



Augustine's concept of Person in Martin Buber's personalism*

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Abstract

The question about man appears again in contemporary philosophy no longer as an eidetic, but as an existential question (if it ever ceased to be so). Martin Buber, Austrian-Jewish thinker (1878-1965), seeks with his thought to recover the value of man, adding to the existentialist influences of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and to the phenomenological influence of Husserl, the dialogic principle; that is, the necessity of the other as a You for the becoming of the I as a person. This last concept, person, has its origin in the philosophical discourse in the Trinitarian and Christological Theology of the Fathers of the Church, among them, Augustine of Hippo. In this

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article we want to make explicit the presence of this Augustinian conception of person in the personalism of Martin Buber. To do so, we will identify the most important characteristics of the person for the bishop of Hippo, which are explained in detail in his work *De Trinitate*, and then we will link these characteristics with those that are central to Buber's thought. Our hypothesis is that we can find in Buber's anthropology traces of Augustine's thought, influenced especially through existentialism and phenomenology.

Key words

St. Augustine, Person, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Relationship, Martin Buber.

El concepto de Persona de Agustín en el personalismo de Martín Buber

Resumen

La pregunta sobre el ser humano aparece nuevamente en la filosofía contemporánea ya no como una cuestión eidética, sino como una existencial (si es que alguna vez dejó de serlo). Martin Buber, pensador judío-austríaco (1878-1965), busca con su pensamiento volver a darle valor al ser humano, añadiendo a las influencias existencialistas de Kierkegaard y Nietzsche, y a las fenomenológicas de Husserl, el principio dialógico; es decir, la necesidad del otro como Tú para el devenir del Yo como persona. Este último concepto, persona, tiene su origen en el discurso filosófico de la Teología Trinitaria y Cristológica de los Padres de la Iglesia, entre ellos, Agustín de Hipona. En este artículo queremos explicitar la presencia de esta concepción agustiniana de persona en la antropología de Martin Buber. Para ello, identificaremos las características más importantes de la persona para el obispo de Hipona, que se explican detalladamente en su obra *De Trinitate*, y luego vincularemos estas características con

las que son centrales en el pensamiento de Buber. Nuestra hipótesis es que podemos encontrar en la antropología de Buber rastros del pensamiento de Agustín, influenciado especialmente a través del existencialismo y la fenomenología.

Palabras clave

San Agustín, Persona, Existencialismo, Fenomenología, Relación, Martin Buber.

The question about man appears again in philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, no longer as an eidetic question, but as an existential one (if it ever ceased to be so). This happened as a response to Hegelian idealism, in which man as a singular individual was relegated to a mere phenomenon of the development of the Absolute Spirit. Thinkers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were the first ones on defending the value of the individual. Both, although from paradigms that seem opposed, exalt with their philosophy the life of the existential present and the value of the individual above all massification. Later, and from an aspect closer to science, Husserl also gives to man a distinctive value, by using the term "person". This concept, person, enters the philosophical discourse through the Trinitarian and Christological Theology of the Fathers of the Church, among them Augustine of Hippo. From then on, the concept of Person undergoes some transformations, largely due to Boethius and the Scholastic, and when Kant takes up again, possibly from Brentano, in the use of this concept there is almost no distinction between Person and Individual, they are synonyms. However, strongly influenced by Jewish existentialism, and by phenomenology, Buber gives a new constitutive character to the term Person, which would seem to take up again the words that the Saint of Hippo used to refer to the Divine Persons, that is, the character of the relation. Contemporary to Husserl, Martin Buber also seeks with his thought to recover the value of man, adding to

the existentialist influences of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and to the phenomenological influence of Husserl (and Dilthey), the dialogical principle; that is, the neediness of the other as a You for the conformation of the I as a person. In this article we want to make explicit the presence of this Augustinian conception of person in Martin Buber's personalism. To do so, we will identify the most important characteristics of the person for the Bishop of Hippo, which are explained in detail in his work *De Trinitate*. Our hypothesis is that we can find in Buber's anthropology traces of Augustine's thought. Although Buber mentions Augustine several times in his work, there are no clear signs of a direct influence, therefore, our hypothesis is that this influence was mediated by existentialism and phenomenology. For this reason, in this article we will work on the trace of Augustinian thought fundamentally in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the part of existentialism, and in Husserl on the part of phenomenology. Finally, we will seek to link these characteristics present in Augustine's theology with the existential and phenomenological personalism of Buber, adding what is distinctive in the Austrian thinker, which is the relational-dialogical character, although it is, in a certain sense, already present in both existentialism and phenomenology.

1. The Person in the Trinitarian theology of St. Augustine

1.1. The origin of the concept "Person". A phenomenological-hermeneutical exegesis

When Augustine converted to Christianity the discussion among theologians and philosophers of the Church about God's way of being already had two centuries of development. The terms used to describe the being of God differed between the bishops from the East and from the West. While those from the East speak of "one essence and three hypostases", the Latins prefer to speak of "one essence, three persons".

This concept, person, arises from the Greek's *prosopon* (πρόσωπον), and was used in the framework of literary art and theater. Ancient poets, when telling stories, added characters so that the story could be told in the manner of a dialogue. The concept *persona* was used «as «roles» in order to dramatize the action (originally the word *prosopon*, and the later form *persona*, simply meant «role», the actor's mask)»¹. Thus, the first Christians read the Bible, and made a (proto) phenomenological - (proto) hermeneutical exegesis on it, and discovered throughout Sacred Scripture this tool: the action in the Bible also takes place in the form of dialogue, and God refers to himself in the plural, when he says, for example, "Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves. (Gen 1:26)" Who first refers to this is St. Justin, in the second century:

But when you hear the phrases of the prophets spoken as though from a character (ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου), do not suppose that they were spoken as from the inspired ones themselves, but rather from the divine Logos moving them. [...] This kind of thing is also to be seen amongst your own writers, the writer of the whole is one individual, but he sets out the speaking characters (πρόσωπα δὲ τὰ διαλεγόμενα)².

Justin, in this Apology, established for the early Christians a rule for reading and interpreting Holy Scripture. But moreover, he did it so by taking a tool of the time, and so he said that something similar could be seen among contemporary writers. «This rhetorical strategy— called *prosopopoeia* (literally "character-making")—was discussed extensively in ancient rhetorical handbooks»³. Justin's

1 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 181.

2 Justin, *Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 179. «Όταν δὲ τὰς λέξεις τῶν προφητῶν λεγομένας ὡς ἀπὸ προσώπου ἀκούητε, μὴ ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἐμπεινουσμένων λέγεσθαι νομίσητε, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοῦ κινούντος αὐτοὺς θείου λόγου. (...) ὅποιον καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν συγγραφέων ἰδεῖν ἔστιν, ἓνα μὲν τὸν τὰ πάντα συγγράφοντα ὄντα, πρόσωπα δὲ τὰ διαλεγόμενα παραφέροντα».

3 Mathew Bates, *The birth of the Trinity, Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31.

recognition of this rhetorical strategy allowed this biblical prosopological exegesis, but with an addition: the created "characters" are no longer contemplated as mere rhetorical devices, but as real persons. Thus, the term *prosopon*, which had referred to artistic characters, began to be used to speak of the Divine Persons.

The literary device of having dramatic roles appear that enliven the presentation with their dialogue reveals to the theologian the One who is performing the real role here, the Logos, the *prosopon*, the Person of the Word, which is no longer merely a role but a person⁴.

This prosopological reading can be found after Justin also in Tertullian (160-220), who introduced it to the Latin world. It is Tertullian who made for the first time the affirmation of God as *una substantia-tres personae*. For Tertullian, the concept of person was the right one to distinguish the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit, without, however, separating them from the same Divine nature.

By these passages, therefore, few as they are, the distinction within the Trinity is yet clearly set forth: for there is He who declares, the Spirit, and the Father to whom He declares, and the Son about whom He declares. So also with all other things that are uttered now by the Father about the Son or to the Son, now by the Son about the Father or to the Father, now by the Spirit: they establish each person in His own proper self⁵.

In *Contra Praxeas* Tertullian established more clearly than Justin the being of God as Trinity, and that the term person refers no longer to artistic characters, but to the reality of God, who, being one

4 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 182.

5 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* (Suffolk: Richard Clay and Sons, 1920), 54. «his itaque paucis tamen manifeste distinctio trinitatis exponitur: est enim ipse qui pronuntiat spiritus, et pater ad quem pronuntiat, et filius de quo pronuntiat. sic et cetera, quae nunc a patre de filio vel ad filium, nunc a filio de patre vel ad patrem, nunc a spiritu pronuntiantur, unamquamque personam in sua proprietate constituent».

substance, is also three persons, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Precisely Praxeas, a monistic theologian contemporary to Tertullian, affirmed that God was a single being, and that the terms Son and Holy Spirit referred only to ways of speaking to refer to the same being. In this work, Tertullian, using the exegetical tool proposed by Justin, marked the distinction between the Divine Persons, a distinction that does not imply separation. «[...] you ought to regard the other, I have already declared, "other" in respect of role (*personae*), not of nature, by way of distinction, not of division»⁶.

Taking into account Justin's proposal, and the continuation, and clarification, in the Latin world, of Tertullian we can affirm not only that «the Trinity emerged conceptually to a large degree through interpretative reading of the Old Testament, especially through a specific technique, prosopological exegesis»⁷; but also that the concept *persona* entered the theological-philosophical discourse in this quest to clarify the being of God, distinguishing the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit, without separating them. Trinity and person emerged conceptually together, and therefore the concept of person cannot be fully understood but from this origin.

1.2. St. Augustine and the Concept of the Person

Augustine's conception of the Trinity, which he develops in *De Trinitate*, was also accompanied by an exegetical proposal. This is the affirmation of the belonging of the three Divine Persons to the same being, which is God, and therefore, the equality among them, because neither the Son is inferior to the Father, nor the Holy Spirit inferior to the Father and the Son⁸. Augustine, who followed this

6 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 56. «accipere debeas iam professus sum, personae non substantiae nomine, ad distinctionem non ad divisionem».

7 Mathew Bates, *The birth of the Trinity, Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament*, 40.

8 Augustine, *The Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 2010), II, 1, 3 and 2, 5.

rule that was already affirmed by the Council of Nicaea, responded to Greek tendencies, such as that from Arius, which, using the term hypostasis, affirmed, as in the metaphysics of Plotinus⁹, the inferiority of the second and third hypostases to the first one. This hermeneutical methodology is directly related to the affirmation of Tertullian and the prosopological exegesis of Justin, since only by understanding God as a single substance, or essence, but also the distinction between the three Divine Persons that constitute that substance, is it possible to affirm the equality between them.

For this reason, we can also find in Augustine many passages in which the Bible is approached in a (proto) phenomenological - (proto) hermeneutical way. From this approach we can mark three fundamental characteristics of the concept of Person in the thought of the Bishop of Hippo: subsistence, relationship, and donation.

1.2.1. Person as subsistence

In his analysis of the Trinity and the terms used to name it, the author makes a clarification pertinent to the discussions of that time.

And so, for the sake of talking about inexpressible matters, that we may somehow express what we are completely unable to express, our Greek colleagues talk about one being [*essentia*], three substances (*substantiae*) [ὀπόστασις-*hypostasis*], while we Latins talk of one being [*essentia*] or substance (*substantia*), three persons, because as I have mentioned before, in our language, that is Latin, "being" and "substance" do not usually mean anything different¹⁰.

9 Cf. Plotinus. "Ennead IV, V y VI", *The Enneads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For more, Agustín Uña Juárez "Plotino: el sistema del Uno. Características generales", *Anales del seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, Vol. 19 (2002), 99-128.

10 Augustine, *The Trinity*, VII, 4, 7. «Itaque loquendi causa de ineffabilibus, ut fari aliquo modo possemus, quod effari nullo modo possumus, dictum est a nostris graecis una essentia, tres substantiae [ὀπόστασις- *hypostasis*]: a latinis autem, una essentia vel substantia, tres personae; quia sicut iam diximus non aliter in sermone nostro, id est, latino, essentia quam substantia solet intelligi».

The word substance comes from *substare* and for this reason it is a synonym of essence (*essentia*), because it refers to the same thing: what subsists by itself, and which has not its being in another. Why do the Greeks preferred the term hypostasis rather than the term person? This was fundamentally because of the artistic theatrical origin of the term *prosopon*, which tends to a conception close to the monism of Praxeas, in which the Son and the Holy Spirit are simply ways of calling the Father. On the other hand, the Greek term, as we have already said, made it difficult not to fall into an Arianism¹¹. Augustine's intention, therefore, was to seek the possibility of accepting both, not only making the distinction between the term used by the Greeks and the one used by the Latins, but also re-signifying the Greek term. Again, it was from the exegetical reading, and from the rule already proposed above, that the author proposed this resignification, in which we can also identify an existential phenomenological analysis of God's being.

But if it is one thing for God to be (*esse*), another for him to subsist (*subsistere*) as it is one thing for him to be, another for him to be Father or be Lord, then substance will no longer be substance because it will be relationship¹².

Although later the author ended up choosing the word person over *substantia*, because it avoided confusion, this exegetical proposal of not defining «the person by substance, understood as sub-stare, but as subsistere»¹³ possessed an intuition that marked the way in

11 Cf. Luis Arias "Introducción", *Obras de San Agustín en edición bilingüe, Tomo V* (Madrid: BAC, 1956).

12 Augustine, *The Trinity*, VII, 4, 9. «Si autem aliud est Deo esse, aliud subsistere, sicut aliud Deo esse, aliud Patrem esse vel Dominum esse; quod enim est, ad se dicitur, Pater autem ad Filium et Dominus ad servientem, creaturam dicitur: relative ergo subsistit, sicut relative gignit et relative dominatur. Ita iam substantia non erit substantia, quia relativum erit».

There is a Note in the translation with Augustine's addition: That he is, is said of God with reference to himself; that he is Father is said with reference to Son, and that he is Lord is said with reference to the creation that serves him; so on this supposition, he subsists by way of relationship, just as he begets by way of relationship and lords it by way of relationship.

13 Tarsicio Jañez, «Ser Persona» en San Agustín. Dinamismo vital hecho relación a imagen de la Trinidad», *Estudio Agustiniano*, Vol. 56 (2021): 453.

which we must try to understand God. The being of God can only be approached from his concrete existential manifestation, and not at the level of his essence.

This allowed us to approach the concept of person not from the essential, but from the existential perspective.

Richard of Saint Victor, in contrast [to Boethius], at the beginning of the medieval period, found a concept of person take from Christian thought; he defines person as "spiritualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia", a distinct and incommunicable existence of a spiritual nature¹⁴.

The classical definition of person given by Boethius cannot help to understand the total dimension of the personal being, because it is given from the level of essence. On the contrary, Richard of St. Victor, taking Augustine's intuition, defined the person from the existential perspective. Only from this perspective can we really understand the personal dimension, not only of God's being, but also of man. This is the intuition that reached the philosophy of the nineteenth century, which is situated on a different framework from that of Boethius, and later, scholasticism.

1.2.2. Person as relationship

This characteristic that we marked previously, person as subsistence, and the intuition of approaching the personal dimension from the existential perspective lead St. Augustine, as we saw in the previous quotation, to affirm the person as relationship. Substance understood no longer as *substare*, but as *subsistere*, is understood by Augustine as relation.

14 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 189.

Augustine "places the metaphysical concept of "relation" at the heart of his discourse in order to reconcile in God the unity of nature (aseity) and the trinity of persons, that is, to illuminate how in a single essence each of the three divine persons subsist¹⁵.

This characteristic of relation, which in Aristotle was accidental, in Augustine is the being of the divine Persons, it constitutes them: they are relation. Accidents can only say (a) part, therefore in God the relation is no accident, because it says the being of the Person, and therefore we call them so; the Father: Father, and the Son: Son.

But since the Father is only called so because he has a Son, and the Son is only called so because he has a Father, these things are not said substance-wise (*substantiam*), as neither is said with reference to itself but only with reference to the other. Nor are they said modification-wise (*accidens*), because what is signified by calling them Father and Son belongs to them eternally and unchangeably. Therefore, although being Father is different from being Son, there is no difference of substance, because they are not called these things substance-wise but relationship-wise (*relativum*); and yet this relationship is not a modification (*relativum non est accidens*), because it is not changeable¹⁶.

15 Tarsicio Jañez, "«Ser Persona» en San Agustín. Dinamismo vital hecho relación a imagen de la Trinidad", 453. The quote is from Rusell J. De Simeone, "Dios Uno, Dios Trinidad", en: J. Oroz Reta - J.A. Galindo Rodrigo. *El pensamiento de San Agustín para el hombre de hoy. II. Teología dogmática* (Valencia: Edicep, 2005), 204-206.

16 Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 5, 6. «Sed quia et Pater non dicitur Pater nisi ex eo quod est ei Filius, et Filius non dicitur nisi ex eo quod habet Patrem, non secundum substantiam haec dicuntur; quia non quisque eorum ad; se ipsum, sed ad invicem atque ad alterum ista dicuntur: neque secundum accidens, quia. et quod dicitur Pater, et quod dicitur Filius, aeternum atque incommutabile est eis. Quamobrem quamvis diversum sit Patrem esse et Filium esse, non est tamen diversa substantia: quia hoc non secundum substantiam dicuntur, sed secundum relativum; quod tamen relativum non est accidens, quia non est mutabile».

To be a Person, therefore, does not say the substance of God, because it cannot be understood separately from the other Persons. But neither does it say person by way of accident, because it does not change, and it could not change. In this way it is possible to save the unity of God in one essence, but also to affirm the trinitarian character of it. Person says, then, the relationship; and we cannot separate the being-person (the personality) from the name, which says the relationship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"The names Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are said not according to the substance (substantially), but according to the relation (relatively)." There is real distinction between the persons (subsistent relations) in God, but there is no real objective (adequate, proper) distinction between aseity (*essentia* divine nature) and the persons, between «*esse in*» and «*esse ad aliud*». «*Esse in*» includes the «*esse ad*», or projection «*ad aliud*». The foundation of «*esse ad aliud*» is to be sought in «*esse in*». But how could «*esse in*» be understood without «*esse ad aliud*», i.e., it would be an empty «*esse in*». The subsistent relations in God are persons¹⁷.

Although we affirm in God only one nature, only one God (Deut. 6, 4), which is the foundation of the Divine Persons, they can only be understood from their relative character. But not only they, but the very nature of God remains empty if we separate it from the personalities that compose it. «Now exactly the same arguments hold in the case of persons; it is not one thing for God to be and another for him to be person, but altogether the same»¹⁸. Therefore, when Jesus says, "I and the Father are one (Jn. 10,30)" Augustine explains it in this way: «He said both 'one' and 'are'; 'one' in terms of being, because he is the same God; 'are' in terms of their relationship, because one

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17 Tarsicio Jañez, "«Ser Persona» en San Agustín. Dinamismo vital hecho relación a imagen de la Trinidad", 459.

18 Augustine, *The Trinity*, VII, 6, 11. "Nam et in personis eadem ratio est: non enim aliud est Deo esse, aliud personam esse, sed omnino idem."

is Father, the other Son»¹⁹. Again, person does not say the relation accidentally, but from the constitution, not in the way of essence, but in the way of subsistence. Person is subsistent relation.

1.2.3. Person as donation

If in God being and being a person are the same thing, and being a person is being in relationship, we can say that, phenomenologically speaking, what is proper to each Person in the Trinity is the abandonment of oneself to the other.

To put it even more concretely: the first Person begets, not as though the act of begetting a Son was something added on to the complete Person, but rather he is the act of begetting, of surrendering himself, of pouring himself out. The Person is identical with this act of selfgiving²⁰.

God's being, which is pure act, as constituted by his being-person, is being-for-the-other. The Father is for the Son and the Son is for the Father, and both together are for the Holy Spirit. The latter, being for the Father and the Son, is also for the world, which is why Augustine gives him the name of Gift of God, «who works all ways in all men»²¹. However, this act of donation, being identified with the being of God, is nothing other than the affirmation of each Divine Person in his being. Each Divine Person affirms his own in this act of self-giving. The self of the person is only affirmed in the giving of itself to the you. For this reason, the person cannot be understood as «a self-enclosed substance, but rather the phenomenon of total relatedness»²², which in its very act of being, donates itself. Person is donation.

19 Augustine, *The Trinity*, VII, 6, 12. "Et unum dixit; et sumus: unum, secundum essentiam, quod idem Deus; sumus, secundum relativum, quod ille Pater, hic Filius."

20 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 184.

21 Augustine, *The Trinity*, IV, 20, 29. «qui operatur omnia in omnibus»

22 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 185.

Therefore anyone who can understand the generation of the Son from the Father as timeless should also understand the procession of the Holy Spirit from them both as timeless. And anyone who can understand that when the Son said, As the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son to have life in himself (Jn 5:26), he did not mean that the Father gave life to the Son already existing without life, but that he begot him timelessly in such a way that the life which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave it, should also understand that just as the Father has it in himself that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him, so he gave to the Son that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him too, and in both cases timelessly; and thus that to say that the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Son is something which the Son has from the Father²³.

We cannot understand this gift as a temporal act, because if the Father is eternal, His personal character of being-gift is also eternal with Him. For this reason, the Father is always a gift for the Son whom He begets and for the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Him. And the same is true of the Son, who is always gift to the Father, and for the Holy Spirit who also proceeds from Him. This timeless reality of the gift manifests it as the pure act of God and, therefore, as the being of God. This act of gift is fully manifested in creation.

Thus it is the creator of all these invisible seeds who is the creator of all things, since whatever comes into our ken by a process of birth receives the beginnings of its course from hidden seeds, and

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23 Augustine, *The Trinity*, XV, 26, 47. «Quapropter, qui potest intelligere sine tempore generationem Filii de Patre, intelligat sine tempore processionem Spiritus sancti de utroque. Et qui potest intelligere in eo quod ait Filius: Sicut habet Pater vitam in semetipso, sic dedit Filio vitam habere in semetipso; non sine vita existenti iam Filio vitam Patrem dedisse, sed ita eum sine tempore genuisse, ut vita quam Pater Filio gignendo dedit, coaeterna sit vitae Patris qui dedit: intelligat sicut habet Pater in semetipso ut de illo procedat Spiritus sanctus, sic dedisse Filio ut de illo procedat idem Spiritus sanctus, et utrumque sine tempore; atque ita dictum Spiritum sanctum de Patre procederé, ut intelligatur, quod etiam procedit de Filio, de Patre esse Filio»

derives its due growth and final distinction of shape and parts from what you could call the original programming of those seeds²⁴.

For this reason, we cannot understand God's action, which is his being, only as inward but also outward, toward all creatures who receive their being from God as a gift. This happens in a special way in the human being, who is created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, and that is why the Bible says «Let us make»²⁵. Because man is created in the image and likeness, there is in him a desire for relationship, a tension towards relationship, especially with God.

Therefore, if in God, his first attribute in relation to the world is that of harmony, in the case of man, his first constitutive and essential attribute is relational, here is that Genesis highlights that before man is man, in the mind of God he already depended, he was already made in relationship, and in dialogical relationship²⁶.

Being created in the image of a God who is communion, there is in the human being a tendency to live in communion. However, in spite of having this intuition, the bishop of Hippo, when he wants to speak of the human being in *De Trinitate*, speaks of the image of the Trinity in the interior of the human being, which leaves this anthropological proposal undeveloped. Moreover, this decision allowed an erroneous interpretation on the part of religious piety and a narrowing of the reality of the human person, «which in this narrowness ultimately loses the Thou as well»²⁷. The history of philosophy ended up uniting the concepts of Person and Individual, and we have here one of the

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24 Augustine, *The Trinity*, III, 8, 13. «Invisibilibium enim seminum creator, ipse creator est omnium rerum: quoniam quaecumque nascendo ad oculos nostros exeunt, ex occultis seminibus accipiunt progrediendi primordia, et incrementa debita magnitudinis distinctionesque formarum ab originalibus tanquam regulis sumunt».

25 Cf. Gen. 1,26; Augustinus, *The Trinity*, VII, 6, 12.

26 Daniel Brousek, «El ser humano en clave de relación en el De Trinitate de San Agustín» (Master diss., Facultad de Teología Pontificia y civil de Lima, 2020), 72.

27 Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 194.

causes. However, this intuition of the human being as being-in-relation, in the image and likeness of a Triune God endured, and that is why we can find these ideas of Augustine present in personalism, in this case, that of Buber.

2. The Presence of Augustinian thought in the Anthropology of Martin Buber

2.1. The means through which Augustine reaches Buber: Existentialism and Phenomenology

The thoughts of Augustine have always been studied and valued in philosophy and the history of thought, especially in the themes pertaining to the question of the human being and God. However, since the 7th-8th century the imprint of thought moved away from the existential intuitions of the bishop of Hippo and began to seek answers in the world of abstractions and logical discourses. The clearest example of this is scholasticism. The question of the individual at this time, to which Buber dedicated his doctoral dissertation, falls into the metaphysical discussions about totality and the principle of individuation. With modern philosophy the thoughts of Augustine, especially in relation to interiority and the subject, reappears in Western thought. "The act of reflexivity in *Confessions* foreshadows the modern understanding of subjectivity from Descartes, through Kant and Hegel, to Kierkegaard"²⁸.

After the appearance of idealism, first in Kant and finally in Hegel, Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher, rehearses in his thoughts and works a proposal to re-understand the human being and his relationship with God. The way through which the Danish philosopher develops his thought and confirms his proposal allows us to recognize in him the Augustinian influence.

28 Lourdes Flamarique, «La fenomenología de la interioridad en Agustín de Hipona y su interpretación existencial en Kierkegaard y Heidegger», *Anuario Filosófico*, Vol. 49 Núm. 2 (2016): 318.

Through the impact of the heritage of Augustine on post-Trentine Catholics, Lutheran confessionalists, pietists of all kinds, heterodox mystics, and thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, Augustinian concepts and modes of thought were simply part of the air that Kierkegaard breathed. Even though Augustine's influence on Kierkegaard was often not direct, Augustine was responsible for much of the framework in which Kierkegaard thought²⁹.

Kierkegaard's philosophy is formed in an environment where the thoughts of Hippo's Bishop were an important part of philosophical discourses. Thereby, the Danish thinker takes up the intuition of the bishop of Hippo in relation to the subject and his relationship with God. Kierkegaard's existentialism is born from this (re) thinking of human being's relationship with God. «Augustine and Kierkegaard shared the conviction that the desire to know and experience God was inextricably bound together with the individual's quest for self-transparency and self-integration in a fractured and opaque world»³⁰.

It is worth adding here the figure of Nietzsche, who recognizes himself as Pascal's successor³¹. The french philosopher had converted in the last years of his life to Jansenism, a Christian movement inspired by the texts of St. Augustine. Therefore, we can also find in Nietzsche's vitalism a certain influence of Augustine's thought and imprint, especially from the recognition of human poverty and incompleteness, and therefore, the existential/vital need to overcome it.

On the other hand, the imprint of Hippo's Bishop is also taken and interpreted by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. The

29 Lee Barret, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing; 2013), 3.

30 Lee Barret, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard*, 2.

31 Lucie Lebreton, «Nietzsche, lecteur de Pascal: 'le seul chrétien logique'», *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, no. 2 (2017): 175-194. Also José Thomaz Brum, "Pascal e Nietzsche", *cadernos Nietzsche*, 8 (2000): 35-41, consultada en 20 de octubre, 2022. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-philosophique-2017-2-page-175.htm>.

father of phenomenology takes up not only the Augustinian imprint of reflexivity but also, from self-consciousness, the same idea of *intentio*, which Augustine works on in *De Trinitate*, and is central to Husserl's thought. We can say that «the Augustinian concept of *intentio* has many similarities with [Husserl's] current concept of intentionality, such that we can say that Augustine offers, from a historical point of view, a considerable impetus to the enterprise of describing subjectivity»³².

Having made this necessary mediation, in which we make clear the influence of the African saint on existentialism and phenomenology, we will move on to show how, from these two philosophical trends, we can find in Martin Buber and his conception of the person the influence of the Doctor of the Church.

2.2. The personalism of Martin Buber

Although the Austrian philosopher was not as prolific as Augustine, his work, including books, essays, lectures, etc., is quite extensive. For this reason, for this article we will take especially the work *I and Thou*, and some articles that followed it and serve to clarify some things that were not clear in the first work mentioned above. However, we will use as a common thread a less worked essay from Buber, *The Way of Man according to the teachings of Hasidism*, from which we will also be able to show the influence of this Jewish religious movement in the author's thought. This common thread is sustained in the last three titles of the essay, which respond to a passage from the Mishnah: «He [also] used to say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for my own self [only], what am I? And if not now, when?»³³.

32 Sávio Peres, San Agustín y la fenomenología: la concepción de la atención, *Rev. abordagem gestalt*, vol.24 (2018): 447.

33 פֶּהַח הָיָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְפֶהַח. רַבִּי שִׁמְשׁוֹן בְּרֵךְ שֶׁלְּפָנָיו. [אִם אֵין לְעַצְמִי, מִי לְעַצְמִי; מִי לְעַצְמִי, מִי לְעַצְמִי; וְאִם אֵין עַתָּה, מִתְּנָה?]

2.2.1. Person as subsistence: "Begin with Oneself"

For Buber, we cannot develop ourselves as persons if we do not first recognize ourselves as masters of our own existence, and therefore responsible for it. Augustine's existentialist intuition in Buber is assumed as a developing stage of personhood. We do not speak of personhood in terms of essence, but in terms of recognition and appropriation. «The essential [*Es kommt einzig darauf an*] thing is to begin with oneself, and at this moment a man has nothing in the world to care about than this beginning»³⁴. It is not a passive but an active beginning insofar as the human being must appropriate his own existence.

We can certainly find the influence of Kierkegaard in this statement. In fact, in the article that Buber dedicated to comment on the thoughts of the Danish philosopher in relation to the singular individual, he himself says: «The category of the Single One [*Einzelne*], too, means not the subject or «man», but concrete singularity; yet not the individual who is detecting his existence, but rather the person who is finding himself.»³⁵ Inspired by the Danish philosopher, Buber affirms that this beginning is not only recognition, but an attitude. One cannot understand the «I», the essence, but from its existential character, from its way of subsistence.

«The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude».³⁶ The world of the human being is defined by the existential attitude he has at each moment, and the human being can only be understood from this attitude. "Thus the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in

34 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism* (Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill, 2002), 21.

35 Martin Buber, *Between man and man* (London-NewYork: Routledge, 2002), 48.

36 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 53.

the basic word I-It."³⁷ There is no I but being, existing. And only if we analyze the way in which it exists, we can understand it. Here, too, Nietzsche's influence resounds in Buber, about whom he writes in his work *What is Man*, and says that for him «man is «the animal that is not yet established». That is, he is not a determined, unambiguous, final species like the others, he is not a finished form, but something that is only becoming»³⁸. The human being is a becoming, he is not defined, determined. He is determined by his existence; his personal character develops in his existence.

The human person, in order to become a person, must first assume his existence as his own and as entirely his own.

But in order that a man may be capable of this great feat, he must first find his way from the casual, accessory elements of his existence to his own self; he must find his own self, not the trivial ego of the egotistic individual, but the deeper self of the person living in a relationship to the world³⁹.

The way in which the human being can be fulfilled as a person is through the appropriation of the self. But this appropriation is not as an abstract individual, separated from his existential constitution, but precisely as a person who lives-in-relation-with another.

2.2.2. Person as relationship.

“Not To Be Preoccupied With Oneself”

«Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons»⁴⁰. Of the two attitudes that constitute the human world, marked by the basic words I-You and I-It, only from the first one does the human

37 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 53.

38 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 177.

39 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 22.

40 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 112.

being become a person. «The I of the basic word I-You appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity.»⁴¹ By becoming a person, the human being becomes conscious of his own subjectivity and can then appropriate himself. Therefore, these two moments, the appropriation of oneself and the encounter with the other, cannot be understood as separate moments. The appropriation of oneself as a person becomes possible only through the relationship with the other. Again, we can note the influence of the Danish philosopher on the tension that constitutes the human being as a person.

In other words, for Kierkegaard, man cannot exist if he is not in dialogue with God from its interiority. Martin Buber, concerned with the idea of man in the world, could not leave aside the thoughts of the Danish philosopher and followed this path opened by Kierkegaard⁴².

For human beings to exist, they must enter into dialogue with God. Relationship with God is «the relation for whose sake man exists»⁴³. But, even though this relationship is given just by the fact of existing, the human being must turn into that relationship, and embrace it. The human being must become a Single One to become a «you» to God. Although the influence here was really strong, in fact, the strongest in this idea of man as a realization to be made⁴⁴, Buber criticized Kierkegaard's description of how this relationship with God should occur.

This relation is an exclusive one, the exclusive one, and this means, according to Kierkegaard, that it is the excluding relation, excluding

41 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 112.

42 Catalina Dobre, "Søren Kierkegaard y Martin Buber: el mundo de la relación y el diálogo.", *Revista de Filosofía Universidad Iberoamericana*, 135 (2013): 157.

43 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 58.

44 Cfr. Maurice Friedmann, *The Life of Dialogue* (Londres-Nueva York: Chicago University Press, 2002), 35.

all others; more precisely, that it is the relation which in virtue of its unique, essential life expels all other relations into the realm of the unessential⁴⁵.

According to Buber's lecture and interpretation from Kierkegaard's thought, the Danish philosopher reduces human's relation to be only with God. In fact, Buber starts the essay comparing Augustine and Pascal with Kierkegaard. Augustine had his mother, and Pascal his sister, but Kierkegaard decided to renounce his wife to embrace the solitariness that the relationship with God required. For Buber, the relation with other people and with the world do not alienate man from God; in fact, for Judaism they are one of the most important ways of relating with God, through God's creation.

Turning is capable of renewing a man from within and changing his position in God's world, [...] it means that by a reversal of his whole being, a man who had been lost in the maze of selfishness, where he had always set himself as his goal, finds a way to God, that is, a way to the fulfillment of the particular task for which he, this particular man, has been destined by God⁴⁶.

Not to be preoccupied with oneself means to human beings to turn to the other to discover the goal of their own life. Therefore, man can escape selfishness to achieve its fulfillment, this is, to become a person in the encounter with the other, in the world. This is a difference, according to Buber, between Judaism and Christianity. While Christianity marked as the most important aim for men the salvation of its own soul, in Judaism the aim for man is to serve God's Creation by working in the becoming of God's Kingdom. We can deduce that when Buber talked about Christianity, he was referring to Kierkegaard.

45 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 58.

46 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 24.

Man becomes Person by encountering the other. However, not every meeting gets man to become Person, but only the real meeting, that it's made with the whole being.

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter⁴⁷.

The encounter with the other in this real meeting, by saying You, is constitutive for the becoming as an I; not as an individualistic I, but as a Person. But, as we can see, these two moments happen simultaneously. Man requires a You to become an I, and only as an I he can say You. Both states are part of the same event, the encounter in which actual life happens.

We can also find this intuition in Husserl thoughts. In fact, one of the things Buber values the most from Husserl is that he states «that man's essence is not to be found in isolated individuals, for a human being's bonds with his generation and his society are of his essence⁴⁸. Husserl understands that intersubjectivity is not just a superficial quality from men, but «a subject that touches the being of entities»⁴⁹. Intersubjectivity, for Husserl, is where it reveals the meaning of the I, because it is where it can recognize itself as being-towards-other.

Something that exists is in intentional communion with something else that exists. It is an essentially unique connectedness, an actual community and precisely the one that makes transcendently possible the being of a world, a world of men and things⁵⁰.

47 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

48 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 190.

49 Francisco Leocata, "Idealismo y personalismo en Husserl", *Sapientia*, 55/208 (2000): 423.

50 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 129.

Intentionality and intersubjectivity are related because what causes the intersubjectivity is the intentionality, the fact that everything that exists does it tending towards the other. «The being is therefore, and in an eminent way, a personal being»⁵¹. The most eminent way of being is the personal being, a way only man can achieve, by embracing its own life as an intersubjective life.

Therefore, for Buber we cannot understand the human person without its encounter with the other. We cannot understand human society without contemplating this as the most important, constitutive, event in human life. Individualism and collectivism had shown themselves as systems that forgot human beings as persons. Men get to live in society to reach for its life meaning or happiness, but both answers have misunderstood man. To become a person, «It is obvious that such an event can only take place if the person is stirred up as a person»⁵². In individualism, man is thought of as a self-sufficient being that must assert himself in its existence (and the other is just useful for this assertion). Collectivism invites men to forget themselves and join the mass, to overcome isolation. «In both cases the person is incapable of breaking through to the other: there is genuine relation only between genuine persons»⁵³. The problem is below the incongruences every ordering-system has. Buber insisted that the problem is the understanding both and every system had about human beings. Human beings must be understood from the fundamental fact of its existence. «The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man»⁵⁴. The fundamental act is the encounter, in which man became a person. Of course this meeting is not pursued by the selfishness of the individual, but by the proper way of living as a person, who, «in his relationship to the world, should be careful not to set himself as his aim»⁵⁵.

51 Francisco Leocata, "Idealismo y personalismo en Husserl", 429.

52 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 239.

53 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 239.

54 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 240.

55 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 26.

2.2.3. Person as donation. "Here Where One Stands"

For Buber, as for Hasidism, «no encounter with a being or a thing in the course of our life lacks a hidden significance»⁵⁶. Each meeting, however insignificant and everyday it may seem, could be for man the way of achieving the fulfillment of its life. The challenge here is to be really present in what is happening in each moment of life. That is the only way to meet with reality, with other persons and with God. Once again, there is no renounce to the world in the encounter with God, but «the total acceptance of the present»⁵⁷. Donation is presence. For man can only say You when its presence in what is happening in its own life.

The environment which I feel to be the natural one, the situation which has been assigned to me as my fate, the things that happen to me day after day, the things that claim me day after day — these contain my essential task and such fulfillment of existence as is open to me⁵⁸.

Each moment is the moment of saying You, of entering in the real meeting. To become a person is not a one time development, or some growth man makes in special situations. Becoming a person is an everyday task. This is the responsibility of man, the only way of embracing its own life, to give it to the redemption of the world, and own, in its everyday work. Responsibility (*Verantwortung*) is always an answer (*Antwort*).

Only then, true to the moment, do we experience a life that is something other than a sum of moments. We respond (*antworten*) to the moment, but at the same time we respond (*antworten*)

56 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 29. ⁵

57 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 126.

58 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 28.

on its behalf, we answer (*verantworten*) for it. A newly-created concrete reality has been laid in our arms; we answer (*verantwortest*) for it⁵⁹.

In embracing its own life in the responsibility of answering to each moment man can achieve its fulfillment, and his life becomes more than a sum of moments. To be present in each moment is to answer with life. Presence is donation.

Each real meeting is preceded by love and plenified in love. But only man that is present in what is happening can really love. «The loving man is one who grasps non-relatively each thing he grasps, [...]at the moment of experience nothing else exists, nothing save this beloved thing... »⁶⁰. Loving man donate himself to the encounter, to the one that is meeting, and gives exclusivity to it. Love is understood here as much more than a feeling. It is precisely this possibility of encounter, of saying You, to achieve the redemption of the world and his own fulfillment as a person. Love is the essential thing about meeting, because «love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its 'content' or object; it is between I and You. [...] Love is responsibility of an I for a You»⁶¹. Only the man who loves, then, can meet the world, because only by loving can he perceive the originality of each thing. This encounter can only happen for the loving man, who acts from that love:

Every true deed is a loving deed. All true deeds arise from contact with a beloved thing and flow into the universe. Any true deed brings, out of lived unity, unity into the world. Unity is not a property of the world but its task. To form unity out of the world is our never-ending work⁶².

59 Martin Buber, *Between man and man*, 60.

60 Martin Buber, *Pointing the way* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 28-29.

61 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

62 Martin Buber, *Pointing the way*, 30.

In order for man to act in a true way, he must do so *in* and *from* love, which makes it possible to embrace his responsibility and become a person. In his unity man becomes a person, because unity is the embracing of himself, to meet with the world in the responsibility of the answer. That is why it is a never-ending work, because it's an every-day work.

But love reaches its completeness in the encounter between persons. It is regard to love to say You, but that love is completed and plenified when man is answer back, becoming a You for another I. The first love is still in man, but it is his predisposition to openness and presence, his moving towards the encounter. With the world, this act will remain in a certain mystery, but charged with the power of the encounter that redeems. With people the encounter will gain its fullness in the *between*. «Feelings one 'has'; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man. but man dwells in his love»⁶³. Love is, for Buber, a universal effect. Just as man dwells (*steht*) in the encounter, so he also dwells (*steht*) in love. The person with whom man encounters gains, as in the case of things of the world, exclusivity, and is freed and liberated; is, ultimately, redeemed in his originality. And as an answer to the originality of the other, true responsibility arises in him.

This responsibility is, precisely, to redeem. «God wants to come to his world, but he wants to come to it through man. This is the mystery of our existence, the superhuman chance of mankind»⁶⁴. Redemption is possible only through man. By becoming a person man lets God into his life, by making effective its reality as *image and likeness*, precisely, as person. Through man God can get in the world, that is redemption. By the encounter man has with the world and with other persons, God gets in its Creation, redeeming it. But

63 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

64 Martin Buber, *The way of Man according to the teaching of Hasidism*, 30.

for that to happen, man must embrace himself, to live towards the other, fully present in every moment of his life.

Conclusion

The question about man was one of the most important leitmotifs for the development of Augustine's and Buber's philosophy. Both, also, affirmed with conviction that man cannot be understood if God is taken out of the discourse. In regarding to the concept of person, we have unveiled the origin of the use of that concept in the philosophical discourse; This one is not in the Roman Law, nor in the well-known Boethius' thesis, but in the theological attempts to say God's being. It is in the prosopological analysis of the Bible in the first centuries where the concept of person arises over others in the description of God's Beings. This opens a new way of understanding person, and a new way of understanding the concept of person as the concept used by philosophers to propose a different anthropology from that of latest modern philosophies, such as individualism and collectivism. Person is not, as happened to be in the Aquinas, synonym of individual. Person is subsistent relation and donation, as Augustine wrote in *De Trinitate*.

About Augustine's influence in Buber, we know Buber have read Augustine, because Augustine's name appears in some works and letters from Buber; but we don't know if it is this work from Augustine, *De Trinitate*, what Buber have read. It seems more certain to say that this ideas from Augustine reach Buber through other philosophers, such as Kierkegaard and Husserl, but also Nicholas of Cusa⁶⁵, and other modern philosophers. This influence, although mediated by others, is undeniable, and place Buber in a brand new personalism,

65 Buber's PhD dissertation is about the answers of Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Böhme to the problem of the individuation. To see more, Buber M. (2012). *Niccolò Cusano e Jakob Böhme. Per la storia del problema dell'individuazione*, Critic edition in charge of Francesco Ferrari.

that is grounded not in Aquinas' thought, as french-catholic personalism, but in Augustine's thought, and in the real origin of the concept of person.

Finally, we cannot reduce Buber's personalism only to this influence. In fact, the same text I've chosen to use as a guideline in this article bring to us in Buber's word the teachings from Hasidism. Jewish thought, through Hasidism but also through other Jewish philosophers, such as Rosenzweig, Landauer and Cohen, has been the greatest influence on Buber. All the ideas that we recollected in this article had also been influenced by the Jewish thought. To give one example, we can find in the I-You proposal from Rosenzweig many of the intuitions Buber developed in his work⁶⁶. So, it's clear that we cannot reduce Buber's personalism only to Augustine's influence, through existentialisms and phenomenology. Nevertheless, neither can we fully understand Buber's personalism without taking in account this influence.

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