

University of Babeş-Bolyai
Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of History and Philosophy
Doctoral School of Philosophy

**The theory of immortality of the soul in Hellenism (Plato and Plotinus) and in
early Christianity (Saint Augustine – Gregory of Nyssa)**

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DOCTORAL ADVISOR:

Ph.D. Professor Muscă Vasile

DOCTORAL STUDENT:

Brînzan Daniel

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The idea of immortality of the soul in Hellenism (Plato and Plotinus) and in early Christianity (Saint Augustine – Gregory of Nyssa)

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The study follows the theory of immortality of the soul at the Greek philosophers Plato and Plotinus, and also at the Ecclesiastical Fathers, Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Gregory of Nyssa. It is examined whether and how it is transmitted the idea of the immortality of the human soul in Platonism and Neo-Platonism in the fourteenth century Christianity, in the authors mentioned above.

At a rapid assessment, the majority of the authors consider that the theory of immortality was generally present in all the cultures and civilizations and that only few ideas had such a wide spreading area. There is a real continuity between the earliest rational speculation and the religious representation this is based on. The immortality of the soul always had a religious aspect, but for the first time the Greeks conceded it rational speculations, complementary to its theological origin.

For Greeks, the immortality didn’t come from the resemblance of the human with the divine, as for Christians, but from the essence of the experience that induces the divinity to the soul. The immortality of the soul cannot be experienced before death, but its eternity could be felt in this kind of estates; the belief in immortality was derivative, the one in eternity was primary.

The Hellenism explored the subject of the soul and all the facets regarding its nature, its corporeity and incorporeity, the origin, the location, its abilities, the relation with the body and immortality. The idea of the union with the soul was a mandatory repertory of the philosophers from the late antiquity.

Our study is tangent to psychology and theology, especially to anthropology and eschatology. Because the Platonism studies the man, and theology studies God, the common research should be God-Man, meaning Jesus Christ, especially His death and His resurrection. For Christians, the study of Christ's immortality seems a contradiction of terms, but for philosophy, the study of the resurrection of the body is at its best minimized.

In theory, the convergence of Hellenism with Christianity in which the immortality of the soul is concerned must occur at a sufficient distance in time from Christ's historical death and resurrection. The post-apostolical period must have been surpassed and the New Testament canon must have been formed, without outrunning the era when the education mainly supposed the Hellenism.

This era was the fourteenth century when Christianity became *religio licita* and it was strong enough to present an imperial interest. This way, it could participate in long debates about metaphysical problems of the antiquity. In this demarche, the Greek idea of natural immortality of the soul was studied by Christian anthropologists and critically used in the maturation process of the dogmas and of the missions of the scholars in that time. In that era, The Ecclesiastical Fathers formulated the first substantial Christian anthropology.

In our analysis we will limit ourselves to the theory of the immortality of the individual soul, because Platonism as long as Christianity have the calling of the universality and present themselves as systems of redemption. The study is structured in four chapters, one for each author. The work assumptions are that Platonism and Christianity are large enough entities not to be used without circumscriptions, and Platonism influenced in both positive and negative way the Christianity. Our work method is both critical and comparative.

The topic of the soul at Plato occupies a central place, and the references to the soul are numerous and various. About the soul it is spoken quantitatively more than about principles, mathematics or Ideas. The first chapter analyses the primary texts in a chronological order, emphasizing the dynamism specific to the Platonism. We consider that to interpret correctly the dialogues used as study units, we have to understand the evolution of the theory of the immortality, the dominant ethical idea, the treating of the immortality of the philosopher's soul and the distinction between the Socratic and platonic ideas. It is analyzed the historicity of Criton's dialogues, the Defense and Phaidon, as well as the compatibility Socrates-Plato in supporting the immortality, from the perspective of the declaration of ignorance. The theory of the immortality is historically contextualized with the help of Burnet and Bloch's studies. In the second part of the dialogue it is assessed the argumentation from Phaidon and the scientific reception of the arguments about immortality in the scientific world.

Here are some of the first chapter conclusions: philosophers are just right to die because they have priority to immortality, the confusions of the idea of immortality emanate from the fact that Plato is a philosopher to the second power, that renders the Socrates conceptions. Plato didn't create a universal system of the soul; Plato rarely mentions the immortality without pointing to preexistence; the immortality of the soul differs from the individual immortality because the platonic psychology it is not exclusively preoccupied by the nature of the human soul. Even if his opinions are not definite and set, the idea of immortality owes him almost everything. Plato presents it as a fundamental theoretical certainty and guiding principle for life.

The second chapter proves scientifically Plotinus' notion about soul and repeats the platonic arguments about immortality. It is analyzed the immortality of self and the aspects of eternity and resurrection from the body, compared to the Christian perspective. One of the Plotinus' fundamental topics is the religious problem of the destiny of the soul and its returning to the origin. Plotinus tries to put in harmony the universal order with the specific destiny of the soul. The soul is many things, is all things, is the continuity between the humble or elevated forms of life, an intermediary in the perceivable and sensitive world, an organizer of the sensitive world. Plotinus doesn't see the soul as a development of corporeity, or as a corporal function, or as a harmony of the corporal activity, because the intellectual life is perceived differently by the corporal nature. The self is distinct from the soul; is one of the greatneses of the Neo-Platonism's psychology.

In what Plotinus is concerned the case study is the same as in the previous chapter; the immortality of the Socrates' individual soul. The customization of man presents the realization of the moral content, in a determined individual evolution, where this life's behavior is cannot be neglected. The tendency of cosmicization of man tends to cancel the tendency of personalization. The metaphysic destiny of the soul at Plotinus throws the man into a timeless phase; in eternity, but not in time. The most important trait at Plotinus about the concept of self is the extraordinary flexibility of the concept of person. We are at most ourselves when we are universals. In conclusion, Plotinus psychology is dominated by the thought that the bounds of self can not be settled; the neo-platonic doctrine of the immortality tends to cancel for good the distinction of the person after death; through the separation of the soul from the body, death unites man with divinity, and the self goes back to its original realm.

The theory of the immortality of the human soul at Augustine is analyzed in the fourth chapter, introduced through anthropological and psychological aspects. For Augustine, the main subject of the philosophy was God and the human soul. He was convinced by the immortality of the soul before he became a Christian. First, he used platonic concepts to prove the immortality. He studied the theme of the soul for about four decades. His ideas reflect a dynamism that ends

with the obsession for resurrection. The chapter analyzes Augustine's evolution from the idea of immortality of the soul to the idea of the resurrection of the body, of the soul, of the flesh. His work method is analytic. His studies, works and sermons are chronologically developed; it is drawn the progressive narrative thread and the conclusion comes out very soon; in forty years of writing at Augustine, just in the first year the subject of immortality of the soul presents a maximum interest, and the fact is consumed before embracing the Christianity. In the very next year, in the middle of the discussion about the quantity of the soul, Augustine mentions the immortality in the context of the resurrection of the body, and many times he talks about resurrection without recalling the immortality. There are analyzed many more works from this perspective. At Augustine there is one death and a double resurrection, both of the soul and of the body. Man waits the gift of double immortality in the future.

The study analyses Cary's conclusions about the inner space in man, that Augustine created beginning from the demonstration of the immortality of the soul; there are presented linguistic resemblances with Plotinus in the argumentation of the immortality through the aspiration happiness; there are presented in detail the stages of transition from the admiration for Plato to the advice that the pagan philosophers should not be researched in what resurrection is concerned.

Although it may seem strange, Augustine himself looked for a resemblance between the Christian resurrection and platonic resurrection. When we analyze the Augustine's progress, from the greatest appreciations to the smallest critics brought to Plato's followers, our interpretation emphasizes on one side the genius of the thinker and on the other side the force of the Christian doctrine to minimize the immortality of the soul in favor of resurrection. The change of the initial interest manifested by Augustine for the immortality of the soul and his ultimate obsession for resurrection, seems to support the idea that in what the natural immortality of the soul is concerned, the patristic anthropology has connections as strong as the Hellenistic vision and the Jewish Scriptures.

In the last chapter, we are analyzing Gregory's anthropology. First we mention the general platonic and neo-platonic influences that molded his thinking. We agree with most researchers in underlining the critic and creative capacity that Gregory uses in a very subtle way to express the philosophical contents. The nyssenean was prone to think in a conscious way the Platonism and Neo-Platonism as propaedeutic. However, in his theology, same as Augustine, the Scriptures teaching is normative. In Gregory's study we explain the basic concept of epektasis, the distinction Creator-creature, the two creations of man, the knowledge of God in the mirror of soul. We also analyze the treatise about the immortality of the soul with the title "The Christian

Phaidon” and the arguments. For the immortality of the body. (immortality through virginity and eucharisty).

The conclusion is that even if anthropology reflects itself best in the echoes of Hellenism, Gregory goes so far in his assumptions that we can hardly find a platonic concept that hadn't been altered or denied. The cult of the virgin's body seems related to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The immortal body is not annihilated, and the soul lives in an incarnate stance, like in Abraham's bosom, attached to the particles of the body. Another conclusion is that Platonism and Christianity do not resonate through their modern categories to Gregory's understanding, who lived in a time when there was no separation between theology and philosophy. Gregory is not different from the Ecclesiastic Fathers in natural divinity rejection of the human soul. There are analyzed his incoherencies about the immortality and resurrection.

The final conclusions examine if the Christian idea of the immortality of the soul has a Hellenic or Jewish origin. After determining the directions of further research, appears the observation that differently from the immortality of the soul dialectical suggested, the resurrection of the body had an experimental knowledge.

The idea of the immortality of the soul is justified through the platonic vision about man as compound of body and soul, or as in the Romanian utterance of Dimitrie Cantemir, the “county of the soul with the body.” This assumption was rudimentary tested by Augustine in the Cassiciacum era. Without this fundamental concept, the final result of the immortality could not be reached. Christianity adapted the assumption and the method, and the outcome was similar. Without the idea that the man by definition is a conjugation of the body with the soul, the immortality of one part of a man would not exist; by accepting this dichotomy the raising from the dead is surpassed.

The studied Fathers' anthropology is new, incompatible and irreducible with the platonic anthropology as well as with the Semitic anthropology. Gregory and Augustine changed the proportions and the value of the two elements that compound the man. They changed the Hellenic recipe in mixing the body with the soul; they gave the body a higher value, to the soul a lower value, because this was not essentially divine. None of them ever imagined the body being equal to the soul, excepting the stance from the future life. The antique duality was erased, the distinction remained. Augustine said nothing new when he affirmed that the soul was created. Plato himself sometimes stated the same thing. Gregory was not original either when he imagined the soul lingering around the dead body particles, bur still existing (to be seen the Greek concept about the shadows around the graves). Plato used a lot of corporal vocabulary about the soul separated from the body.

This is why at Saint Gregory of Nyssa appears the idea from Phaidon about the persistence of the body and soul after death. The persistence of both elements derived from the existence of dualism. The soul could be immortal both at Augustine and Gregory, even if at one the body perishes, and at the other one the body persists. There is no logical problem because the Socratic guiding idea is still available; the concept of a bipartition man. Moreover, same to Plato, Augustine and Gregory conceived a bipartition soul but mortal in a certain way.

In what the fundamental and irreconcilable differences between Christianity and Hellenism, we mention the emphasis set by Greeks on eternal immortality which includes both preexistence and post existence of the soul. The Christian understanding confirms only the eternal post existence of the soul. The second difference consists in the unity of an essential part of man with the soul or idea of the world, and at its best, the personal immortality is questionable. In Christianity immortality means a restoration of something that man already holds – the divine face in man – and the individual survival is obvious. The rituals have a specific role. The different methods are justified by the fact that Platonism is a philosophy and Christianity is a religion. In the third, the metempsychosis is accepted (at least in a mythic sense) in Platonism, but bitterly denied in Christianity. The reincarnation is problematic in what personal redemption and individual identity are concerned, so it was rejected by the theologians with platonic sympathies. The fourth major difference between Hellenism and Christianity is the understanding of the timeless eternity. The fifth, Christianity suggests a immortality of the body, what could be for Platonism a logical omission, having the role of ethic concession, and for Platonism could not be accepted.

Finally, if we have to mention the common points, we make mention of radical dualism between present life and the future world, identification of man with divinity, the partial death of the soul and the resurrection. The Christian theories studied according to which the soul dies and resurrects before the end of earthly life (Augustine), that the body becomes immortal before death (Gregory of Nyssa) along with the idea that the body does not perish, but remains united to the soul at death and after death (Gregory of Nyssa) are original Christian concepts and derives from the doctrinal confrontation between the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

In what the Neo-Platonism is concerned, we make mention of creation of the concept of falling of the soul (Augustine), thinking orientation towards the future (both Fathers), epektaza and the acquisition of immortality through chastity/contemplation (Gregory). Through Plotinus, the vocabulary, the images and the methods of mystic experience are transmitted directly and indirectly to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. The biggest difference between the redemption concept at Plotinus and Christianity is the thinking pattern of the human nature. Plotinus'

philosophy annuls the providence, the idea of the Christian grace, the sacraments, the Christian congregation and the incarnation of Christ in space-time-history and commemorated in rituals is incompatible to the Plotinus' idea that the real self is eternal, divine, and unchangeable and above the flow of processes.

The last paragraphs analyze based on Tausan's observations, a few implications of the concept of immortality of the soul. It is noticed the presence of a vicious circle in ethical implications for the present life and are determined further directions of the research.

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