

SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HERMENEUTICAL UNIVERSALISM

Serhiy Kvit,

*PhD, Professor, President of the National University
of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (Kyiv, Ukraine)*

Abstract: *In his essay the author touches upon the question of the practical application of the principles of philosophical hermeneutics. Drawing upon the conceptual teachings of St. Augustine and his followers, particularly Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Serhiy Kvit explicates the possibility in principle of achieving comprehension, mutual understanding, and tolerance, on the basis of humaneness. The author also discusses the use of hermeneutic strategy for solving global society's problems of a mass communication nature.*

Key words: philosophical hermeneutics, inner word of truth, Christian determination of faith, phenomenology, global mutual understanding.

The assertion that philosophical hermeneutics are universal in meaning requires further interpretation not only in the theoretical realm, but also from a practical point of view. That is why attention focused on Saint Augustine's writings may help clarify many important theses "first hand". In this essay I propose an in-depth look at the figure of this thinker, in his capacity as the founder of philosophical hermeneutics. It is of prime importance to read St. Augustine's works not only in their religious, or historical and philosophical contexts, but also with a view to looking for answers to modern challenges, particularly in the search for the all-important quality of human and global mutual understanding.

St. Augustine belongs to a circle of key thinkers of European civilization. That is why an in-depth study of his heritage is important not only for theology, but also for branches of scholarship such as communicative philosophy and the social and political sciences. Readiness to engage in conversation and an ability to listen to and understand one's interlocutor in order to together seek out and find the truth, or to answer questions not existing prior to the conversation's start, but born in its process are the skills pertaining to factors that influence the survival of our civilization. What are we looking for? Terms used by St. Augustine, such as "the true inner word" belonging to God, have an aesthetic value that remind us of things eternal also important to us in our vain era.

Philosophical hermeneutics are based on a metaphorical hermeneutical circle, which (according to H. G. Gadamer), represents discourse aimed not at making an opponent change his or her mind, but at developing "a common language" [1], that is, a search for the truth. J. Gronden focuses attention on the special meaning that Gadamer accords Saint Augustine's writings in defining the sense of philosophical hermeneutics, in the process reducing it to a concept of the inner word [2], which belongs to no language and can be found in a search for the truth. According to Gronden, Gadamer attributes St. Augustine with encroaching hermeneutics on universality [3].

The Inner Word of Truth

The inner word belongs to St. Augustine's clearly and accurately presented inner, or spiritual world, whose description includes mentions of inner nourishment [4], inner justice (p. 39), mental vision (p. 109), spiritual sense (p. 114), mental strength of mind (p. 121), the human Within (p. 125, 135), inward shelter (p. 140), internal form (p. 188), and the inner ear (p. 217). In his *Confessions*, the author shows his "inner self", inaccessible to the physical "eye", "ear", and "understanding" (p. 173). In contrast to the unstable outer world where we live, inner life is permanent. The latter opens itself to the eternal spirit, which is a sign of humaneness. This conception includes two main components religious proper, and hermeneutically functional, the two being closely inter-related.

Christian determination of faith enables a specific attitude to the world. Hence, an aspiration for seeing something essential, spiritual, and appurtenant to eternity – beyond the exterior and material, emerges. St. Augustine confesses that “my human Within is where infinite light shines in my soul, where ringing melodies can never be seized by time, where unknown smells spread out, where gluttonous food savors, where embrace is so tight that no penetration can destroy it” (p. 174). The metaphor of light here is not accidental. It carries very important conceptual sense.

According to Gadamer, light, beauty, and truth are connected. He claims that the “metaphysics of light clarifies the connection between the revelation of beauty and evidence of the comprehensible” [5]. In his comments to Genesis, St. Augustine uses the metaphor of light in an ontological context, which will later be drawn upon by Martin Heidegger. The Divine Word does not take part in the creation of heaven and earth. Only after having created light does God begin to speak, making it possible to distinguish things. In other words, language is the first creation by means of which “the mentally infinite is first revealed through the unity of the word” [6]. Speech as word play allows for the revelation, differentiation, and realization of essential meanings, which are usually not evident on the surface and require separate colloquial reflection on their genuine (inner) sense.

Phenomenological Foundations of Hermeneutical Conversation

In his turn, Heidegger discusses a luminescence of the truth [7], which is formed during a discussion that begins on its occasion and in its field [8]. Here we again see the motif of the hermeneutical circle, which is particular speech aimed at finding the truth that third element not present prior to discourse between two interlocutors, or between the text and its interpreter. Among the theoretical parallels that exist between St. Augustine and Heidegger, a phenomenological grounding of ontology, namely an ecstatic-horizontal structure of temporariness, should be taken into account [9].

In a like manner, St. Augustine claims that “future time, which is not, is not therefore long; but a “long future” is “a long expectation of the future.” Nor is time past, which is now no longer, long; but a long past is “a long memory of the past. (...) The life of this action of mine is divided between my memory, on account of what I have repeated, and my expectation, on account of what I am about to repeat; yet my consideration is present with me, through which that which was future may be carried over so that it may become past” [10]. A horizontal

way of understanding and institutionalizing the world confirms a human characteristic such as mortality. In other words, beauty, truth, and light expand the horizons of the living person, whose existence in this world is only temporary.

St. Augustine mentions two more characteristics of human nature – the abilities to think and to believe. A human being has an immortal soul and, because of it, the ability to become one with the divine truth, which penetrates the essential meanings of words. Significant effort is required to achieve this. In particular, it is necessary to ponder humaneness itself (the human Within each one of us), and to use one’s own mind. St. Augustine explains the functions of the soul and of the mind, both of which have an immortal nature [11]. They play equally important roles in the process of understanding. Inasmuch as we cannot arrive at correct conclusions without the help of science (p. 208), our mind functions as the eye of our soul. With its help the soul contemplates the truth (p. 214), without the mediation of the body. Accordingly, the truth is glimpsed not through physical means (eyes), but through pure thought (p. 227).

In other words, St. Augustine demonstrates that Christianity supplants the mind with something very important for understanding human existence. Attention is focused on the immortal soul as the realization of humaneness itself. That is why, according to St. Augustine, we have to know “the reasons behind good and bad things” (p. 297). The presence of the immortal soul as the human Within enables cognition of the truth. “Let religion connect us with the one Almighty God, because no animal can be a mediator between our mind, with the help of which we perceive the Lord, and the Truth – our inner Light, through which we comprehend It. And together with the Lord we will hold in high respect the Truth, which is connected with Him, and which has the shape of everything made by the one and towards a single whole” (p. 288). Immortal souls, together with the mind, outline the universalism of philosophical hermeneutics.

This exclusively religious aspect is incorporated into the Greek philosophical tradition, thereby expanding it. St. Augustine reflects on the features of the human soul and memory: “Does the soul contain something which momentarily does not occur to it, or does a learned soul have no knowledge of music when it is occupied only with geometry? Since the latter is wrong, the first is true. The soul is master only of that which come to its mind. That is why the soul may contain something, the presence of which it doesn’t feel” (p. 212). In other words, the soul uses inner memory to contain knowledge,

which at the opportune moment can point to the truth. We are only left with finding this knowledge.

Appealing to God, St. Augustine says: “Oh light that enlightened me, now I see that in using my external feelings I have not been searching correctly; you are inside of me and they knew not how You entered me [12]. The Lord is the only true light (p. 132). St. Augustine asks Him to not let himself be dispersed from the singularly significant “into the numerous, but collect me from the outward into myself, and from myself to You” (p. 152). This inner (word) is not connected with the possession of particular concrete information. It now opens the way to the truth, the sense of which is much more complex.

The truth is connected with God, therefore with humaneness, in the sense that a human being is god-like and mortal simultaneously. S/he needs the truth for perfecting both herself/himself and the entire human world (of culture). The correlation of the inner and outer signifies something more than just meaning encapsulated in words. J. Cavadini emphasizes that the main question is “how effectively our cultures show or even symbolize eternal forms of justice” [13]. The truth takes on special mental and ethical significance, which is consonant with the concepts of goodness, light, and beauty.

According to St. Augustine, “who doubts the existence of the truth has something true inside, which gives him no reasons to doubt because all which is true can be true only from the truth. Thus, one who for some reason may have reason to doubt, should not doubt the truth. Light that is boundless, timeless, and even free out of the apparitions of all these conditions is in the one who has such uncertainty (...). Thinking does not create truth, but finds it ready. Thus, before it is found, the truth exists inside of itself, and when it is revealed it serves to our renovation” [14]. Similarly, “Christ teaches the inner and man recalls the outer with the help of words” [15]. It is important to understand that the dialectic of the inner and outer in St. Augustine’s texts introduces not only theological problems, but also the nature of hermeneutical realization itself.

B. Hennig reveals the following accordances with the outer (visible) and the inner (essential): true Christian the human Within, view – knowledge, hearing understanding, belief – truth [16]. As we can see, it is not coincidental that truth correlates with faith. This speculative Christian proposition frees room for the universal application of hermeneutics. Returning to divine world creation, St. Augustine turns to idea of the original word: “God the begetter, who has in some way spoken by His own co-eternal Word all things that He has in His substance; and God His Word Himself, who Himself

has nothing either more or less in substance than is in Him, who, not lyingly but truly, has begotten the Word” [17]. In a similar way, Heidegger interprets poetry phenomenologically, as “coming into being with the help of the Word” [18]. He calls for the destruction of language in order to reach the original and essential meanings of words.

Gadamer stresses that in Christianity the Word exists in the realm of the miracle, which is creation, redemption, sending of the Son, and incarnation. “The greatest miracle of language is not the fact that the word takes on “flesh” and acquires outer being, but the fact that what emerges and finds itself in outward flesh is always the Word. (...) The Word was always with God for eternity; this doctrine also introduces the language question into the inner spheres of thought” [19]. We have already determined that this initial essential Word can be discovered by the human within. It does not belong to any one language, but is spoken as though it encapsulates the light of the truth. In other words, a living human being displays not only external personification. Inner essential resources can also be engaged.

This inner word of the spirit is as indivisibly essential to thought as God the Son is to God the Father. This entails searching for and finding the (inner) Word, corresponding to the truth. “In spite of all distinctions there is accordance; not only of the unity of human cognition with language, but also the connection of all human languages with things, which is extremely important. Cognition is only a prism through which the light of the only one truth creases” [20]. St. Augustine divides the process of searching for the inner word into two stages. The first stage touches upon some particular person who has individual tastes and ideas. “For if we refer ourselves to the inner memory of the mind”, means that a word which “cannot be without a thought... even if it be said by that inner word which belongs to no separate language” is only recognition of the following three things: “memory, intelligence, will” [21].

The next step is the reduction of the human to humaneness, which leads to a “more hidden depth of our memory, wherein we found this also first when we thought of it, and wherein an inner word is begotten such as belongs to no tongue – as it were, knowledge of knowledge, vision of vision, and understanding which appears in [reflective] thought; of understanding which had indeed existed before in the memory, but was latent there, although, unless the thought itself had also some sort of memory of its own, it would not return to those things which it had left in the memory while it turned to think of other things” [22]. St. Augustine interprets thinking not as a separate capability, but in its firsthand con-

nection with humaneness. The mind and the soul interact in the process of inner word revelation on the basis of humaneness.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration the essentials of St. Augustine's hermeneutical heritage, we should emphasize at least three things. First, he points out that not only can we find the truth, but that this truth potentially exists even prior to our particular hermeneutical discussion. Such substantial presence points out not metaphysical transcendence, but hermeneutical factuality in the manner of Heidegger and Gadamer – as a result of correlative introspection. It rides on phenomenology. Similarly, a work of art, waiting for its author for realization, can also hide inside a slab of marble. Though such an analogy is insufficient in consideration of all of the prerequisites of a hermeneutical circle – among which is an appropriately asked question, requiring a true answer according to that inner word specified by and born of hermeneutical discourse.

Second, the hermeneutical way of inner true word revelation is determined by humaneness. In other words, concentration on the truth is simultaneously a reflection on humaneness as such. A person

can find a common language with any other person if s/he needs the truth, not victory over an opponent. An ability to understand and listen to any other person leads to the common revelation of the inner word, which does not belong to any language and was unknown to either discussant prior to their discourse. This is proof that the discourse has changed the disputants in the process of heading toward the truth. This word belongs not to some specific person or metaphorical human within, but to a person as such, if s/he is courageous enough to meditate on his or her own essence.

Third, the universal use of philosophical hermeneutics takes on special significance according to the new challenges facing civilization, brought about by globalization—beginning with the need for the hermeneutical generalization of the methodological partition of “the spiritual sciences” (social studies and the arts), and ending with the mass-media aspect of global mutual understanding and accord. A monological way of thinking, and ideological motives for any kind of behavior are a dead-end threat for modern civilization. The practical application of philosophical hermeneutics requires consideration and mastery of the depths of phenomenological convention of this particular kind of discourse, with the reward being truth itself.

- [1] *Gadamer H.-G.* Istyna i metod. – Volume #1. – Kyiv: Universe, 2000. – 457 p. – P. 359. (Translation mine.)
- [2] *Grondin J.* Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics. – Yale, University Press. New Haven, 1994. – 231 p. – P. XIII.
- [3] *Ibid.* – P. 33.
- [4] *Sv. Avhustyn.* Spovid. – Kyiv: Osnovy, 2007. – 319 p. – P. 32. The next pages are in the text. (Translation mine.)
- [5] *Gadamer H.-G.* Istyna i metod. – Volume #1. – Kyiv: Universe, 2000. – 457 p. – P. 446. (Translation mine.)
- [6] *Ibid.* – P. 446
- [7] *Heidegger M.* Tvoriennia i Istina // Pisma i razmyshliennia raznykh liet. – Moscow: Gnomyz, 1993. – P. 86. (Translation mine.)
- [8] *Heidegger M.* Istina i Iskusstvo // Pisma i razmyshliennia raznykh liet. – Moscow: Gnomyz, 1993. – P. 92. (Translation mine.)
- [9] *Heidegger M.* Sein und Zeit. – Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993. – 445 p. – P. 422.
- [10] *Sv. Avhustyn.* Spovid. – Kyiv: Osnovy, 2007. – 319 p. – P. 234. (Translation mine.)
- [11] *Bl. Avgustin.* Enhiridion ili o vierie, nadziehdie i liubvi. – Kyiv, 1996. – 413 p. – P. 213. The next pages are in the text. (Translation mine.)
- [12] *Bl. Avgustin.* Besedy dushi s Bogom. – Moscow, 2006. – 159 p. – P. 116. The next pages are in the text. (Translation mine.)
- [13] *Cavadini J.* The Quest for Truth in Augustine's De Trinitate // Theological Studies. – # 58, 1997. – P. 436.
- [14] *Bl. Avgustin.* Ob istinnoj religii // O bessmiertii dushi. – Moscow: AST, 2004. – 512 p. – P. 481. (Translation mine.)
- [15] *Bl. Avgustin.* Ob uchitielie // O bessmiertii dushi. – Moscow: AST, 2004. – 512 p. – P. 426. (Translation mine.)
- [16] *Hennig B.* The Inner Man as Substantial Form // First International ESEMP Congress. – Essen, March 28, 2007.
- [17] *Augustine.* On the Trinity (40) // New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>.
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- [19] *Gadamer H.-G.* Istyna i Metod. – Volume #1. – Kyiv: Universe, 2000. – 457 p. – P. 388–389. (Translation mine.)
- [20] *Ibid.* – C. 405.
- [21] *Augustine.* On the Trinity (10) // New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>.
- [22] *Augustine.* On the Trinity (40) // New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>.

Анотація: У своєму есеї автор звертається до питання практичного застосування принципів філософської герменевтики. Спираючись на концептуальні положення Св. Августина та його послідовників – Мартіна Гайдеггера і Ганса-Георга Гадамера, – С. Квіт обґрунтовує принципову можливість віднайдення розуміння, порозуміння і взаєморозуміння на засадах людяності, а також застосування герменевтичної стратегії для вирішення масово-комунікаційних проблем глобального суспільства.

Ключові слова: філософська герменевтика, внутрішнє слово істини, християнська визначеність віри, феноменологія, глобальне порозуміння.