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The concept of freedom in the thought of St. Augustine

The existence and nature of free will is an extremely momentous issue for humans in both theoretical and practical terms. Not surprisingly, this issue has interested and continues to interest scientists, theologians and philosophers alike. However, the issue turns out to be so complex and multifaceted that all attempts to understand it in depth have encountered many difficulties. Sometimes they have even led to solutions that may seem either divergent or even contradictory and absolutely irreconcilable.

The research and experiments of the American neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet (1916–2007), for example, had a great impact. Citing the phenomenon of so-called readiness potential discovered by Hans H. Kornhuber and Lüder Deecke (*das Bereitschaftspotential*), Libet argued that the real initiators of our actions are not free will, but certain unconscious processes that occur in the human brain immediately before the moment of decision-making¹. The hypothesis put forward by Libet was immediately met with criticism from both other neurophysiologists and philosophers².

The issue of freedom has been an important topic, and often a topic of primary importance, in the inquiries of many modern and contemporary philosophers. It is difficult not to mention here, for example, Immanuel

1 Cf. B. Libet, *Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action*, “The Behavioral and Brain Sciences” 8 (1985) issue 4, p. 529–539, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00044903>.

2 Cf. W. R. Klemm, *Free will debates: simple experiments are not so simple*, “Advances in Cognitive Psychology” 6 (2010) issue 6, p. 47–65.

Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Henri Bergson and Jean-Paul Sartre, or the achievements of Polish phenomenologists, Roman Ingarden³ and Józef Tischner⁴.

The subject of this paper will be an attempt to present the views of St. Augustine, who, as early as the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, made an in-depth and significant analysis of the phenomenon of free will. At the same time, the intention of the author of the work will be only to present the main themes characteristic of the Augustinian concept of freedom. The essential basis for such an analytical-synthetic reconstruction of St. Augustine's views will be, first of all, the dialogue *De libero arbitrio*. He developed the concept of free will as an essential, and therefore necessary, feature of human existence in polemic with the views prevalent in his time that questioned the existence of freedom so understood. This refers primarily to the views of the Stoics and Manichaeans⁵.

St. Augustine's polemic against the views of the stoics and manichaeans

The concept of free will as an essential and therefore necessary feature of human existence, St. Augustine developed in polemic with the views prevalent in his time that questioned the existence of freedom so understood.

The Stoics in their philosophical views recognized the determinism of the laws of nature⁶. Questioning the freedom of the will, they even went as far as accepting fate, which absolutely governs human life. In their interpretation, freedom had no ontological basis, but was itself the essence of human life. The Stoics understood freedom as independence from external

3 See R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1975.

4 Cf. J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 7.

5 Cf. A. Trapè, *Święty Augustyn. Człowiek, duszpasterz, mistyk*, transl. J. Sulowski, PAX, Warszawa 1987, p. 59–62.

6 See. F. Copleston, *A history of philosophy*, vol. 1: *Greece and Rome*, Doubleday, New York–London 1993, p. 430, 432–433.

situations and conditions, adopting an attitude of distance from the world around us⁷.

The Tagasta thinker did not share the views of the Stoic school and consequently rejected their doctrine. In his opinion, first of all, the judgments created and pronounced by man are completely independent of the determinism of the laws of nature. Hence, freedom is not, as the Stoics believed, merely an attitude of reserve and indifference to situations imposed by the necessities of fate. In the area of freedom of the will, Augustine distinguishes two actions: free and natural-mechanical. Natural-mechanical actions can be compared to the falling of a branch, which is subject to the determinism of the laws of nature. Free actions, on the other hand, are characteristic only of rational beings, who act consciously and voluntarily⁸. Therefore, with regard to free choice, freedom of will is always the ability to direct oneself.

St. Augustine formulates a certain definition of free will: „Nobis autem voluntas nostra notissima est: neque enim scirem me velle, si quid sit voluntas ipsa nescirem”⁹. From his point of view, coercion becomes the opposite of freedom. Free choice, on the other hand, is a consequence of freedom understood as the ability to make an independent choice. Thus, free choice is a peculiar and distinct phenomenon. Freedom plays a key role in decision-making, for it is freedom that gives a person the ability to refrain from or take a certain action. Person has the ability to act and express himself through what he wants for themselves.

Freedom of will in the ontological sense was also questioned by the Manichaeans. They preached the view that the world is dualistic (black and white), so to speak, because it is governed ultimately by two absolute principles — the principle of good and evil. In such a world, the source of evil is substantive evil, which excludes the complicity of the will in the performance of evil acts. Hence, in Manichaeism there is no place for true

7 Cf. S. Kowalczyk, *Człowiek i Bóg w nauce świętego Augustyna*, Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych, Warszawa 1987, p. 76.

8 Cf. S. Kowalczyk, *Człowiek i Bóg w nauce świętego Augustyna*, p. 77.

9 Augustinus, *De duabus animabus*, X, 14, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia [...]*, ed. J.-P. Migne, t. 8, Parisiis 1865 (Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina [=PL], 42).

freedom and responsibility. St. Augustine completely rejected such a view and fully appreciated the value and significance of free will.

For Augustine, the existence of free will was a self-evident fact. He was deeply convinced of its existence. According to the Bishop of Hippo, the foundation of free will is primarily man's mental cognition. In the treatise *De Trinitate*, we read:

Quam quidem voluntatem de cognitione procedere (nemo enim vult quod omnino quid vel quale sit nescit), non tamen esse cogitationis imaginem; et ideo quamdam in hac re intellegibili nativitatis et processionis insinuari distantiam, quoniam non hoc est cogitatione conspicerere quod appetere, vel etiam perfrui voluntate, cernit discernitque qui potest¹⁰.

According to Augustine, the basis and space for the action of free will is intellectual cognition. It can be said that human wills, desires and chooses not only on a purely volitional level, but also on a cognitive basis, the Tagasta thinker distinguishes two attitudes: the desire for cognition and knowledge itself. Mental cognition is accomplished through a choice of will, while knowledge itself is a consequence of this choice. The consequence of freedom understood ontologically is the choice between good and evil. Augustine writes: „Sed illud me movet, quoniam de libera voluntate quaestio est, et videmus ipsam bene uti caeteris vel non bene, quomodo et ipsa inter illa quibus utimur numeranda sit”¹¹. Freedom of will is connected with the act of choice, and a person is never forced to commit a certain act. Free will allows one to choose from two possibilities. Therefore, St. Augustine considers free will itself a good and includes it accordingly in the domain of goods. Moreover, in his interpretation, free will, as an ontological feature of human being, is a good received from God. Commentators on the teachings of the Bishop of Hippo point out that with him free will is always considered in the context of the good and is always directed toward it.

¹⁰ Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, XV, XXVII, 50 (PL 42).

¹¹ Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, II, XIX, 51, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia [...]*, ed. J.-P. Migne, t. 1, Parisiis 1877 (PL 32).

Obviously, in Augustine's philosophy, the highest place in the hierarchy of goods will be occupied by God:

Voluntas ergo quae medium bonum est, cum inhaeret incommutabili bono, eique communi non proprio, sicuti est illa de qua multum locuti sumus, et nihil digne diximus, veritas; tenet homo beatam vitam: eaque ipsa vita beata, id est animi affectio inhaerentis incommutabili bono, proprium et primum est hominis bonum¹².

Those who interpret St. Augustine's teachings on the role of free will sometimes refer to his view as philosophical voluntarism. According to this view, in the human person, preference is always given to will over reason, to desire over cognition. At the same time, with regard to Augustine, voluntarism is sometimes understood differently. For example, according to W. Tatarkiewicz, it is about ordinary, moderate voluntarism¹³. Others go further and describe Augustine as a radical irrationalist who completely questions the value of rational cognition in favor of free will¹⁴. However, everything indicates that, yes, St. Augustine highly valued the role of the will, but he did not overestimate it, and his position on this issue was quite subtle. Intellectual cognition precedes the undertaking of any act of the will, because the free will cannot make a choice with regard to an object that is completely unknown to itself¹⁵. The emphasis here falls clearly on the primacy of intellectual cognition. He does not recognize the superiority of the will over man's other mental faculties: „Non igitur nisi voluntate peccatur. Nobis autem voluntas nostra notissima est: neque enim scirem me velle, si quid sit voluntas ipsa nescirem”¹⁶.

12 Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, II, XIX, 52 (PL 32).

13 Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii*, vol. 1: *Filozofia starożytna i średniowiecza*, PWN, Warszawa 2003, p. 198.

14 See *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, second ed. R. Audi, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 964.

15 Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, XII, XXVII, 50 (PL 42).

16 Augustinus, *De duabus animabus*, X, 14 (PL 42).

Augustine does not try to minimize the value of rational cognition. He does not reduce the intellect to volitional activities. On the contrary, cognition and intellect constitute the space that makes the action of free will possible. The primacy of the will here refers only to the order of action. St. Augustine was a voluntarist only in the sense that he recognized the fully active function of the will in human personality. The Tagasta thinker, contrary to popular opinion, was not an advocate of the absolute primacy of will over intellect. He does not obliterate the aspectual primacy of cognition before the decision of the will. Instead, he emphasizes the sphere of the will in human life and connected it to the domain of mental reflection and religious contemplation. Choice on the part of the will is always preceded by discernment of good and evil, which necessarily implies the corresponding primacy of mental cognition.

In St. Augustine's view, freedom of the will is not an absolute, unlimited freedom in the case of man. This is because person is not an absolute being in any respect. God does not create beings that would be equal to him i.e. unlimited in their freedom¹⁷. The relationship of human freedom to God's freedom is the finite creature to an infinite Being. Therefore, man's freedom is a limited freedom. Of course, Augustine does not question the existence of free will¹⁸. Freedom of the will stems from the nature of person — God, foreseeing that man would sin, provided humans with the gift of free will. Despite this, the human will is not free in the sense that it has absolute and unlimited freedom. The will is subject to moral obligation. Augustine based moral obligation on a metaphysical basis¹⁹. Freedom of will is not self-will, since person is a relative entity. The fact of being created from nothing causes a tendency in human toward evil.

In his writings, St. Augustine attempts to justify the existence of free will. To emphasize his reasons, he refers to Platonic philosophy and the

17 See W.E. Mann, *Augustine on Evil and Original Sin*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. D.V. Meconi, E. Stump, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 42.

18 Cf. Augustinus, *De natura et gratia*, III, 3, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia [...]*, ed. J.-P. Migne, t. 10, p. 1, Parisiis 1965 (PL 44).

19 Cf. Augustinus, *De catechizandis rudibus*, XVIII, 30, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia [...]*, ed. J.-P. Migne, t. 6, Parisiis 1865 (PL 40).

Bible. Most often he draws attention to the direct consciousness of man. In his opinion, every mentally healthy person has the consciousness of freedom:

Video, et quodammodo tango, et teneo vera esse quae dicis: non enim quidquam tam firme atque intime sentio, quam me habere voluntatem, eaque me moveri ad aliquid fruendum; quid autem meum dicam, prorsus non invenio, si voluntas qua volo et nolo non est mea: quapropter cui tribuendum est, si quid per illam male facio, nisi mihi? [...] Motus autem quo huc aut illuc voluntas convertitur, nisi esset voluntarius, atque in nostra positus potestate, neque laudandus cum ad superiora, neque culpandus homo esset cum ad inferiora detorquet quasi quemdam cardinem voluntatis... Hoc autem monendum non esse hominem, quisquis existimat, de hominum numero exterminandus est²⁰.

As you can see, the experience of freedom is shared by every human being. In ontological terms, it is experienced by all human beings. Recognition of the existence of free will also reveals the meaning of man's active involvement in the realization of higher values. Without free will, it would be impossible to speak of either man's responsibility for his actions, much less for the evil committed. Hence, to negate the existence of free will on the level of being would be to deny and deprive man of an essential element inherent in his nature. The existence of free will is a necessary condition for human responsibility²¹. Augustine was well aware that the highest good can only be God for person, in his reflection on the existence of free will, he referred to the human desire for happiness. In his view, only a free human can achieve happiness²². God, as the primary object of the will's predilection, gives meaning and happiness to human life. Understanding freedom, as a necessary element of human existence, is crucial to achieving happiness, every person wants to be happy, but only a free person can be.

20 Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, I, 3 (PL 32).

21 Cf. R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, p. 81–82.

22 Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, III, 6, 8 (PL 32).

Will, being and autonomy in the face of epistemological and biblical inspirations

Freedom, understood as the ability to master oneself, as the intrinsic autonomy of man, is distinct from free will as an entity characteristic of every human being. According to St. Augustine, the latter is substantively the same in all people. In contrast, the former, intrinsic freedom, can vary from person to person. He considers the freedom of internal autonomy on a moral and theological level, defining it as the ability to liberate oneself from transient things and as adherence to God²³. In his view, human autonomy can only be based on voluntary acts of²⁴. If human did not have free will, if everything in the world occurred according to the inevitable necessity of fate, then it would be impossible to speak of internal autonomy. In this context, É. Gilson noted that man is what his will is and this to the extent that a will divided against itself makes person divided against himself²⁵. Augustine describes the nature of free will and the question of its enslavement or unconditioned action through the inner activity of senses, drives and desires:

Denique tam multa faciebam corpore in ipsis cunctationis aestibus, quae aliquando volunt homines et non valent, si aut ipsa membra non habeant aut ea vel conligata vinculis vel resoluta languore vel quoquo modo impedita sint. [...] Tam multa ergo feci, ubi non hoc erat velle quod posse; et non faciebam [...]. Ibi enim facultas ea, quae voluntas, et ipsum velle iam facere erat; et tamen non fiebat, faciliusque obtemperabat corpus tenuissimae voluntati animae, ut ad nutum membra moverentur, quam ipsa sibi anima ad voluntatem suam magnam in sola voluntate perficiendam²⁶.

23 Cf. Augustinus, *De vera religione*, XLVI, 88, in: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini [...] opera omnia [...]*, ed. J.-P. Migne, t. 3, p. 1, Parisiis 1865 (PL 34).

24 Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, III, 6 (PL 32).

25 Cf. É. Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, transl. Z. Jakimiak, PAX, Warszawa 1953, p. 172, 180.

26 Augustinus, *Confessiones*, VIII, VIII, 20 (PL 32).

In the deliberations of our author, there is a distinction between good will and bad will. This, of course, is not about some two differently existing wills, but about one will that, depending on the decision, takes such and not another object. The philosopher declares: “Et vae voluntati malae, si mala est; pax bonae voluntati, si bona est. Sive autem mala sit, sive bona sit, voluntas est. Bonam voluntatem sequitur corona, malam sequitur poena”²⁷. Thus, the concept of “ill-will” here falls within the scope of human activity, which, by means of choice, settles for the direction it has determined. The distinction used by St. Augustine is related to with the intrinsic freedom of man, which is the result of the moral attitude of rational beings. Self-determination, which is the essence of free will, does not always lead to inner freedom, since only good will is authentically free. Therefore, the expression *liberum arbitrium* takes on a different meaning when applied to God than when applied to a person, for whom the possibility of doing evil appears through free judgment, while God is free from such a possibility itself.

Freedom in the sense under discussion means the moral uprightness of man. According to St. Augustine, such freedom is not the same in all people; it occurs in many forms and can be subject to evolution. In its potential form, it is already present in children, while it is realized only in adult life. In contrast, the fullness of freedom will be attainable in the life to come, that is, in the state of achieved salvation. During earthly life, the growth of freedom depends on the intensity of the spiritual life lived. This involves an inner union with God, especially cooperation with His grace, loving Him above all else, and a proper appreciation of natural values. The ultimate source of man’s inner freedom becomes God — the highest good. The more soul affirms himself in the good, the more freedom he receives²⁸. In dialogue *De quantitate animae*, St. Augustine distinguished as many as seven degrees of human spiritual development. These include inner purification and detachment from sense goods, attainment of perfect purity,

27 Augustinus, *Contra Felicem*, II, XII (PL 42).

28 See S. Kowalczyk, *Człowiek i Bóg w nauce świętego Augustyna*, p. 78.

knowledge of the highest truth (God), attainment of perfection, and possession of the highest Good²⁹.

Also linked to man's inner freedom is the need to respect God's will as expressed in moral precepts. Human, through obedience to God's commands, becomes free from the burden of sin and can experience true freedom. One hears here an echo of the reflections contained in St. Paul's letters. In one of them we read: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance"³⁰. Freedom, as the ability to control oneself, as righteousness, is not so much something given as something inflicted. Probably no one, like St. Augustine, realized that human freedom is very imperfect. It does not exclude moral weaknesses and the fact that man constantly experiences the drama of having to make choices between good and evil. Already the first human through original sin turned away from God³¹. He sought freedom, and found spiritual bondage from which he was unable to free himself by his own efforts. The consequence of evil and sin is moral degradation, loss of self-authenticity and even moral perversion. Evil never gives inner freedom, but brings bondage to the gods of the earth and nature.

Why, St. Augustine asked, does a person decide to choose evil? According to him, this question cannot be meaningfully answered, because it is impossible to know anything about what does not exist at all³². Metaphysical evil does not exist. Instead, we can talk about how moral evil appears, that is, that which depends on free human choices. Well, the cause of moral evil lies within ourselves and consists in the fact that man can turn away from the immutable and infinite Good. Sin and evil is the result of the abuse of freedom, and it cannot be obtained or magnified by doing evil. Simply put, man's freedom, freedom as good will, does not exclude weakness of will and does not deprive us of the propensity to sin. In St. Augustine's

29 Augustinus, *De quantitate animae*, XXXIII, 71–76 (PL 32).

30 Rom 6:17.

31 Cf. Augustinus, *Contra Iulianum*, I, VI, 24; V, III, 12 (PL 44).

32 Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, II, XX, 54 (PL 32).

view, evil is a consequence of our behavior. Person, through the choices he makes, can reject what is good. The author clearly confirms this rule when he writes: “Hoc enim peccabam, quod non in ipso, sed in creaturis eius me atque ceteris voluptates, sublimitates, veritates quaerebam, atque ita irrueram in dolores, confusiones, errors”³³. Evil is born of free will choices and comes from man. Good, on the other hand, comes from God and is a thing of grace given to person.

The momentousness of free will as an inner autonomy is also made apparent by the good that man achieves through the choice he makes. According to Augustine, free will, as an inner action directed toward the good, also begins to possess something of the good to which it gives itself over. Of course, it is the good conduct that makes a person happy the moment he becomes happy. He already possesses something of this goodness, something that is not insignificant if his will is good, if he wishes to enjoy all the good things that human nature is capable of, and does not seek joy in fulfilling or possessing evil thoughts. In the context of freedom as internal autonomy, St. Augustine also discusses the issue of choosing evil for evil’s sake:

Et ego furtum facere volui et feci nulla compulsus egestate nisi penuria et fastidio iustitiae et sagina iniquitatis. Nam id furatus sum, quod mihi abundabat et multo melius, nec ea re volebam frui, quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato. Arbor erat pirus in vicinia nostrae vineae pomis, [...] et abstulimus inde onera ingentia non ad nostras epulas, sed vel procienda porcis [...]. Foeda erat, et amavi eam; amavi perire, amavi defectum meum, non illud, ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi, turpis anima et dissiliens a firmamento tuo in exterminium, non dedecore aliquid, sed dedecus appetens³⁴.

The question arises, which Augustine himself does not answer directly: can I choose evil, as evil? From the point of view of ontology, we cannot

33 Augustinus, *Confessiones*, I, XX, 31 (PL 32).

34 Augustinus, *Confessiones*, II, IV, 9 (PL 32).

choose evil, as such, evil for evil's sake, because, as we already know, it is the absence of being. Even when we choose what in everyday language we call evil, such as fornication, theft, murder, then we choose this evil *sub ratione boni*, that is, because of the of the good we expect to achieve. According to St. Augustine, the object of our choices is always the good. Moral evil, on the other hand, occurs as a result of choosing not the good that should be chosen in a given case — as a result of choosing a lesser good. In other words, the choice being made always refers to something that is cognizable as good, even if it is objectively bad. Immoral acts are the result and consequence of free will choice. At the same time, this evil consists in such a course of action through which person chooses what is worse³⁵. Augustine stresses that the real value of a person's conduct can only be evaluated in the context of free choice. The consequence of a wrong choice is also the responsibility for a voluntarily committed act. Thus, free will itself, despite the possibility of sinful persistence on the part of created beings, is not framed negatively by St. Augustine. Free will always remains man's greatest gift and greatest value.

Context of discussion with pelagianism

St. Augustine's peculiar understanding of philosophy and its tasks entitled him to address topics that included theological aspects of human freedom³⁶. The first of these is the intractable question of the relationship between human freedom and God's foreknowledge. The writer of *Tagasta*, in addressing the above question, presents it in light of what we know about God. The author ponders whether God's provisions can be reconciled with our freedom of choice in such a way that human acts are not predetermined, which could be limit free action:

35 Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, II, XVI, 34, 35 (PL 32).

36 Cf. W. Seńko, *Pojęcie filozofii u św. Augustyna*, in: św. Augustyn, *Dialogi filozoficzne*, Kraków 1999, p. 871.

Quod si fieri non potest ut dum volumus non velimus, adest utique voluntas volentibus; nec aliud quidquam est in potestate, nisi quod volentibus adest. Voluntas igitur nostra nec voluntas esset, nisi esset in nostra potestate. Porro, quia est in potestate, libera est nobis. Non enim est nobis liberum, quod in potestate non habemus, aut potest non esse quod habemus. Ita fit ut et Deum non negemus esse praescium omnium futurorum, et nos tamen velimus quod volumus. [...]. Nec voluntas esse poterit, si in potestate non erit. Ergo et potestatis est praescius. Non igitur per eius praescientiam mihi potestas adimitur, quae propterea mihi certior aderit, quia ille cuius praescientia non fallitur, adfuturam mihi esse praescivit³⁷.

St. Augustine stresses emphatically that God's omniscience *praescientia* does not preclude the freedom of human acts. God knows the future, but future human acts depend on man's free resolutions. Thus, according to St. Augustine, freedom is not something apparent. A person who takes an action does not do so because God has decided it so previously. Free will is not dependent on such necessity. The fact that God foresees a man's free act does not make it determine the freedom of his choice. God's omniscience does not make human's acts necessary, for acts of the will by their very nature are always free acts for Augustine³⁸.

A momentous issue that also fell under the theological aspects of human freedom was for St. Augustine the question of the relationship between human freedom and grace. He elaborated the position on this case in the course of a sharp polemic with the views of Pelagius, who recognized that salvation depends solely on the will of man, and that God's grace is not needed to achieve this phenomena. In order to further understand the crux of St. Augustine's polemic against Pelagius, it is necessary to recall the essential elements of Pelagius' teaching. Well, he defines sin exclusively as the wrong use that man makes of his free judgments. God does not bestow grace to do good on someone who is guided by a wrong, erroneous desire, but grants grace just like a judge who forgives and pardons the guilt

³⁷ Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, III, 8 (PL 32).

³⁸ Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio*, III, III, 8 (PL 32).

committed³⁹. In other words, a person earns merit through good deeds, while grace itself is reduced by Pelagius to a gift that crowns earned merit. In his view, God's grace does not need to affect the will at all, since the will is not corrupted and therefore man does not need it. Nor is there any need for God's grace to act before a sin is committed, wishing to forestall it; if it does act, it is only after the sin, in order to erase it. St. Augustine did not share the Pelagian concept of grace. According to him, the essential characteristic of grace is its supernaturalness characteristic of all undeserved gifts of God. The purpose of these gifts is to make salvation possible for person who is in a fallen state. To grant the will self-imposed priority in obtaining salvation would be to diminish and, in a way, relegate to the background the role of God Himself. Although Pelagius recognized the need for grace, he understood it only as a kind of help given according to merit. However, in St. Augustine's view, God's grace would not be grace if it were given by Him for merit. Undoubtedly, the key to understanding St. Augustine's teaching on grace was the letters of St. Paul, especially the passage from the Letter to the Romans:

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [...]. Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification⁴⁰.

39 Cf. É. Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, p. 203–204.

40 Rom 3: 21–24; Rom 5: 16. Νυνι δε χωρις νομου δικαιοσυνη θεου πεφανερωται μαρτυρουμενη υπο του νομου και των προφητων. Δικαιοσυνη δε θεου δια πιστεωσ ιησου χριστου εις παντας και επι παντας τους πιστευοντας ου γαρ εστιν διαστολη. Παντες γαρ ημαρτον και υστερονται της δοξης του θεου. Δικαιουμενοι δωρεαν τη αυτου χαριτι δια της απολυτρωσεωσ της εν χριστω ιησου [...]. Και ουχ ως δι ενου αμαρτησαντος το δωρημα το μεν γαρ κριμα εξ ενου εις κατακριμα το δε χαρισμα εκ πολλων παραπτωματαωσ εις δικαιομα.

St. Augustine, like St. Paul, understood his own powerlessness and weakness resulting from a fallen nature that implores God for grace; he experienced her indispensability in his own life. His personal experiences alone spoke against Pelagius' overly optimistic doctrine. Grace also has a therapeutic meaning for people. This means that it does not destroy the power of free will. On the contrary, through grace, the free will is improved to perform good. These theologically complex relationships are presented and interpreted variously by researchers. At the forefront are mainly two interpretations. According to the first, grace interacts with man's free will in such a way that it leaves the will free to judge, following to the second interpretation, God's grace acts on him will in such an absolute way that it completely abolishes his free will⁴¹.

Augustine did not deal with this difficult issue directly. His statements, taken in their overall context, seem to prove that God's grace does not overrule human freedom. This is also the thesis of many scholars. For example, Étienne Gilson believes that grace acting on the will not only respects free judgment, but still gives it freedom. For freedom *libertas* is only the good use of free judgment *liberum arbitrium*, so the more the will is subjected to grace, the more healthy it is, and the healthier it is, the more free it is⁴². Supporters of the second interpretation mentioned above suggested that St. Augustine preached the truth of man's eternal destiny either to eternal happiness or eternal damnation. This would be supposed to be confirmed by some of his statements⁴³. Of course, this would in effect lead to an acceptance of fatalism and determinism. However, it is not excluded that statements of this type, especially out of context, can be explained by the temperament of St. Augustine, who — embroiled in long-standing disputes, sometimes fell into exaggeration and found it difficult to avoid exaggerations or even balancing on the edge of orthodox Church teaching.

41 Cf. A. Kasia, *Św. Augustyn*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1960, p. 73 (Filozofia Starożytna i Średniowieczna); J. Mausbach, *Die Ethik des hl. Augustinus*, vol. 1, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 1929, p. 25.

42 É. Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, p. 208–209.

43 See Augustinus, *De natura et gratia*, VII, 7 (PL 44).

Conclusions

The attempt made in this work to reconstruct the views of St. Augustine regarding the understanding of freedom, although intended only as a modest outline of them, entitles us to formulate several important conclusions and observations. The bishop of Hippo comprehensively considered the phenomenon of human free will from all possible aspects — psychological, strictly philosophical, theological. Searching for the essence of human freedom, the author realizes that he is still touching only shreds of the mysterious complexity of this phenomenon. Hence, he so often confesses his helplessness and admits his ignorance, and even takes the risk of balancing orthodoxy. Despite the ever-emerging new doubts, in St. Augustine's writings pertaining to the question of freedom, the constant, unchanging intuition persists that freedom is an essential characteristic of human being. Without free will, man would not be himself, and without it his meaningful existence cannot be imagined at all; it is the condition of humanity, the foundation of personal responsibility. Hence, the phenomenon of human freedom arouses constant admiration, amazement and determines true happiness. The philosopher also distinguished between intrinsic freedom, which is the ability to control oneself and can vary from person to person, and free will, which is substantively the same in all people. He also argued that the ultimate source of man's inner freedom is God, and that the more man affirms himself in the good, the more freedom he receives. Augustine believed that obedience to God's commands frees one from the burden of sin and leads to true freedom. There is no doubt that human freedom is imperfect, as it does not exclude moral weaknesses, and man is constantly experiencing the drama of making choices between good and evil. Freedom of the will, according to Augustine, is the ability to direct oneself, and its basis is intellectual cognition. In his view, freedom of the will is not absolute and unlimited, since man is not an absolute entity in any respect. Instead, man's freedom is limited, and this is due to his nature, which God envisioned as a gift of free will. He also disagreed with the Pelagian conception of grace, arguing that grace is a supernatural gift of God that makes salvation possible for those in a fallen state, and that it is not given

according to merit. Augustine's teaching on grace was influenced by his personal experience and understanding of St. Paul's letters. The philosopher suggests that the concept of freedom is fundamental to human nature and is necessary for human happiness. Augustine's approach to the concept of freedom can be seen as an exemplar of a philosophical inquiry that is grounded in thorough analysis, nuanced exploration, and a deep respect for the complexity of the phenomenon under examination. According to the author, the priceless gift of freedom poses a great challenge to both the individual and humanity as a whole. For man can choose good, but he can also choose evil. Freedom can be, as J. Tischner wrote, an unfortunate gift. How is it possible, St. Augustine continues to ask, that man equipped with reason nevertheless succumbs to ignorance and so often chooses evil? This dramatic question still troubles human minds today.

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Abstract

The concept of freedom in the thought of St. Augustine

The article discusses St. Augustine's arguments for the existence of free will and its theological contexts in relation to human nature. The bishop of Hippo refers to the philosophical works of Plato and Plotinus as well as texts from the New Testament, and in justifying the existence of free will points to the direct consciousness of man. Augustine was deeply convinced that this intrinsic action is necessary for valuation and therefore for moral judgment resulting from the choice between good and evil. Without free will, man would not be himself, it is the condition of humanity and the foundation of responsibility. In his writings, the author distinguished between the freedom from autonomy and self-determination; independent acts of will that are an ontological feature of human being. He believed that the ultimate source of man's inner freedom is God. Augustine was also aware that human freedom is imperfect, which manifests itself in ethical dilemmas related to decision-making. The human freedom is never absolute, as a result of man's fallen nature, which God has bestowed with the grace of goodness in the form of the gift of free will. Among other things, this accounted for Augustine's rejection of the concept of grace proposed by Pelagius, who denied its supernatural character claiming that it is given according to merit. Many scholars have attempted to interpret the issue of how grace affects the human will. Their statements seem to support the conclusion in light of which freedom of the will is not abrogated due to the action of grace.

Keywords: St. Augustine, free will, freedom, autonomy, grace, volition

Abstrakt

Pojęcie wolności w myśli św. Augustyna

W artykule omówiono argumentację św. Augustyna na rzecz istnienia wolnej woli oraz jej konteksty teologiczne w odniesieniu do natury ludzkiej. Biskup Hippony odwołuje się do dzieł filozoficznych Platona i Plotyna oraz tekstów z Nowego Testamentu, a uzasadniając istnienie wolnej woli wskazuje na bezpośrednią świadomość człowieka. Augustyn był głęboko przekonany, że to wewnętrzne działanie jest niezbędne do wartościowania, a tym samym do osądu moralnego wynikającego z wyboru między dobrem a złem. Bez wolnej woli człowiek nie byłby sobą, jest ona warunkiem człowieczeństwa i fundamentem odpowiedzialności. W swoich pismach autor odróżniał wolność od autonomii i samostanowienia; niezależne akty woli są ontologiczną cechą istoty ludzkiej. Wierzył, że ostatecznym źródłem wewnętrznej wolności człowieka jest Bóg. Augustyn był również świadomy, że ludzka wolność jest niedoskonała, co przejawia się w dylematach etycznych związanych z podejmowaniem decyzji. Ludzka wolność nigdy nie jest absolutna, co wynika z upadłej natury człowieka, którą Bóg obdarzył łaską dobroci w postaci daru wolnej woli. Wynikało to między innymi z odrzucenia przez Augustyna koncepcji łaski zaproponowanej przez Pelagiusza, który zaprzeczał jej nadprzyrodzonemu charakterowi, twierdząc, że jest ona udzielana według zasług. Wielu uczonych próbowało zinterpretować kwestię wpływu łaski na ludzką wolę. Ich wypowiedzi wydają się popierać wniosek, w świetle którego wolność woli nie jest zniesiona z powodu działania łaski.

Słowa kluczowe: św. Augustyn, wolna wola, wolność, autonomia, wolicjonalność