D. 386-391}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968, p. 19-20. Fr. O'Connell makes this important observation very interesting and good to discuss later in other article: «We cannot expect Augustine always to have recognized the initial strain and the consequent development they (= \textit{Enneades}) brought about; his frequent practice of combining the contextual thrusts of treatises that date from
Concluding: For Augustine truth realizes itself in freedom\textsuperscript{107}. The metaphysical questions about man and God develop and reach their full intelligibility within that liberating truth. The search for truth implies also the search for freedom. God is self-existing truth and absolutely free Being. Man can participate in divine freedom: «Sicut autem haec cum sit in seipsa vita, etiam nobis fit vita, cum eius efficimur utcumque participes\textsuperscript{108}». God is the cause of our will and He is with us in the volitive process: «Ad bonum et agimus et agimus. Dicit mihi aliquis: Ergo agimus non agimus. Respondeo: Imo et agis, et ageris; et tunc bene agis, si a bono agaris. Spiritus enim Dei qui te agit, agenti adiutor est tibi\textsuperscript{109}».

God and man work together. Authentic freedom has an essential relation with good and truth\textsuperscript{110}. God liberates man acting through his saving grace in time and history\textsuperscript{111}. This concept of liberating grace has a great richness and it is necessary to understand more deeply: it is complete grace\textsuperscript{112} incarnated in History with all the signs and symbols of temporality. His source is Christ the Mediator and his significant dimension is the Christus totus needing to be liberated in his Body: «Evangelizat Christus seipsum, evangelizat se etiam in membris suis iam existentibus, ut et alios adducat, et accendant qui non erant, et copulentur membris eius, per quae membra eius praedicatum est evangelium; et fiat unum corpus sub uno capite, in uno Spiritu, in una vita\textsuperscript{113}».

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different periods of Plotinus’ life will, accordingly, sometimes lead him to deform the problematic line of both the treatises in question. The result, more often than not, is a bastardized Plotinianism which modern scholars would refuse to honor with the master’s name. Cf. G. Madec, Bulletin Augustinien, 1986/87, in REAug., 33, 1987, p. 375.


\textsuperscript{108} Ep., 120, 4, 19, 19 : CSEL, 34, 720-21.
\textsuperscript{109} Sermo, 156, 11, 11 : PL, 38, 855.
\textsuperscript{113} Enarr. in ps., 74, 4 : CC, 39, 102-67 ; cf. De civ. Det, 10, 6 : CC, 47, 278-9 ; De Trin., XV, 19, 34 : CC, 50 A, 509-11.
RéSUMé : Cet article est le résultat premier et partiel d’une recherche en cours à l’École des Études Orientales de l’Université du Salvador (Buenos Aires), dirigée par le R.P. Dr. Ismael Quiles S.J., et portant sur le concept de liberté dans l’antiquité (Ier-Ve s.), dans une perspective biblico-judaïque, hellénique et latine. L’A. analyse la pensée d’Augustin sur la liberté ; cette dernière, abordée du point de vue existentiel, est considérée comme un principe vital et immanent, lié à la Transcendance. L’A. fait également allusion à diverses interprétations concernant l’influence plotinienne, qui fêront l’objet de prochains articles, fruits de cette recherche.