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THE SEEDS OF MODERN EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY IN ST. AUGUSTINE

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Abstract. This article delves into Augustine's doctrine from anthropological and cognitive perspectives within the framework of existential philosophy. Central to this analysis is Augustine's stance on transcendence and his adoption of a bottom-up approach to anthropology. The article explores the existential aspects of human experience, examining how Augustine's conception aligns with the existential movement's focus on individual crises. The relevance of his doctrine lies in its depiction of human positivity stemming from a metaphysical source—God, who serves as the unconditioned model of human fullness. Through an exploration of Augustine's views on human emotions and their conditions, the author explains the parallels with the existential movement focusing on individual situations. In this context, what warrants close attention is the principle of the significance of critical inquiry and analytical rigor in the pursuit of truth. The very process of seeking truth can lead to an improvement in understanding and to the discovery of genuine facts. Through a synthesis of critical thinking, analysis, and research, individuals can navigate through uncertainty and arrive at deeper insights into the human condition. Augustine's anthropological analysis of human existence is intertwined with reflections on the transient nature of life and the pursuit of meaning. By situating human existence within the broader framework of metaphysical realities, Augustine underscores the positive aspects of human nature emanating from a source beyond the material realm. His doctrine serves as a testament to the enduring importance of metaphysical inquiry in contemporary philosophical discourse.

Keywords: St. Augustine, anthropological path, human subjectivity and cognition, God, transcendence, existentialism.

Streszczenie. Ziarna nowożytnej filozofii egzystencjalnej u św. Augustyna. Niższy artykuł zgłębia doktrynę Augustyna z perspektywy antropologicznej i poznawczej w ramach filozofii egzystencjalnej. Centralnym punktem analizy jest stanowisko biskupa z Hippony w kwestii transcendencji oraz jego oddolne podejście do nauki o człowieku. Świadection Augustyna można określić jako antropologię myślącego podmiotu, ponieważ wszystkie nasze emocje są w dużej mierze warunkowane przez kontekst aktualnych doświadczeń. Podobieństwo jego poglądów z ruchem egzystencjalnym polega właśnie na tym, że oba te nurty skupiają się na jednostce przechodzącej przez kryzys. W tym kontekście szczególne znaczenie przypisuje się zasadzie krytycznego dociekania oraz analitycznego rygoru jako kluczowych narzędzi w procesie poszukiwania prawdy o sobie. Antropologiczna analiza egzystencji w ujęciu Augustyna splata się z refleksją nad przemijalnością życia oraz poszukiwaniem sensu. Autor podkreśla pozytywny wymiar ludzkiej natury emanujący ze źródła wykraczającego poza sferę doczesną. Tym samym umiejscawia on życie człowieka w szerszym kontekście rzeczywistości. Jego doktryna stanowi trwałe świadectwo względem dociekań o naturze przemijania w ramach dyskursu filozoficznego.

Słowa kluczowe: św. Augustyn, droga antropologiczna, podmiotowość i poznanie człowieka, Bóg, transcendencja, egzystencjalizm.

The theme posed in the chapter will be realized based on the analysis of St. Augustine's views on man in the context of experience implying the temporal and subjective aspects of existence. The author's existential authenticity pertaining to personal experiences and his multifaceted horizon of thought unite the drama of human destiny with temporal problems that prove to be still relevant. An important rationale prompting the above research is, as it turns out, the inexhaustible vitality of the reflections of the Bishop of Hippo. The analyses carried out in the presented chapter are an attempt to justify the question of the meaning of human survival against the background of his anthropology.

Augustine's life and works mark an interesting concept in which the starting point is the experience and need for a relationship with God. The author considers the title issue against the background of two types of experience: subjective-existential and transcendental. The above division is not insignificant, for the Father of the Church links the problem

of the transience of existence with the attitude of overcoming oneself, the need to seek lasting values and to find God in the difficult situation of life. The latter includes the question of His existence in the context of human existence. We are talking about the subjective (from below) principle of understanding reality, through which man is capable of knowing nature of a supernatural nature. The starting point for the analyzed direction are three important concepts, which include the problem of the anthropological path, the subjectivity of cognition and the subject of the transience of present existence. And although Augustine himself does not use the referenced terminology, it is worth noting his insightful reflections, which are referred to by many researchers today. Let's see how the modern meaning of the anthropological path coincides with some of Hippo's theses.

1. ANTHROPOLOGICAL PATH AN EXPRESSION OF NATURAL DESIRE TO KNOW GOD

The referenced issue, also referred to as the bottom-up way, is an alternative to atheistic philosophy. The basic premise of this view is the rational demonstration of the possibility of a bottom-up reading of Christian revelation based on an existential model of subjectivity that grows out of the inner condition of man and the position in which he finds himself.¹ We can find antecedents of the anthropological path as early as the end of Christian antiquity, i.e. in the thought of the Bishop of Hippo, who at a certain point in his life felt the need for conversion. In his reflections, the author explains the need to know God by means of two categories, the first of which is admiration arising from the beauty of nature, while the second is man. He eloquently states: „Sicut enim corpori non hoc est esse, quod pulchrum esse (alioquin deforme esse non posset) ita etiam creato spiritui non id est vivere, quod sapienter vivere; alioquin incommutabiliter saperet. Bonum autem illi est haerere tibi semper, ne, quod adeptus est conversione, aversione lumen amittat et relabatur in vitam tenebrosae abyssio similem”² The human being is, in a sense, sandwiched between

¹ See Carl Gordon Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions* (New York: State University of New York 2004), 6.

² St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, XIII, 2 (PL 32).

two extremes, i.e., he feels the incomprehensible greatness of the universe and also realizes that his being is contingent. The polarity between the transcendent and the finite covers all planes of life.³ The realization of this truth is a turning point, because greatness and nobility consist precisely in the fact that man recognizes his misery, which causes in him the desire to transform.⁴

The subtitle issue of the anthropological path is one of the terms used in fundamental theology and its beginning is in the modern era. The object of study for this direction is the analysis of man's natural cognition in its relation to the world involving the dependence of the knowledge of God on anthropology. This kind of reflection has lived to see several classic approaches. Outstanding examples are the works of B. Pascal and M. Blondel.⁵ It was in the aftermath of their reflections that the need arose to respond to some of the modern views attempting to eliminate from philosophical discourse the question of God's existence, and consequently the possibility of relating to His supernaturalism.

One of the fundamental questions about the meaning of human life inevitably and dramatically appears in the face of sin and therefore the fall, which can lead to spiritual death (cf. Matthew 10:28). A biblical exegesis of the parable of the prodigal son will serve as an example. Augustine declares: „Non enim pedibus aut spatiis locorum itur abs te aut reeditur ad te, aut vero filius ille tuus minor equos vel currus vel naves quaesivit aut avolvit pinna visibili aut moto poplite iter egit, ut in longinqua regione vivens prodige dissiparet quod dederas proficiscenti dulcis pater, quia dederas, et egeno redeunti dulcior...”⁶ Our author uses an allegorical interpretation of the Bible, as it turns out, the experience of spiritual poverty can be the beginning of a relationship of openness to the Creator. Augustine reminds us that the love of the Almighty is capable of bending to every prodigal son and sinner. The parable from the Gospel according to St. Luke makes a person begin to see himself and his actions in truth, but it is impossible to

³ See Carl Gordon Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions* (New York: State University of New York 2005), 240.

⁴ „Noli esse vana, anima mea, et obsurdescere in aure cordis tumultu vanitatis tuae” (*Confessiones*, IV, 11, PL 32).

⁵ See Maurice Blondel, *L'itinéraire philosophique de Maurice Blondel. Propos recueillis par Frédéric Lefèvre* (Paris: 1928), 66–67.

⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, I, 18 (PL 32).

speak of a change in the way of life without consciousness combined with work on oneself and a good will for reconciliation. The philosopher proclaims: „Ibi enim [...] ubi compunctus eram, ubi sacrificaveram mactans vetustatem meam, et inchoata meditatione renovationis meae sperans in te, ibi mihi dulcescere coeperas et dederas laetitiam in corde meo”.⁷ Augustine’s words allow us to discover an ambivalent dynamic, subjective internal and objective external; the former, subjective, determines the status of being of the „I”, which exists here and now. The latter, objective, on the other hand, manifests itself primarily in the fact of the existence of diverse and therefore more and less perfect entities. It is their perspective (contingent and impermanent), combined with consciousness and intellectual self-reflection, that sends the searching subject back to the supernatural reality. In the philosopher’s opinion, a purely rational view of the world will not satiate the anxiety associated with existence. An honest look at the issue refutes pseudo-rationalism, which, by reducing the world solely to a philosophical ratio, denies the horizon of external objectivity. Such a position usually takes the form of philosophical atheism. Augustine rejects the above view and emphatically attests that man is incapable of answering by himself the fundamental questions of where he comes from and what is the purpose of his earthly journey? Viewing human existence in a complementary way, he sees the natural desire for the infinite expressed in the need for support from God and adds: „Convertisti enim me ad te, ut nec uxorem quaererem nec aliquam spem saeculi huius stans in ea regula fidei...”.⁸ In the face of this attitude, the drama of existence is ultimately creative, for the uncertainty of one’s fate and the experiencing of internal conflicts compel man to existential and moral progress. According to the Bishop of Hippo, this is natural, since everyone needs such values in his life that are permanent and unchanging. Some experts on Augustinianism call the position presented the way of the restless heart. It is worth looking at how Augustine referred to the subjective feeling of an individual experiencing his own fate.

⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, IX, 4.

⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, XIII, 12.

2. SUBJECTIVITY AND TOP-DOWN ANTHROPOLOGY

The Christian philosopher gives us numerous examples of practicing metaphysics leading to God, one of which is natural theology. Let's consider especially those statements of the author saying that man's cognition is expressed in his subjective experience. In his treatise *On the Trinity*, he lets us know: „Nam neque colorem quem numquam vidit, neque figuram corporis, nec sonum quem numquam audivit, nec saporem quem numquam gustavit, nec odorem quem numquam olfecit, nec ullam con-trectationem corporis quam numquam sensit, potest quisquam omnino cogitare”.⁹ There is no mistaking the philosopher's notion that the material world is imperfect, changeable and far from perfect unity. We know this from autopsy, that the absence of real contact with the reality around us would mean the complete unverifiability of all research and claims. Our writer did not reject the obvious qualities of the functions of the senses, according to his assessment, all perceived objects fall within the scope of our perception, but their value is determined by the soul itself, it is through it that we gain invaluable knowledge of the word.¹⁰ In Augustine's teaching, realism in human experience is not limited to sensory-somatic aspects alone, it is just the first theoretical-cognitive step on the anthropological path, the starting point of which is the subjective experience of the individual. After all, the process of acquiring knowledge is not based on perception itself, but primarily on intellectual authorities, that is, the activity of discursive-analytical thinking and the function of memory. Thanks to them, human beings form a mental link between themselves and the material world. Having at his disposal basic and experiential impressions of what is sensual, he critically feels ontological instability, which leads him to ask questions about the end of his earthly journey.¹¹ In the following section, we will see how Augustine combines into a single thread the bipolarity between inner ideas about the world and man's

⁹ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XI, VIII, 14 (PL 42).

¹⁰ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XI, V, 9.

¹¹ „Ecce sunt caelum et terra, clamant, quod facta sint; mutantur enim atque variantur [...]. Tu ergo, Domine, fecisti ea, qui pulcher es: pulchra sunt enim; qui bonus es: bona sunt enim; qui es: sunt enim. Nec ita pulchra sunt nec ita bona sunt nec ita sunt, sicut tu Conditor eorum, quo comparato nec pulchra sunt nec bona sunt nec sunt” (*Confessiones* XI, 4, PL 32).

openness to God expressed in the transcendence of transcending his own limitations. Augustine discovers the mysterious presence of God at the root of our needs, in his view the dynamism of existence springs from the depths of consciousness, while the person, as an independent subject, is the base and center of his own being in the world. The philosophy of the Bishop of Hippo differs significantly from modern and also post-modern approaches that portray man as an exclusive end unto himself.¹² After all, our author, in the spirit of the biblical *eritis sicut dii*, polemicized against the reversal of the objective hierarchy of values placing man above God. Significant are his words: „Illud itaque malum, quo, cum sibi homo placet, tamquam sit et ipse lumen, avertitur ab eo lumine, quod ei si placeat et ipse fit lumen: illud, inquam, malum praecessit in abdito, ut sequeretur hoc malum quod perpetratum est in perto”.¹³ In his work, the Church Father also did not forget that without the participation of human subjectivity it would be impossible to speak of any cognition *si fallor sum*. That is why the message of our philosopher turns out to be close to the mentality of modern man affirming empiricist methods. Augustine's great merit was to show his own religious sensibility in the horizon of transcending temporal limits. Let us recall the memory of his conversion:

Ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi me nescio quomodo et dimisi habenas lacrimis, et proruperunt flumina oculorum meorum, acceptabile sacrificium tuum, et non quidem his verbis, sed in hac sententia multa dixi tibi: Et tu, Domine, usquequo? Usquequo, Domine, irasceris in finem? [...]. Dicebam haec et flebam amarissima contritione cordis mei. Et ecce audio vocem de vicina domo cum cantu dicentis et crebro repetentis quasi pueri an puellae, nescio: „Tolle lege, tolle lege” [...]. Arripui, aperui et legi in silentio capitulum, quo primum coniecti sunt oculi mei: Non in comensationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite Dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis. Nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat. Statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt¹⁴.

¹² See. Gerald O'Collins and Edward Farrugia, *Leksykon pojęć teologicznych i kościelnych*, transl. Jan Ożóg and Barbara Żak (Kraków: WAM 2002), 22–23.

¹³ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, XIII (PL 42).

¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VIII, 12 (PL 32).

The story described above confirms that the problem of returning to God *objectively exterior* is inseparable from subjective experience. Once again, let's allow our philosopher to ask, as it were: does the anthropocentric approach present itself as a proto-experience in relation to transcendence? Augustine declares: „Atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorem vim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corporis”.¹⁵ This kind of dialectic was considered by Augustine to be a virtue rather than a skill related to the action of ratio. Magnanimity makes it possible for a person, having awakened his inner sight, not only to view the beauty of the noetic world, but also to know it and thus to become an inner-spiritual man himself. This author's interpretation of Christian subjectivity opens human subjectivity to the self-transcendence of the personal experience of God. Deserving special attention is the fact that Augustine does not start directly from the deposit of faith, but arrives at it through personal experience and philosophical reflection.¹⁶ Transcending one's own boundaries has two fundamental facets, one of which is the ability to view oneself in truth, while the other is a theopoetic leaning toward external objectivity. Augustine concludes: „Ita etiam, cum aeternitas delectat superius et temporalis boni voluptas retentat inferius, eadem anima est non tota voluntate illud aut hoc volens et ideo discerpitur gravi molestia, dum illud veritate praeponit, hoc familiaritate non ponit”.¹⁷ An example of what the philosopher is writing about is not only freedom understood as self-determination, but also love, which is not about finishing something, but above all about an ever-deepening relationship. Augustine proclaims that we can experience our own

¹⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VII, 17.

¹⁶ In Augustine's ecclesiology, the authority of Revelation becomes fundamental, for the truths contained in the Gospel transcend the possibility of empirical verifiability, hence their acceptance requires prior belief or reliance on the seriousness of the Church's teaching. The author declares: „Auctoritas autem partim divina est, partim humana: sed vera, firma, summa ea est quae divina nominatur” (*De ordine*, II, 8, 27, PL 32). Moreover, the Christian apologist unequivocally affirms that man has neither influence over the content of Revelation nor any change in the transmission of the inspired books (see. *De Civitate Dei* XI, 3 PL 42).

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VIII, 10 (PL 32).

limitations while at the same time realizing that consciously overcoming them is a sure way to change what we do in our lives.

3. WAS ST. AUGUSTINE AN EXISTENTIALIST?

Existential philosophy is one of the most recognizable directions of modern thought today. The problem of existence has been an important topic in the inquiries of many philosophers, and it is difficult not to mention, for example, S. Kierkegaard, M. Heidegger, J. P. Sartre, or the work of theologians such as R. Bultmann and K. Barth.¹⁸ History shows us many interesting concepts referred to as existential philosophy. Basically, we encounter two approaches (atheistic and anti-atheistic) that have traditionally been taken in developing reflections on the meaning of human existence. Some of the prominent representatives of existential philosophy (B. Pascal and M. Blondel) were people of great religious faith, while their reflection on human existence did not close them to the dimension of the sacred, or directly to a personal God. Other well-known representatives of this direction were declared atheists, at least one of whom (J-P. Sartre) also presented an anthropocentric version of existentialism. The common feature of these thinkers was that they were based on a fundamental affirmation of the world and man starting from the scarcity of reality around us and the fragility of existence in the face of death. In analyzing the relationship between personal experience and transcendence, Augustine laid a foundation that was reflected in the work of 20th century existentialists. Augustine's concept of the "anthropological road" is to understand existence through personal experience and the pursuit of God, which parallels the later reflections of the existentialists, who also sought deeper meaning in the face of the human condition and the transience of life. Although Augustine did not use existential terminology, he showed in his works the mechanisms that later existential philosophers developed in the context

¹⁸ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Albo-albo*, trans. by Karol Toeplitz and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN 1982), t. II, 232. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Byt i nicość. Zarys ontologii fenomenologicznej*, transl. Jan Kielbasa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa 2007), 307. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Bycie i czas*, transl. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN 1994), 68.

of their analysis.¹⁹ Augustine's understanding of the human condition as a constant quest for transcendence and truth shows how his thought may have influenced later approaches that explored issues related to existential pain and the search for meaning.²⁰ In his view, it is being in the world that characterizes the mode of existence involving the reality of the subject experiencing his own fate. This type of view is described by F. Sawicki, who describes the Tagasta thinker as the first modern human being²¹. In his writings, Augustine emphasizes the horizontal antinomy of the greatness and changeability of life, good and evil and also the unexpected events of fate that so often surprise us. He eloquently states: „Vita misera est, mors incerta est; subito obrepit: quomodo hinc exibimus? [...]. Quid, si mors ipsa omnem curam cum sensu amputabit et finiet?”²². It should be remembered that his position does not imply a nihilistic attitude of indifference to the world of values. Let's see how the philosopher emphasizes the positive dimension of life. He expresses it as follows: „Tu itaque, Domine Deus meus, qui dedisti vitam infanti et corpus, quod ita, ut videmus, instruxisti sensibus, compegisti membris, figura decorasti proque eius universitate atque incolumitate omnes conatus animantis insinuasti... [...]. Sed nec anima es, quae ita est corporum (ideo melior vita corporum certiorque quam corpora) sed tu vita es animarum, vita vitarum, vivens te ipsa et non mutaris, vita animae meae”²³. As for the value of assessing human existence, it depends on moral aspects, which are considered in terms of ontological realism. With the help of the intellect, man perceives the close relationship with the surrounding nature and comes to know himself and the environment in which he lives²⁴. The emotions involved are not solely the product of human imagination, for there are extraneous factors alongside the latter. It is impossible not to take into account an important statement by Augustine describing an experience resulting from the experience of the death of loved ones. His words are touching:

¹⁹ See Luigi Alici, Remo Piccolomini, Antonio Pieretti, red., *Agostino nella filosofia del Novecento: Esistenza e libertà* (Roma: Città Nuova 2000), 40.

²⁰ Cf. Alici, Piccolomini, Pieretti, red., *Agostino*, 87–90.

²¹ See. Franciszek Sawicki, „Filozofia egzystencjalna,” *Studia z historii filozofii* 1 (2010), 70.

²² St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VI, 11 (PL 32).

²³ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, I, 7; III, 6.

²⁴ Cf. St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, I, VII–16 (PL 32).

„Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat [...]. Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio et interrogabam animam meam, quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me valde, et nihil noverat respondere mihi”²⁵. Some Augustinologists point to a certain convergence of the above views with M. Heidegger’s position²⁶. Such a thesis is propounded, among others, by S. Kowalczyk, who believes that the German philosopher’s analyses are largely a continuation of the thoughts contained in Hippo’s writings²⁷. Regardless of some similarities in the two authors, there are no less significant differences, for Augustine, death has a theological meaning in addition to existential aspects. According to his words:

Noli esse vana, anima mea, et obsurdescere in aure cordis tumultu vanitatis tuae. Audi et tu: verbum ipsum clamat, ut redeas, et ibi est locus quietis imperturbabilis, ubi non deseritur amor, si ipse non deserat [...]. Veritati commenda quidquid tibi est a veritate, et non perdes aliquid, et reflorescent putria tua et sanabuntur omnes languores tui et fluxa tua reformabuntur et renovabuntur et constringentur ad te et non te deponent, quo descendunt, sed stabunt tecum et permanebunt ad semper stantem ac permanentem Deum²⁸.

The problem posed in this way primarily concerns metaphysical reality, and thus the orientation of the problem of the transience of life to

²⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, IV, 4 (PL 32).

²⁶ See. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIII, X (PL 42).

²⁷ Cf. Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Człowiek i Bóg w nauce św. Augustyna* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych 1987), 87. See. Martin Heidegger, *Bycie i czas*, transl. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN 1994), 75. See. Martin Heidegger, *Fenomenologia życia religijnego*, transl. Grzegorz Sowiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak 2002), 16.

²⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, IV, 11 (PL 32). St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VIII, 6 (Phil 3:21). The principle of identity tells us that something is what it is, that is, if something is true, it is true, and if something is false, it is false. In other words, truth always leads to truth, and falsehood always leads to falsehood. If you accept something as true (even if it is true), but rely on false premises, your conclusions may be wrong. Conversely, if you rely on true premises, your conclusions can be true or false, depending on how you interpret them or other circumstances. So, although our initial data may be wrong, the very process of seeking the truth can lead to an improvement in our understanding and ultimately to the discovery of the true facts. This shows that despite initial errors, we can arrive at the truth through critical thinking, analysis and research. So even false premises can lead us to the truth if we make an effort to improve our understanding.

eschatology. If we speak of the ontology of death, then only in the sense of the earthly end of existence, after which the history of our life receives a full and irreversible shape before God. Such an approach causes human existence to take on a soteriological character, that is, it reveals the important truth that without God the purposefulness of creation cannot be definitively explained.

Also worthy of close attention is Augustine's exposition of the theme of the incidental conditions of existence being the backdrop of human inconvenience. We know this from autopsy, that man does not have the ability to choose the place or time of his own birth, after all, none of us decides on his biological predisposition, hence the existence in the world eludes freedom understood as internal autonomy. In spite of this difficulty, *liberum arbitrium* plays a key role in decision-making, since through it man has the possibility of self-determination.²⁹ Our author took for granted the existence of the world by describing the real experience of life. At the same time, Augustine did not affirm the theory of metempsychosis, advocating rather cognitive realism, despite the fact that he allowed the phenomenon of Divine illumination. The starting point of his considerations is the world of the human person, and it should be noted that *esse* alone does not yet determine the essence of a given being. Hence the question of the rational nature of man, without which it is impossible to speak of human identity, is so important for Augustine.³⁰ After all, to negate thinking on the ontic plane would make thought itself unthinkable. This rational theory of knowledge integrates practical experience and seeks absolute truth despite human fallibility. As E. Sienkiewicz rightly notes, Augustine's realism is evident in his distinction between ontological and epistemological truth.³¹ Augustine's approach to epistemology is complex due to the lack of a systematic theory and the lively, personal nature of his reflections. His reflections on knowledge are deeply connected to his personal search for truth and wisdom, as documented in his Confessions. His rejection of skepticism is based on the conviction that doubt and delusion do not negate the possibility of the existence of certain truths. For Augustine, the certainty of one's own exist-

²⁹ Cf. St. Augustine, *De duabus animabus*, 12 (PL 42).

³⁰ St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, VII, 17 (PL 32).

³¹ Cf. Edward Sienkiewicz, *Poznawczy realizm egzystencjalny według św. Augustyna* (Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński 2012), 23–26.

ence is the basis of knowledge, even in the midst of doubt. This argument provides a source of certainty for the existence of acts of consciousness of the cognizing subject, including those that are mistaken, and knowledge of that existence. It reads: „... non omne quod vivit scire se vivere, quamquam omne quod se vivere sciat, vivat necessario”.³² This, of course, is not a conventional reconciliation of thought with the surrounding reality, but a special kind of reflective-autonomous discourse that reveals the perspective of one's attitude towards the surrounding reality. Augustine refers to the world of the human person and his own experiences.³³ It is true that it is difficult to express approval of the reduction or closure of the horizon of one's own existence in terms of existential frustration resulting from the fear of the fact of passing.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the Christian apologist encourages us to live our lives in terms of unconditioned transcendence. Taking this direction is in line with our desires, as well as with the postulates of reason, whose action is not limited to agreeing cognition with empiricism, but requires rational reference to the current conditions of life and the involvement of the entire subjectivity. The author is not indifferent to the problems that are also close to modern philosophers. Among them we can distinguish the problems of anthropocentrism and existential realism. Thus, it is not about the hermeneutics of experience, but about showing the anthropological inclinations of the individual, who consciously experiences his own fate. The analysis of selected aspects of experience carried out reveals human existence as an ordered structure that defies all simplifications. The condition of transcendence links the experience of God's presence with the action of transcending oneself, expressed in the concern for existence, which is finite and fragile. Augustine's position can also be called grassroots anthropology, since human experience is often conditioned by the prism of the here and now. The Church Father focuses primarily on the analysis of existence, including the issue of transience. Augustine considered this issue without starting directly from the deposit of Revelation, i.e. he appealed mainly to inner experience. It seems obvious that reflection on eternity is a natural human need, so existence and

³² St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, VII–16 (PL 32).

³³ See. Étienne Gilson, „L'avenir de la métaphysique augustinienne,” *Revue de Philosophie*, série I (Paris: 1930), 360–370.

existence direct the human heart to the soteriological sense associated with the end of the earthly journey. The philosopher argues for a reciprocal correlation between the deepest emotions of the *psyche* and what is indicated by the Christian message of Revelation, which embodies the ultimate and complete meaning of existence.³⁴

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³⁴ Cf. Félix Joseph Thonnard, „Caractères platoniciens de l'Ontologie augustinienne,” in *Augustinus Magister, Congrès International Augustinien*, Vol. I (Paris: 1954), 319.

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