
I N T E N T I O S P I R I T U S :
T H E M A T E R I A L I S T ,
P N E U M A T O L O G I C A L
O R I G I N S O F I N T E N T I O N I N
A U G U S T I N E

A l b e r t o P a r i s i

O luce eterna che sola in te sidi,
sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta
e intendente te ami e aridi!
(Dante)¹

Today, the concept of intention is said and thought to have nothing to do with air. A catchword of 20th-century Western philosophy, positively or negatively, intention takes a central role in numerous continental as well as analytic traditions, as a fundamental element of conscious, subjective life. Stripped to the essentials, today intention can have two meanings, whose lines of delimitation are blurred: (1) famously in the phenomenological tradition – but this meaning is prevalent also outside it – it stands for the most basic characteristic of consciousness, which is always already intending, namely *directed towards*, an object;² (2) in ordinary language, on which analytic philosophy bases itself, it stands for the voluntary, futural purposes and designs of humans, something strictly related to the will.³

¹ “O’ eternal light that alone in yourself lie, / yourself only intend, and by yourself understood / and intending yourself love and smile to.” Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, 3 vol. (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1968), vol. 3, “Paradiso XXXIII,” 423–424.

² Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. Stephan Strasser (Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1963), 70–72; Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7–42.

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “intention.” The most famous 20th-century work, which reawakened the problem of intention for Analytic philosophy, is G. E. M. Anscombe’s *Inten-*

The history of this term too, or its possible genealogy, on which scholars have been debating without pause for almost seventy years, does not mention breath in the slightest. It goes something like this: the two aforementioned ideas of intentionality have a common origin, namely the *intentio* of Medieval Scholasticism (in the case of Husserl, the mediator is, as most people in this tradition know, the psychologist Franz Brentano).⁴ Yet, in Scholasticism, *intentio* was not a univocal term and they were aware of it.⁵ For example, Alain de Libera and Rémi Brague have stressed a fascinating side of this story, namely that, among their various uses of *intentio*, the Scholastics also used this word to translate *ma'na*, the Arabic term used by Ibn Sinna (Avicenna) to talk about the concept in the mind.⁶ But before this shift took place, through Islamic philosophy, the story goes that the Scholastics received the fundamental meaning of *intentio* from one Church Father in particular: Augustine. It is with Augustine, it has been argued, that the origins of intention can be found.⁷ It is in Augustine's *intentio animi* that

tion, followed by Donald Davidson's studies: G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Kieran Setiya, "Intention," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Winter 2022 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/intention/>.

⁴ For a recent, complete account of the history of the different meanings of the term intention in European culture see Alain de Libera, "Intention," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 500–511.

⁵ See in this regard Jean-Luc Solère, "Tension et intention: Esquisse de L'histoire d'une notion," in *Questions sur l'intentionnalité*, eds. Lambros Couloubaritsis and Antonin Mazzù (Bruxelles: Éditions OUSIA, 2007), 115.

⁶ De Libera, "Intention," 505–506; Rémi Brague, "*Intentio* and *ma'na*," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 506.

⁷ "The couple 'intention'/ 'attention' (which corresponds also to the English 'directedness') was attested, in exemplary fashion, in St. Augustine's analysis of visual sensation." De Libera, "Intention," 502. Many are the studies that traced the modern European concept of intentionality back to Augustine. The first was Herbert Spiegelberg, "Der Begriff der Intentionalität in der Scholastik, bei Brentano, und bei Husserl," *Philosophische Hefte* 5 (1936): 75–91. The idea has then been discussed implicitly or explicitly many times: Jean Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité des sensations chez Saint Augustin," in *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international augustiniens, Paris 21–24 Septembre 1954*, vol. 1, ed. Fulbert Cavré (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1954), 491–498; Sofia Vanni Rovighi, "La fenomenologia della sensazione in Sant'Agostino," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 54, no. 1 (1962): 18–32; Richard Sorabji, "From Aristotle to Bren-

one can find intention as the ability of the soul to turn itself towards things or towards itself, which is to say to turn one's attention to something; it is with Augustine that this same idea becomes a synonym for that faculty of the soul on which he, later in his life, founded his whole theology, namely the will.

Nowhere in this story does air or breath make an appearance. But is this really the case? In this article, I do not wish to argue this genealogy to be wrong, but rather to claim that it has stopped too early and that, at the same time, it has underestimated the larger historical and philosophical context – a pneumatological one⁸ – in which Augustine was writing and in which he developed his conception of intention.

Indeed, on the one hand, in the last century Augustine scholars have not stopped at Augustine's text but have rather tried to discover where Augustine's *intentio* itself came from, unearthing new information that is pivotal for the whole history of intention but which is not usually taken into consideration. What has been found is that Augustine's *intentio* could derive from the Ancient Stoic concept of *τόνος* (*tonos*, tension or tone), the material tension or vibration of the spirit foundational to Stoic gnoseology and psychology.⁹

On the other hand, these scholars have also conducted their research without paying attention at all to the importance air and breath played in Augustine's works.¹⁰ All of them have worked as if in the dark in

tano: The Development of the Concept of Intentionality," in *Supplementary Supplement: Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, eds. Henry Blumenthal and Howard Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 227–260; Victor Caston, "Connecting Traditions: Augustine and the Greeks on Intentionality," in *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, ed. Dominik Perler (Boston: Brill, 2001), 23–48; Solère, "Tension et intention," 77; Victor Caston, "Intentionality in Ancient Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2008 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intentionality-ancient/>.

⁸ Against Christian theological practice, which uses the term pneumatology for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in my work I use *pneumatological* (from the Ancient Greek πνεῦμα, *pneuma*, namely breath) to define any discourse that assumes the spirit and the soul to be as corporeal as the rest of reality and understands the spirit primarily as air, breath, voice, smells and every other aerial phenomenon, such as wind, breeze, storms, etc.

⁹ Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité," 497; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 43–45; Solère, "Tension et intention," 59–90.

¹⁰ My work here follows a new research movement that has been rediscovering and exploring the importance of air and breath in philosophy, as well as in the most diverse disciplines and

regard to Gerard Verbeke's conclusion, in his *L'évolution de la doctrine du Pneuma du stoïcisme à saint Augustin* from 1945, that it is with Augustine that the *pneuma* or *spiritus* becomes, in the history of European culture, finally spiritualised, which means completely detached from material air.¹¹ A new study of Augustine's texts, which seriously considers both the pneumatological context in which Augustine (and the Stoics) wrote and the extant, although unheeded, studies of the origins of *intentio* in the Stoic concept of *tonos*, will show that air and breath played a role in the history of intention, and a central one at that.

As it is well known, the foundational event of Augustine's philosophy and theology is the discovery of the *libri platonici*, the Neo-Platonist books he read around 386 CE, probably in Marius Victorinus' translation.¹² Or rather, the discovery to which Augustine arrived thanks to them: the immaterial nature of God and the soul. Everything we read by Augustine has been thought and written after this original event and Augustine's whole philosophy can be read as a concatenated series of arguments in favour of this fundamental thesis. If this statement is clear and has been clear for many centuries, what this study will show is

cultures. To give a few fundamental references: Yuho Hisayama, *Erfahrungen des ki – Leibessphäre, Atmosphäre, Pansphäre: Eine transkulturelle Phänomenologie der Sphären* (Baden-Baden: Karl Alber, 2014); Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015); Magdalena Górska, *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2016); Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018); Lorenzo Marinucci, *Forms of the Wind: Air and Atmosphere in Modern Japanese Aesthetics* (PhD Diss., Università di Roma "Tor Vergata," 2019); Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

¹¹ Verbeke's conclusion is that the final transformation of the *spiritus* into something completely immaterial takes place with Christianity, which brings together the immaterialism typical of Neo-Platonism and the conception of the *pneuma* they found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Indeed, as Verbeke shows, the word *pneuma* in Neo-Platonism still has a material meaning, whose most fascinating development can be found in Synesius' conception of the imagination in his treatise on dreams. Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma, du stoïcisme à s. Augustin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945), 489–510; Synesius, *On Prophecy, Dreams and Human Imagination: Synesius, De insomniis*, eds. Donald A. Russel and Heinz-Gunther Nesselrath (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

¹² Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.9.13; see also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 70–92. Note: references for Augustine's texts cited in this essay and their English translations can be found in the abbreviation section preceding the bibliography.

1) the central role played in this process by the word and the concepts of *intentio* and 2) that this very process coincided with the “spiritualisation of the spirit”¹³ – in Verbeke’s terms – or in other words, with the rejection of materialist, pneumatological theories, in which Augustine himself used to believe earlier in his life. To prove that the soul or God were immaterial meant for him to prove that they were not something like a breath pervading the whole body or the whole world in a corporeal manner with a certain material intention.

As I will show, it is always through *intentio*, in a way or another, that Augustine demonstrated the immateriality of the soul or even – but the two problematics are strictly correlated – the nature of the One and Triune God. It is by making of *intentio* a synonym of *attentio* first and *voluntas* later that Augustine was able to prove the immateriality of perception and thought, namely soul and God, which just meant to prove that soul and God are not breath.

Thus, having shown that intention in Augustine is the concept that allows the spirit to become immaterial, thus bringing to conclusion the “spiritualisation of the spirit,” I will take seriously the genealogical theory according to which Augustine’s *intentio* is said to descend from the Ancient Stoic *tonos*, to show that this is not exactly the case. Augustine’s *intentio* had to do fundamentally with the Stoic *tonos* but not in the way critics have argued. Augustine was not borrowing the term *intentio* from the Stoics but, rather, he was stealing it, repurposing it to his own spiritualist ends. This is the reason why, after him, no Stoic, materialist, or pneumatological account of *intentio* was anywhere to be found.

Thus, Augustine’s *intentio*, unexplainable through any Neo-Platonist precedent – in fact, there are no direct Neo-Platonist correspondents to it – betrays the underlying presence of another conception of *intentio*, a materialist, pneumatological conception, which Augustine knew and to which perhaps he even subscribed before his conversion to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, but of which we have lost almost every trace. I will conclude by pointing to some of these traces, in view of a future reconstruction of the material intention of the spirit.

¹³ Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 3.

Augustine's Early Treatises as Anti-Pneumatological Texts

Augustine's early dialogues and treatises are indispensable for this research because they testify to Augustine's early enthusiasm after his conversion, first to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, for the immaterialist thesis. Thus, they reveal somewhat more clearly than later works certain theoretical enemies Augustine never stopped fighting: namely, materialist theories and often materialist theories of a very specific kind. Indeed, if we take the titles and objectives of his two early works on the soul this becomes immediately clear. To prove that the soul is immortal, as he wishes to do in his *De immortalitate animae* (*On the Immortality of the Soul*), and that the soul has no extension, as he does in the *De quantitate animae* (*On the Quantity or Magnitude of the Soul*), he simply aims to disprove that the soul is or can be a body. The two texts are just a collection of counterarguments against the subtle and probably at the time pervasive theories of the materialists.¹⁴

Judging from the texts in question, the materialist theories of the soul that must have attracted the most interest at the time are two and both had a long tradition: 1) the Pythagorean, musical conception of the soul as the *harmonia* of the body, at times confused with the Aristotelian conception of the soul as the *form* of the body;¹⁵ and 2) the Stoic but also generally Ancient Greek and Judaic idea that the soul was just a breath (*spiritus*), or even a wind (*ventus*), where the latter ratifies even more the identity between corporeal breath within human beings and the spirit outside them.¹⁶ Yet both theories must have been in some way connected in a world that understood music, and not wrongly, as a fundamentally aerial or pneumatic phenom-

¹⁴ The fact that all of Augustine's texts, both the early ones and less explicitly the later ones, as well as many other texts from the same period, such as Mamertus' *De statu animae*, set out every time to reject materialist theories and, in particular, the theory that the soul is just a breath prove how pervasive these conceptions must have been at the time. Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, in *Opera*, ed. August Engelbrecht (Vienna: C. Geroldi filium, 1885), 1.7. See also Tertullian, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink (Leiden: Brill, 2010), par. 5–10; (also in Hans von Arnim, ed., *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, 4 vol. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924), II.773:784; hereafter referenced as *SVF*).

¹⁵ Augustine, *Im. an.*, 2.2.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 4.6.

enon.¹⁷ Augustine, whose conversion to Platonism taught him one, irrevocable tenet, namely that the soul and God are immaterial, tries to disprove both of these theories in the two texts respectively.

It is in his *De quantitate animae*, however, that Augustine reveals his counterarguments to be strictly connected to his response to certain specific materialist theories, namely pneumatological ones. In the *De immortalitate animae*, to prove that the soul was immortal meant disproving that the soul could simply be a harmony of the body and therefore be or depend on a body. Instead, at the beginning of this dialogue on the *quantity or magnitude* of the soul, to prove that the soul has no extension, which for Augustine is like saying that it is something immaterial, means to disprove all those theories that claim the soul to be just a breath, or even a wind:¹⁸

¹⁷ The two theories are strictly identified and associated with the Stoics and the Epicureans in passage 26.13 from Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De anima*: "In contrast, the soul would be a harmony, or a harmonious composition of certain bodies, for those who make the soul out of a specific kind of mixture and composition of things. This group includes the Stoics, who claim that the soul is breath composed in a certain way from fire and air. It also includes the Epicureans [...]" Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul [De anima]*, ed. and trans. Victor Caston (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 26.13; also in *SVF*, II.786. But the connection is made powerfully explicit by Cicero, in a passage from the *Tusculanae*: "Others however identify soul [*animus*] and breath [*anima*] as we Romans practically do [...] Zeno the Stoic holds the soul to be fire. Now the views I have mentioned, that the soul is heart, brain, life or fire are those ordinarily held: the remaining views are as a rule peculiar to individual thinkers, just as philosophers of old held individual views long ago, but nearest in date to our time there was Aristoxenus, musician as well as philosopher, who held the soul to be a special tuning up of the natural body [*ipsius corporis intentionem quondam*] analogous to that which is called harmony in vocal and instrumental music; answering to the nature and conformation of the whole body, vibrations of different kinds are produced just as sounds are in vocal music." Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. John Edward King (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), I.19; see also Solère, "Tension et intention," 62. Regarding the relation of music to air: "This is to be expected, since sound is a movement of air." Aristotle, *De anima*, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 420c. "For sound is a continuous tuning [*τάσις*] of air which, after it is taken around inside the objects making the beatings, follows through to the outside and therefore, according to how much force there might be in the greater tension of those objects through which the beats are made, is made both smaller and higher." Ptolemy, *Harmonics*, trans. and ed. Jon Solomon (Leiden: Brill, 2000), I.3.8.

¹⁸ English translations of Latin texts can be found in the abbreviation section preceding the bibliography. However, some translations might have been modified to better convey the contextual meaning of the passages.

E. Undoubtedly my view is that it is impossible for bodies to be without these three dimensions.

A. What is that? Can you think of these three dimensions existing anywhere except in bodies?

E. I do not see how they can be elsewhere.

A. Therefore, you think that the soul is simply a body?

E. If we admit that even the wind [*ventus*] is a body, I cannot deny that the soul seems to be a body, for I think it is something like the wind.¹⁹

To think that the soul is like the wind, like a moving breath, means to think that the soul is a body with certain physical dimensions, and this is what this treatise is about to disprove. The *De quantitate animae* is an anti-pneumatological text.

The Soul-Body Problem as a Problem of Mixture

Augustine's main argument for the immateriality of the soul in this dialogue has clear Neo-Platonist undertones. To disprove that the soul has no physical extension he turns to the power of memory and reason, and claims the soul must have no extension for us to perceive and think.²⁰ Put simply, if perceptions and thoughts – what the soul eminently produces and is made of – were corporeal, then how could someone think of or remember things that are much bigger than oneself? However, such an understanding of the soul creates the fundamental problem of the difference or rather of the chasm between soul and body. More than Augustine's complicated and lengthy study of geometry from this dialogue, which he takes to resolve this issue and only partially, we are interested in the theory that he is rejecting and that did not present this problem. Rather, the pneumatological, materialist theory that Augustine is attacking resolved it through its own under-

¹⁹ “E. Prorsus non dubito corpora omnia his carere non posse. / A. Quid illud? Potes cogitare ista tria non esse nisi in corporibus? / E. Non intellego quomodo alibi esse possint. / A. Ergo animam non putas esse aliud quam corpus? / E. Si etiam ventum corpus esse confitemur, negare non possum corpus mihi animam videri: nam tale aliquid eam esse cogito.” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 4.6.

²⁰ This is the Neo-Platonist counterargument that, besides the theory of mixture, aimed to reject the Stoic conception, a development of Aristotle's theory of perception, according to which when perceiving, the *animus* received a physical imprint of the objects perceived. Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 8–23.

standing of the soul as a form of *temperatio*, to use Augustine's term from the *De immortalitate animae*:²¹ to understand the soul as a breath or a wind means to understand the soul as itself a body pervading the body of the human being and thus mixed with it. As Jean Pépin has shown in a famous essay, although rather implicitly, Augustine is here following the Neo-Platonist Porphyry in trying to disprove the Stoic theory that soul and the body form a corporeal mixture.²²

The Stoic theory is worth repeating, even if it does not appear explicitly in Augustine's text. Taking inspiration from the Aristotelian account of different kinds of unity in bodies, the Stoics proposed their own updated catalogue.²³ The simplest one counts three kinds of mixtures: 1) juxtaposition or connection, when two or more substances are juxtaposed to one another without losing any of their own qualities, like in a heap of grain or sand; 2) fusion, namely when two or more substances blend together to such a point that none of their original qualities are left and a completely different substance is created, as in the case of medicaments; and finally, 3) a proper mixture, namely when two or more substances penetrate one another completely without losing their own qualities, since one would be able to separate them again, as in the case of a mixture of water and wine, which can be separated thanks to a sponge imbibed with oil.²⁴

It is on the basis of such an understanding of mixture that the Stoics justified their conception of the soul as breath. The soul is able to penetrate or diffuse completely through the body like wine and water do, in a mixture. In the words of Alexander of Aphrodisia in whose version we have received this Stoic theory:

They employ as clear evidence that this is the case: the fact that the soul which has its own substantiality, just like the body that receives it, is diffused [διήκειν] throughout the whole of the body while preserving its own substan-

²¹ Augustine, *Im. an.*, 10.17.

²² Jean Pépin, "Une nouvelle source de saint Augustin: le ζήτημα de Porphyre *Sur l'union de l'âme et du corps*," *Revue des Études Anciennes* 66, no. 1–2 (1964): 56–89.

²³ Aristotle, *On Coming-To-Be and Passing-Away (De generatione et corruptione)*, ed. and trans. H. H. Joachim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 327b–328b.

²⁴ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixtione*, published as *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Todd (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 216.1–218.1; also in *SVF*, II.473.

tiality in the mixture with it (for there is nothing in the body possessing the soul that does not partake of the soul).²⁵

Since mixtures exist in nature, then the Stoics believe they can envision the relationship between soul and body as the relationship between two bodies that they call a mixture. The soul remains the soul while being completely diffused through the body.

And this is precisely the theory Augustine is here trying to disprove. First, there is the famous example, already discussed by Pépin,²⁶ of the soul filling the body like a waterskin: “A. Now, you do not think your soul exists anywhere except in your body, do you? / E. No, I don’t. / A. Is the soul inside the body only, like the contents of a waterskin, so to say, or only on the outside, like a covering, or do you think it is both inside and outside [*et intrinsecus et extrinsecus*]?”²⁷ This image can be found in one of Porphyry’s *Σύμμικτα ζητήματα* (*symmikta zetemata*) on the union of body and soul, which have been reconstructed.²⁸ Pépin links such an analogy to Democritus and Epicurus through a further reference he found in a doxographical passage by Iamblichus, which mentions the theory according to which the soul “is disseminated and present in the body like the wind is in a waterskin (ἐνεστιν ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ σώματι καθάπερ εἰ ἀσκῶ πνεῦμα)” in conjunction with the Democriteans.²⁹ And yet, then Pépin goes on to explain that this specific *ζήτημα* (*zetema*) of Porphyry rejects the Stoic theory of mixture and the possibility that soul and body could be two bodies mixed together, where the first body is understood exactly like *pneuma*, a breath or a wind.³⁰ But besides this important analogy, Augustine himself goes on to discuss the issue in terms extremely similar to the ones we read in Alexander.

Indeed, the problem is a bit later in the treatise presented by Augustine as a problem of *distentio* which, as we will see, is used by him

²⁵ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixtione*, 217.32; also in *SVF*, II.473.

²⁶ Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 64–67.

²⁷ “A. Sed numquidam animam tuam putas esse nisi in corpore tuo? / E. Ita puto. / A. Intrinsic tantum, ut tamquam utrem impleat an tantum forinsecus velut tectorium an et intrinsic et extrinsecus eam esse arbitraris?” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 7.

²⁸ Heinrich Dörrie, *Porphyrios’ “Σύμμικτα ζητήματα”: Ihre Stellung in System und Geschichte des Neuplatonismus nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten* (München: Beck, 1959), 80.

²⁹ Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 65. My translation.

³⁰ Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 92–94.

alternatively with the term *diffusio*, and brings us back to Alexander's formulation: "Then, if the soul is distended [*distenditur*] through the space of the body, why does it not have quantity? If, however, it is not distended [*distenditur*], how does it feel all over anything that strikes it?"³¹ That the soul distends through the whole body and has, therefore, physical dimensions and is, hence, a body is the materialist theory Augustine is trying to disprove and the one founded on the Stoic conception of mixture. But if the soul does not distend through the body, if it is not a body itself – and Augustine is aware that his theory comes up short here – the question becomes: how can the soul sense and perceive everywhere and throughout the body, namely wherever the body is touched? Through his rejection of the materialist and pneumatological theory of the soul, which is based on the aforementioned conception of mixture, Augustine has become aware of the issue his and every dualism have to confront: the soul-body problem.

Augustine will try to resolve this issue by giving a new account of sensation that is particularly complicated and not worth exploring in detail for two reasons: 1) he will give a sounder and more advanced version of this argument in his *De musica*, which we are going to discuss in the next section; and 2) because towards the end of this dialogue Augustine must almost give up all of his preceding arguments when confronted with the materialist counterexample of the centipede. According to this counterargument, if we take a centipede and we cut it physically in half or more parts, each part goes on living like nothing has happened and, therefore, the soul seems to divide itself with the body.³² As I said, faced with such a straight-forward dilemma, Augustine almost gives up, but he thinks a particular analogy can here come in help: the analogy of signifier and signified.

Unable to prove in any way that the soul does not get split or cut with the body in which it is contained, Augustine decides it is time to try something completely different to explain how the soul is in the body. He turns to language. How is it that sound and meaning relate

³¹ "Deinde, si per spatium sui corporis anima distenditur, quomodo nullius quantitatis est? Si autem non distenditur, quomodo sentit ubique pungentem?" Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 26.

³² Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 62–64; on the centipede, see O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 28–29.

to each other in the words we use? Augustine claims that if one analyses these elements with enough attention, what we find is that meaning and sound are to words, what soul and body are to human beings. They are two completely different entities, of which one, the meaning (or the soul), always precedes the other; it can exist without the other in the mind; and indeed, it exists without dimensions, unlike sound or voice, which are divisible in time.³³

Furthermore, there are some words that, like the centipede, can be divided and still have meaning. Augustine gives the example of the Latin word “*lucifer*,” the morning star, which can be split into two words, and each of them still has a meaning in Latin, “*luci*” and “*fer*.” Then, what the analogy shows is that it is the voice that is extended in time and can be divided and not the meaning. When the word is split into two words, the two words still have meaning but the original meaning has not been split. There are instead two different meanings. But then this implies:

For, the soul did not occupy a place, but held the body which the soul itself moved. Just as the meaning of a word, without being extended in time [*non distenta per tempus*], animated, so to speak, and filled out all the letters that take up slight intervals of time [to pronounce].³⁴

In other words, Augustine believes to have shown, although only by analogy, that the soul-body problem can be solved, without the need for any conception of material mixture: the meaning and the soul are not distended (*distenti*), physically diffused in time and space or in the body but rather *govern* it in some way. It is only in his *De musica*, which he started around the same time of these dialogues but revised much later, that he would find a solution to the soul-body problem in a new account of sensation, in which *intentio* plays the central role.³⁵

³³ Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 66.

³⁴ “Non enim locum ipsa, sed corpus quod ab eadem agebatur, tenebat: sicut illa significatio non distenta per tempus, omnes tamen nominis litteras suas moras ac tempora possidentes, velut animaverat atque compleverat.” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 68.

³⁵ *Intentio* is not absent from these early treatises and dialogues, but its role is not as clear yet. Therefore, I have preferred to leave these uses aside in this article in order to avoid confusion.

Intentio as Attention: Augustine's Solution
to the Soul-Body Problem

Augustine's theory of sensation is, from the beginning, an answer to the problem of the relationship between body and soul. And this is the reason why when Book VI of the *De musica* gives an account of sensation, it seems to begin where Augustine had left off in his *De quantitate animae*. There, he had claimed that the soul is not distended physically throughout the body – which means mixed with it – but rather governs it. The meaning of this expression had, however, remained obscure. Here, instead, Augustine has found a better explanation to it: *intentio*. The formulation that follows has attracted much attention and sparked a wide debate, perhaps because to the reader of the *De musica* it sounds almost out of context and, thus, hard to decipher.³⁶ And yet read as a follow-up to Augustine's reflections in his previous treatises, its meaning is clear enough:

For I think the body is animated by the soul only by the intention of the doer [*intentione facientis*]. Nor do I think it is affected in any way by the body, but it acts through it and in it as if the body was a divine subject of its domination.³⁷

The soul is in the body by dominating it, by governing it, not by being affected by it. And all this Augustine summarises with the expression "*intentione facientis*" – the only way through which the soul ani-

³⁶ The debate developed around François-Joseph Thonnard and Guy Finaert's comment that the text here is hard to read and the expression *intentione facientis* could be translated both as "dans un but d'activité" ("in the purpose of an action") and in a more creationist or theological fashion as "selon l'intention du Créateur" ("according to the intention of the Creator"). Although the two underlying conceptions are certainly related, the second interpretation is here out of context, as most critics now agree. See also editors' note 78 in Augustine, *Dialogues Philosophiques: La musique; De musica libri sex*, eds. Guy Finaert and François-Joseph Thonnard (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947), 378–380; Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité," 494; Vanni Rovighi, "La fenomenologia," 20–21. A fundamental summary of the debate is in Ubaldo Pizzani, "*Intentio* ed escatologia nel sesto libro del *De musica* di S. Agostino," in *Interiorità e intenzionalità in S. Agostino: Atti del I° e II° Seminario Internazionale del Centro di Studi Agostiniani di Perugia*, ed. Luigi Alici (Roma: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1990), 43.

³⁷ "Ego enim ab anima hoc corpus animari non puto, nisi intentione facientis. Nec ab isto quidquam illam pati arbitror, sed facere de illo et in illo tamquam subiecto divinitus dominationi suae." Augustine, *Mus.* VI.9.

mates the body is through “the intention of the doer,” namely through the intention of the soul itself.

At this point, the temptation would be to read this term anachronistically and superimpose onto it the contemporary meaning of intention, reducing it to the wilful purpose of the soul. But we need to resist such an urge, not because it might be wrong in the long run, but because it might obscure the larger context in which Augustine made use of this word. Indeed, we could still doubt this *intentio* to be related in any way to the anti-pneumatological argumentation of the earlier *De quantitate animae*. The two texts might seem too distant, or a link to be missing. Why would Augustine himself not explicitly formulate his argument the way we are sketching it here: the soul is not in the body as a physical distention but rather animates it only through its intention? And yet in a later letter to Jerome (from around 415 CE) about the origin of the soul, this is precisely how Augustine summarised his own view:

Furthermore, if it is a characteristic of a body to occupy space with a certain length, width and height, and for it to be so placed or moved that it fills a larger space with the larger part of itself, and a smaller space with a smaller part, and for the part to be less than the whole, then the soul is not a body. For the soul extends through the whole body to which it imparts life, not by a diffusion in space [*non locali diffusione*] but by a certain life-giving intention [*quadama vitali intentione*]; it is wholly present in every smallest part, not less in smaller parts and more in larger ones, but in one place more intent, in another more relaxed [*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*], yet wholly present in each and all parts.³⁸

Augustine’s *De musica* continues the anti-materialist and anti-pneumatological argumentation of the *De quantitate animae*. To claim that the soul is in the body as *intentio* is to disprove that the soul is itself a body, a breath or a wind that is distended or diffused throughout the

³⁸ “Porro si corpus non est, nisi quod per loci spatium aliqua longitudine, latitudine, altitudine ita sistitur vel movetur, ut maiore sui parte maiorem locum occupet, et brevior brevior, minusque sit in parte quam in toto, non est corpus anima. Per totum quippe corpus quod animat, non locali diffusione, sed quadam vitali intentione porrigitur: nam per omnes eius particulas tota simul adest, nec minor in minoribus, et in maioribus maior; sed alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius, et in omnibus tota, et in singulis tota est.” Augustine, *Ep.*, 166.4.

body. But then what is this *vitalis intentio* (or this *intentio facientis*)? The expression “*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*” immediately strikes an intent reader as worth analysing and it could prove helpful in answering our question. Indeed, “*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*” seems to be a calque of an expression common in classical musical treatises to indicate the tending and relaxing of the voice.³⁹ But it is not in this sense that Augustine uses it but rather, this musical expression becomes in his theory of sensation a synonym of *intentio*.

In fact, circling back to his *De musica*, there Augustine argues that an analysis of sensations explicates how the soul is in the body as *intentio*. After clarifying that the soul is not affected by the body in any way but rather dominates it through its own *intentio*, he goes on to explain how sensing therefore happens: our sense organs are touched by external objects, but these objects do not touch our soul; rather, our soul can become more or less attentive to them:

In short, it seems to me the soul, when it senses something in the body, is not affected in any way by it, but rather it becomes more attentive [*attentius*] to its own affections, and these functions which are felt as easier when in accordance with their object or more difficult if not, are not unknown to the soul: and this whole process is what is called sensing.⁴⁰

The expression from letter 166, “in one place more intent, in another more relaxed [*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*]” was here expressed, quite tellingly, with “rather it becomes more attentive [*sed in eius passionibus attentius agere*].” When we sense something, our soul does not suffer any change (*pati – passionibus*), but rather it can become more or less attentive to these passions, it is more or less intended in them.

³⁹ “It is by the raising, lowering or inflexion of the voice [*intentio vocis, remissio, flexus*] that the orator stirs the emotions of his hearers, and the measure, if I may repeat the term, of voice or phrase differs according as we wish to rouse the indignation or the pity of the judge.” Quintilian, *The institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler, 4 vol. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920–1922), I.10.25. “Because contracting [*intentio*] the chord causes higher noises, relaxing [*remissio*] it lower ones.” Boethius, *De institutione musica*, ed. Giovanni Marzi (Roma: Istituto italiano per la storia della musica, 1990), IV.5.

⁴⁰ “Et ne longum faciam, videtur mihi anima cum sentit in corpore, non ab illo aliquid pati, sed in eius passionibus attentius agere, et has actiones sive faciles propter convenientiam, sive difficiles propter inconvenientiam, non eam latere: et hoc totum est quod sentire dicitur.” Augustine, *Mus.*, VI.10.

Intentio has here become *attentio* and this is what differentiates the soul from the body, while at the same time keeping them together: the first, immaterial, can turn to the other, can attend to the other, material. And it is precisely in this mystical sense that sensation is then read by Augustine. If to sense is to direct our attention towards our sense organs and therefore towards the material world, then to reach God one needs to avoid sensation, avert one's own attention from matter and turn it towards God.⁴¹ When one hears something, one simply intends oneself spiritually towards the material sense organs. But in this way the external, material world, voices and sounds, lose all meaning and what comes first is always the immaterial interiority. It is therefore Augustine that makes of intention a dematerialising and desonouring of life.

Intentio as Will: the Inclusive Exclusion
of the Pneumatological Theory of the Soul

Everything changes in Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*. The arguments used by Augustine in this case are not very different from those already analysed in this article and yet they present a fundamental difference: in response also to the pneumatological nature of the biblical account of the creation of the human being through God's breath, Augustine has here completely absorbed parts of the pneumatological theories he was trying to disprove. After disproving that the soul could be made of one of the two passive natural elements, namely earth or water, Augustine turns once again to air, the element to which the *flatus*, God's breath, also belongs. His rejection is as extreme as usual, but this time we are introduced to another side of the argument, which was missing in the previous iterations. This time the possible corporeal nature of the soul as a breath diffused or distended (*distentio* or *diffusio*) through the body is not simply denied in favour of a spiritual *intentio*. Such a pneumatological theory of distended breath is rather accepted but confined to the level of the body; it is excluded by being included, which means however that for the first time we have a precise and detailed description of what such a pneumatological theory would look like.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Mus.*, VI.12–14. See also Pizzani, “*Intentio* ed escatologia,” 49–50.

Augustine ascribes such a theory to some anonymous medical doctors, but many of the ideas in question can be traced back to earlier Stoic theories, which had developed in parallel to medical theories.⁴² What the “doctors” have shown is that the human body is not made only of earth and water, the passive elements, but also of a certain quantity of air that, contained in the lungs, is then diffused (*diffunditur*) by the heart throughout the body thanks to the veins called arteries.⁴³ Furthermore, precisely like in the case of the Stoic *pneuma*, some of this air is mixed with fire, which gives it some form of heat and luminosity.⁴⁴ And it is through this luminous air that – the doctors have shown and Augustine deems pivotal to retell – we are able to sense anything at all: if we are able to see through our eyes is because rays of this luminous air reach from our brain through our eyes to the objects we perceive; if we are able to hear, taste and smell is because little pipes bring this air from the brain to the sense organs; if we are able to feel what we touch is because through other canals air is diffused everywhere in our body (*per cuncta membra diffundant*).⁴⁵

In contrast to his early arguments for the immateriality of the soul, Augustine’s genius in the *De Genesi ad litteram* is to have absorbed the very pneumatological theory he was, from the beginning, trying to re-

⁴² In regard to Augustine’s medical knowledge see editors’ note 34 in Augustine, *La genèse au sens littéral en douze livres / De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, eds. Paul Agaësse and Aimé Solignac (Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1972), 710–714; as well as Gustave Bardy, “Saint Augustin et les médecins,” *Année Théologique Augustiniennes* 13, no. 3 (1953): 327–346. Indeed, the relationship between the Ancient Greek medical pneumatic school and the Stoics is still matter of debate. Even if we are prone to accept Max Pohlenz’s claim that the Ancient Stoics actually developed certain ideas they found in the medical theory of their time, such as the fundamental role of the *pneuma*, we cannot exclude that Stoic and medical theories then kept influencing each another, as the cases of both Seneca and Galen show. Max Pohlenz, *Hippokrates und die Begründung der wissenschaftlichen Medizin* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938), 30–80; Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), 82–85; Frédéric Le Blay, “Pneumatism in Seneca: An Example of Interaction between Physics and Medicine,” in “Greek” and “Roman” in *Latin medical texts: studies in cultural change and exchange in ancient medicine*, ed. Brigitte Maire (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 63–76.

⁴³ Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.13.20.

⁴⁴ *SVF*, II.442; 443; 841.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.13.20

ject.⁴⁶ Now air is said to play a fundamental role in perception or even in every movement of our body. And yet it has nothing to do with the soul because of *intentio*, or as we read here for the first time, because of something that seems for Augustine to be intrinsically linked to *intentio*, namely *voluntas*. The materialists are right, without air there would be no possibility of any contact with the world outside, no possibility of movement, and yet this air is not the soul: “And the air, which is infused [*infusus*] through the nerves, obeys the will in order to move the limbs, but is not itself the will.”⁴⁷ This formulation is fascinating: indeed, *infusus* corresponds here to *intentus* if, as we have observed numerous times, *diffusus* corresponds to *distentus*. And in the Latin tradition the *nervi* are what first and foremost “intend,” as Augustine claims in his *De quantitate animae* and could have read also in Lactantius.⁴⁸ Here we begin to observe – although it has been happening all along – how Augustine must avoid using *intentio* in a certain traditional, inherited sense, to salvage it for his own ends. And indeed, when we will to move our body, air is infused in our nerves and is put in tension so as to let our limbs move according to our will. But this air is not our soul, it is not the will itself, our will is something different from this tension: it is *intentio*.

Even the theory of mixture is now approved and re-interpreted as part of his own spiritual understanding of the soul. We are told for the

⁴⁶ In light of this, it will be necessary to update Verbeke’s account of the development of pneumatology. If, as he claims, Augustine is indeed the first one for whom the *spiritus* becomes the immaterial spirit, he was able to achieve this only by re-including on another level the earlier materialist understanding of *pneuma*.

⁴⁷ “Et aer, qui nervis infusus est, paret voluntati, ut membra moveat, non autem ipse voluntas est.” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.25. It cannot be stressed enough how pivotal this formulation will be for the following millennia of European history.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 38–39. Also in Lactantius: “What of Aristoxenus who denied that there is any soul at all, even while it lives in the body? Just as in lyres a pleasing sound and melody is effected by a straining of the strings [*intentione nervorum*] which musicians call harmony, so in bodies the power of sensing comes to be from the union of the inward parts and the strength of the members.” Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*, eds. Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, 4 vol. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005–2011), VII.13.2; also in Boethius, *De institutione musica*, I.28. See also Solère, “Tension et intention,” 61–68. In their etymological dictionary, Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet cite “*nervi*” (nerves) as one of the main objects of the verb *intendo*. Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet, eds., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001), s. v. “tendō.”

first time that *intentio* is a response to the problem of mixture, because it makes possible a new kind of incorporeal mixture, which no longer has nothing to do with air:

Since the soul is not of a bodily nature, nor does it fill the body as its local space, like water filling a waterskin or a sponge, but in wonderful ways it is mixed [*commixta*] into the body it animates, and with its incorporeal nod [*incorporeo nutu*], so to say, it powers or steers the body with a kind of intention [*quadam intentione*], not with any material engine [*non mole*] – how much less, I am saying, is this “nod” of its will [*nutus voluntatis*] the subject of local movement itself, in order to move the body locally, when it moves the whole body through its parts, and only moves some parts locally through others which it does not move locally!⁴⁹

The soul is in a mixture with the body but a mixture of a new kind, a distention based on the incorporeal, immaterial ability that Augustine calls “a certain *intentio*” (*quadam intentione non mole*) or will (*nutus voluntatis*).

In order to prove the difference between body and soul, which has now become explicitly a difference between air and soul, Augustine’s argumentation rejoins his earlier ones and turns explicitly to the power of the soul he calls *intentio*, the ability of the soul to direct oneself towards something or even will something:

For indeed that the soul is one thing and a different one these, its bodily services, or instruments, or tools (or whatever else they may more suitably be called) becomes clear from this further evidence: very often it turns itself away vigorously from everything else with a forceful intention of thought [*cogitationis intentio*], and it is unaware of the many things before its wide open and perfectly healthy eyes; and if the intention is greater [*si maior intentio est*], while walking along he may suddenly stop – withdrawing the commanding nod [*imperandi nutum*] from the ministry of motion by which the feet were being set in motion. However, if his intention of thought [*cogitationis intentio*] is not quite intense enough to stop him in his tracks, but is still such that it is not free to nudge that middle part of the brain which mediates the body’s

⁴⁹ “Cum anima non sit natura corporea, nec locali spatio corpus impleat, sicut aqua utrum sive spongiam; sed miris modis ipso incorporeo nutu commixta sit vivificando corpori, quo et imperat corpori, quadam intentione non mole: quanto magis, inquam, nutus ipse voluntatis eius non per locum movetur, ut corpus per locum moveat, quando totum per partes movet, nec aliquas loco movet nisi per illas quas loco non movet?” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VIII.21.42.

movements, he sometimes forgets both where he is coming from and where he is going, and without noticing it passes the homestead he was making for – having nothing wrong with the nature of his body, but his soul has been called away to some other matter.⁵⁰

The fact that the human soul has an *intentio*, namely that it can be both distracted from, as in this case, or intensely focused on and attentive to something which is not its body proves that the soul is something different from the body it controls and from the instruments it uses, namely air. As we know from Augustine's analysis of sensation in his *De musica*, when perceiving something, the soul does not suffer anything. The object perceived or the very sense organs through which the object reaches the soul do not touch the soul in any way. Rather, it is the soul that can direct its own intention towards them or away from them. But now we know that this means directing, or intending, air towards or away from them.

What Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* shows with the utter clarity, compared with the previous texts analysed, is not that *intentio* in Augustine is a calque of the pneumatological concept of *tonos* developed by the ancient Stoics,⁵¹ but rather that *intentio* is in Augustine precisely and from the beginning the opposite of the material, aerial *tonos*, namely an anti-pneumatological concept that allows the split between *aer* and *spiritus*. It is right here with such a use of *intentio* that the *flatum*

⁵⁰ “Namque aliud esse ipsam, aliud haec eius corporalia ministeria, vel vasa, vel organa, vel si quid aptius dici possunt, hinc evidenter elucet, quod plerumque se vehementi cogitationis intentione avertit ab omnibus, ut prae oculis patentibus recteque valentibus multa posita nesciat; et si maior intentio est, dum ambulabat, repente subsistat, avertens utique imperandi nutum a ministerio motionis qua pedes agebantur: si autem non tanta est cogitationis intentio, ut figat ambulanti loco, sed tamen tanta est ut partem illam cerebri mediam nuntiantem corporis motus non vacet advertere; obliviscitur aliquando et unde veniat, et quo eat, et transit imprudens villam quo tendebat, natura sui corporis sana, sed sua in aliud advocata.” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.26.

⁵¹ No one has made such extreme claims, but this is the strawman some supporters of the Neo-Platonist Augustine, such as Stéphane Toulouse, have built on the suggestions of Rohmer, O'Daly and Solère, among others. Rohmer, “L'intentionnalité,” 497; O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 43–45; Solère, “Tension et intention,” 126–128; Stéphane Toulouse, “Influences néoplatoniciennes sur l'analyse augustinienne des *visiones*,” *Archives de Philosophie* 72, no. 2 (2009): 235–237.

becomes *spiritus*, a term as ambiguous as the former and yet one Augustine is ready to transform into what we still call “the spirit:”

What we are saying is that whatever the soul is, it is neither one of these four well-known elements, which are manifestly bodies, nor is it what God is. But you cannot state better what it is than by saying that it is the soul or spirit of life. The reason for adding “of life,” you see, is that this air [*aer*] too is often called spirit [*spiritus*].⁵²

Through the expression *spiritus vitae*, spirit of life, Augustine tries to delimit a space for the immaterial spirit that *intentio* has made possible.

Augustine’s Neo-Platonist Account of the Trinity as a Rejection of the Materialist Theory of Mixture

What we discover in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, perhaps one of Augustine’s most important texts, is that *intentio* does not stop playing a role once we move from the soul to that purely immaterial spirit that he takes God to be. But rather it plays a role that is as foundational and one that Western culture has perfectly internalised. When we talk about intention nowadays, it is almost impossible to disentangle this concept from that of the will, with which it seems to coincide. As we will see, such a coincidence was thought for the first time by Augustine in his *De Trinitate* and it can be read as the conclusion of the process of dematerialisation of the spirit that from *intentio* led to *attentio* and finally to *voluntas* (and love), and which this article has been tracing all along. The point for Augustine will be to show that the true life, of human beings and of everything, namely God, has absolutely nothing to do with the external, material world, even more than one could imagine by looking at the phenomenon of perception, as he had done in his earlier works: God, the Trinity, is the most interior, the most self-sustaining substance that exists, a transcendental subject that lives of and in itself.

⁵² “Nam et nos dicimus, quidquid anima est, non esse horum quatuor notissimorum elementorum, quae manifesta sunt corpora; sed neque hoc esse quod Deus est. Quid sit autem, non dicitur melius quam anima vel spiritus vitae. Ideo enim additur, vitae, quia et iste aer plerumque dicitur spiritus.” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.30.

The aim of the last seven books of Augustine's *De Trinitate* is to clarify the mystery of the Trinity, namely how God could be a Trinity or, according to the well-known formula: three single persons in one substance. It will be impossible to understand Augustine's arguments about the Trinity and their implications, unless we understand that this was for Augustine, and for the Church Fathers before him, first and foremost a metaphysical conundrum. The metaphysical question is: how is it possible that three entities can coexist in a single substance, namely how can they coincide with one another, and at the same time be each one a different "person?" As Wolfson has shown, the Church Fathers had interpreted this problem from the beginning in a similar fashion to the mystery of the incarnation and the related problem of the two natures of Christ, namely as a problem of "mixture."⁵³ Indeed, the Fathers had found in ancient philosophy a wide array of discussions on this theme, the same we have already partially discussed: first in Aristotle, who had been the first to give a catalogue of different kinds of "unities;" and then in the Stoics, who on a very specific kind of mixture had founded their whole philosophy – not just their psychology, as we saw in the first part of this article, but their cosmology as well, as Alexander of Aphrodisia had already noticed.⁵⁴

As Pépin demonstrated in the conclusion to the article already cited, the case here is analogous to the already discussed one of the relationship between soul and body.⁵⁵ Indeed, as we saw in the first part of this article, while the Stoics understood it as a mixture, namely as a complete interpenetration and *distentio* of two bodies, Augustine, following

⁵³ "As to what is meant by these terms and also how the mystery of triunity is to be solved, Augustine's discussion of the subject betrays the influence of Aristotle's discussion of the various kinds of relative unity and of the use made of it by earlier Fathers in their dealing with the mystery of triunity." Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of The Church Fathers*, vol. 1, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 350. Most recently, Alain de Libera has come back to this problem; Alain de Libera, *Naissance du sujet* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2016), 257–269.

⁵⁴ "For their theory of blending does not rely on something else, but their views on the soul depend *on it*, and their notorious Fate and their universal Providence gain conviction in this way if indeed their [theory] of principles and God, as well as the unification and sympathy of everything depend on it; for the God that pervades matter is all of these things for them." Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Stoic Physics*, 226.34–227; *SVF*, II.475.

⁵⁵ Pépin, "Une nouvelle source," 92–107.

the Neo-Platonists and Porphyry in particular, read it as a relationship of *intentio* between the incorporeal soul and the corporeal body. But this time what is at stake is the possibility of an immaterial version of precisely what the Stoics had imagined and believed to be able to prove with empirical evidence: namely, that two bodies can penetrate each other completely (expressed with the noun ἀντιπαρέκτασις (*anti-parektasis*) or the verb χωρέω (*choreo*) or περιχωρέω (*perichoreo*)) without each of them losing its own qualities, like water and wine when mixed. The Greek Fathers called this interpenetration of different immaterial substances in one immaterial essence very aptly *perichoresis*, one of the terms, as Wolfson noted, used by the Stoics to refer to the interpenetration that took place in what they called mixtures and which in Latin will be translated as *circumincessio*.⁵⁶ And it is the possibility of this immaterial *perichoresis* that Augustine's *De Trinitate* wants to make possible, once again through *intentio*, although in a metamorphosed form.

But proving that an interpenetration of immaterial substances is possible appeared to be much harder than proving that an interpenetration of bodies is, or perhaps just as hard if we remember that Augustine rejected the second theory, at least after his conversion. While the Stoics could turn to physical, empirical examples, to prove that bodies actually penetrated each other without losing their own nature, we seem to be at a loss in regard to immaterial substances. In Book VII, Augustine makes this confession: he goes over three well-known analogies that had already been used to understand the relationship between essence and persons inside the Trinity and shows that none of them works.⁵⁷ Each of them leads to a different heresy. It is impossible, he claims, for humans to understand this specific mixture because everything we perceive and imagine is material and corporeal, it has dimensions, while God, the Trinity, has no dimensions. But then, Augustine's innovation, which he

⁵⁶ Wolfson, *Philosophy of The Church Fathers*, 418–433; August Deneffe, "Perichoresis, circumincessio, circuminssio: Eine terminologische Untersuchung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 47, no. 4 (1923): 497–532; de Libera, *Naissance du sujet*, 283–295.

⁵⁷ The first one is that the essence would correspond to a genus and the persons to different species; the second that they would correspond respectively to a species and different individuals; and the third one that one could understand the essence as the common matter or substance from which the three persons are formed, like in the case of some gold from which three statues are formed. Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.9–11.

takes once again from the Neo-Platonists – Plotinus this time – is to claim that an empirical example exists but is detached from everything material. An analogy, or an image he will say, of the way the Trinity works can be found in the immaterial doings of the human mind itself.

It is not then by any chance that this final stage of the process would immediately betray its own Neo-Platonist underpinnings and the final, explicit conversion of *intentio* into a full-fledged and fully traceable Neo-Platonist concept: βούλησις (*boulesis*) or *voluntas*. As Ernst Benz once showed, Augustine's trinitarian exploration can be read as a Christian reading of Plotinus' *Enneads* VI.8, a version of which Augustine could have read already in Marius Victorinus, the Neo-Platonist philosopher and then converted Christian, in whose translation Augustine probably read the *libri platonici* leading to his conversion.⁵⁸ In *Enneads* VI.8, Plotinus reached the speculative peak of his philosophy by trying to understand in which way the One, the supreme principle, worked. His answer was that the One is the Absolute Good and it is beyond being and life, and it is therefore indefinable through any category or attribute of this world, like in every proper negative theology. Yet by using the analogy of the human mind through the particle οἶον ("as if," which in Augustine becomes *quasi*),⁵⁹ he discerned in the One three activities that are actually one: as the Absolute Good, the One contemplates, wills and loves itself as the absolute good, and these three activities are one; because as soon as it contemplates itself, it also knows itself as the Absolute Good and it also wants to be itself, and therefore it loves itself.⁶⁰ For Plotinus, the One is a self-contemplating mind that,

⁵⁸ Pépin argues that the model is not Plotinus but Porphyry. Yet Benz's evidence is quite solid. Here it must be noticed that Benz's work is almost completely absent from any Augustine bibliography. This has implied a general delay in understanding the role Augustine has played in the invention of the Western concept of *voluntas*. Ernst Benz, *Marius Victorinus und die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1932), 289–309. Albrecht Dihle also confirms Benz's argument. Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 123–129.

⁵⁹ See for example, Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.11. On the οἶον, see Benz, *Marius Victorinus*, 289–293.

⁶⁰ "Theoretical intellect, that is, primary Intellect is in this way up to itself, since its function is never up to something else. On the contrary, it reverted entirely towards itself and its function, lying itself in the Good with no deficiency and fulfilled, living in a way in conformity to will. Its will is intellection, but it is called 'will' because its [activity] accords with Intellect. So-called will imitates what is in accord with Intellect, for will wants the Good, while thinking

therefore, wills and loves itself, with no need for an outside. This image of the human mind can be read, according to Augustine, as an image of the Divine Trinity: three persons in one essence.

All these different argumentative steps are present, although at different moments and in a different order, in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. If Plotinus had already undertaken the task of interpreting the One as an entirely interior life, self-sufficient and self-sustaining through its capacity for contemplation, will and self-love, similar to the human mind, Augustine's innovation, central to our research, goes even deeper by grounding such a process more profoundly in the psychology of the human mind.⁶¹ Just as his psychology was founded on the rejection of the possibility that soul and body could be a mixture of two bodies, the soul as breath and the body itself, so his theology is based on the rejection of God as a material mixture and the proof that something like an immaterial mixture is possible. And the second argument depends *in toto* on the first one. For Augustine, the Trinity is a trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia*, a mind that loves and knows itself, or more clearly a trinity of memory, intelligence and will, a mind that is certain to always be remembering, comprehending and willing at the same time, only because the mind is first of all a trinity of memory, things remembered and *voluntas*, which in turn is based on the even more material trinity of vision, object seen and *intentio*. It is through this innovation that the process of the dematerialisation of the spirit and of *intentio* finally takes place and *intentio* as *voluntas* can come to coincide with the totally immaterial Holy Spirit itself.

lies truly in the Good. Intellect, then, possesses what will wants, and, when will attains it, will becomes intellection." Plotinus, *The Enneads*, ed. Loyd P. Gerson, trans. George Boys-Stones et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), VI.8.6. "It is borne in a way inside itself, as though loving itself, in the pure radiance, being itself that which it loved, that is, it has made itself exist, if indeed it is persisting activity and the most loved thing, like Intellect. But Intellect is the result of actuality; hence, the Good is that, too, but not of anything else. It is, therefore, the result of its own activity. It is, therefore, not as it is accidentally; rather, it is as it itself acts." Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.8.16.

⁶¹ This is the reason why Augustine's *De Trinitate* has also been read as a psychological treatise, which also explains why its concepts had such an influence on most psychological theorising in the European tradition.

The Dematerialisation of the Spirit:
The Central Role of *Intentio* as *Attentio* and *Voluntas*
in Augustine's Account of the Trinity

To read the second part of Augustine's *De Trinitate* means to appreciate for the first time the central role that Augustine's theory of sensation played from the beginning in his conception of God: the way in which, from the beginning, his understanding of perception made possible not only the immateriality of the human soul, as we already saw, but also the immateriality of God Himself. And this immateriality, the negation of any corporeal mixture, depends on *voluntas*, a direct equivalent of *intentio* in the soul-body relationship – the two have become at this point synonymous, as we already saw in his *De Genesi ad litteram*. Indeed, Augustine's whole attempt to reach an image of the Divine Trinity – just an image because God is completely unreachable – is based on the possibility of God's similarity to the human being, which Augustine had found in Plotinus but that he read in Christian terms through the scriptural assumption of the *imago dei*: the human being was created in the image of God.⁶² This similarity allowed the possibility for a *regressus* to God in terms of trinity, according to which starting from the trinity that Augustine believed to be intrinsic to the *homo exterior*, the human being in his relation to the external world, one could reach a better understanding of the trinity of the *homo interior*, the spiritual mind of the human being, and therefore of the Divine Trinity itself. It is in this way that *intentio* came to play a role, and a central one at that, in the nature of God Himself.

Therefore, in Book XI of his *De Trinitate*, we find out, as part of this process, that the theory of sensation we read in Augustine contained from the beginning some form of trinity.⁶³ When we perceive some-

⁶² At other times, Augustine claims that the whole of nature must be similar in some way to God since He created it. Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.8.

⁶³ On the passages on the *homo exterior* in the *De Trinitate* see Carla Di Martino, "Il ruolo della *intentio* nell'evoluzione della psicologia di Agostino: dal *De libero arbitrio* al *De Trinitate*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 46, no. 2 (2000): 188–196, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.REA.5.104821>.

thing there are always three elements:⁶⁴ 1) the object one sees; 2) the *visio*, namely what one actually sees in one's mind once the sense organs have been informed by the object outside; and 3) most importantly, the *intentio animi*, "quod in ea re quae videtur quamdiu videtur sensum detinet oculorum," namely what keeps the sense organs fixed on the object seen.⁶⁵ This is the first, most sensible, most corporeal trinity that one can find in the *homo exterior* and yet one that, as we already know, is not completely corporeal. Augustine specifies more than once that this trinity has an interesting characteristic, typical of the *homo exterior*, namely the three elements are not part of the same substance, they are not of the same nature. Indeed, the object seen and the sense organ belong to two different bodies, unless we are perceiving our own body. But, most importantly, as we know, the *intentio animi*, unlike the other two elements, is not corporeal in any way, but rather belongs to the *animus* and only to the *animus*. And it is this *intentio*, which already in this discussion is called, at times, *voluntas*,⁶⁶ that remains a constant of all the trinities Augustine will analyse and that hides a power which cannot be underestimated: the *vis copulandi*, the ability to bring together and unify different things, indeed to mix them, which if powerful enough, it becomes or can be called "amor aut cupiditas aut libido" (love or cupidity or lust).⁶⁷ In other words, the first trinity already shows, although as a possible negative capability as well, the further possibilities of *intentio*: *intentio* is *voluntas*, and therefore love, or bad love.

The second trinity that Augustine finds in the *homo exterior* is the trinity of *cogitatio* (thought) or memory. Once the *intentio animi* that had brought together the object seen and the organ of sense is directed somewhere else, the image produced does not disappear completely but

⁶⁴ The sense in question does not matter, but Augustine takes the example of vision, as he had done in his *De Genesi ad litteram*.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.3–5.

⁶⁶ "Since this is so, let us recall how these three, though differing in nature, may be mixed together [*contemperentur*] into a kind of unity, namely, (i) the form of the body that is seen, (ii) its image impressed on the sense, which is vision, or the sense informed, and (iii) the will of the soul [*voluntas animi*] which directs the sense to the sensible thing and keeps the vision itself fixed upon it. [...] The third, however, is proper to the soul alone, because it is the will." Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.5.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.5.

gives rise to a similar image in our memory. The presence of this image in our memory makes possible the second trinity, the trinity of *cogitatio*: when we think of something, what happens is that 3) our will – *intentio* has now officially become *voluntas*, but at other times it will still be referred to as *voluntatis intentio*⁶⁸ – directs itself towards the 1) image in our memory, giving rise to a new form of 2) interior vision, what we call *cogitatio*, thought, because the three are brought together (*coguntur*) by the force of the will (*coactus*).⁶⁹

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the first and the second trinity of the *homo exterior*, according to Augustine: in the latter case, the three are of the same substance. They all belong this time to the *animus*.⁷⁰ Sensible bodies have been left behind. And yet it is still of their traces that we are thinking, meaning that the will can still turn towards the corporeal world and be lost in it. This trinity is much closer to that of God because it takes place completely inside an immaterial substance, and yet it still preserves some form of relationship to the outside world, which has a further implication: like in the case of the trinity of perception, in this case too there can be countless trinities; every time we perceive or think of something, a new trinity is taking place, which is another way to say that our will can change.⁷¹ But this is not the case for God.

Therefore, Augustine claims, the image of the Divine Trinity in the human being cannot be found in the *homo exterior*, still completely similar in its workings to animals and beasts, but in the *homo interior*, in the human being as mind. What has hardly been noticed is that what remains constant in this shift from *exterior* to *interior*, from beast to human, is *intentio*.⁷² The difference between beast and man is that, while both have *intentio*, the animal does not seem to be able to direct it wherever it wishes. Unlike animals, the human mind has the ability to direct one's own intention away from the external world or anything

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.7.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.6.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.6–7.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.7.12–8.13.

⁷² On the transformation of *intentio* into *voluntas* in this case, see Di Martino, “Il ruolo della *intentio*,” 196–197.

that has to do with the external world, towards itself, and therefore towards the unchangeable truths the mind contains.⁷³ And it is precisely this process that Augustine describes in order to reach that trinity of the mind that he believes to present, although only partially, the clearest picture of the Divine Trinity.

It is here that Augustine finds something very similar to Plotinus: when the mind turns towards itself in search of itself in order to understand the way it works, it means that the mind already wills or loves itself, which according to Augustine are the same thing. But if the mind wills or loves itself, it means that it must in some way already know itself, otherwise it would not be able to turn towards itself and will and love itself.⁷⁴ Whenever we look at the mind intending itself, if such a term is at this point allowed, we find a trinity according to Augustine: the trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia* (mind, love and knowledge). And what is so peculiar about this trinity, in comparison to the ones of the *homo exterior*, is that in this case the three elements are three different elements while really just being one single substance, since each one is inside the other two:

And so each exists in itself. But they are mutually in each other in such a way that the mind that loves is in the love, and love is in the knowledge of him who loves, and knowledge is in the mind that knows. And so each one is in each two, because the mind that knows and loves itself is in its own love and knowledge; and the love of the mind that knows and loves itself is in the mind and in its knowledge; and the knowledge of the mind that knows and loves itself is in the mind and in its love; because it loves itself as knowing and knows itself as loving. And for this reason, each two are also in each one, because the mind that knows and loves itself is in the love with its knowledge in the knowledge with its love, since the love itself and the knowledge are also together in the mind that loves and knows itself. But we have shown above, how all are in all, since the mind loves itself as a whole, and knows itself as a whole, and knows all its love, and loves all its knowledge, when these three are perfect in respect to themselves. These three, therefore, are in a marvelous manner inseparable from one another; and yet each of them is a substance,

⁷³ Augustine, *Trin.*, XII.2.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.2.3–3.8.

and all together are one substance or essence, while the terms themselves express a mutual relationship.⁷⁵

It is not surprising that Augustine tries to show once again that this trinity has nothing to do with the material mixtures one can appreciate in nature. Right before the previous passage in Book IX, he uses examples taken directly from the debate on mixture, which he probably found in Porphyry. One could, Augustine wonders, consider this trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia* as three parts of a single substance. It would be like a beverage made of water, wine and honey, in which each ingredient pervades the whole mixture and yet there are three different substances. This is the classic Stoic example, with the addition of a third ingredient to have a trinity. But this example does not work, according to Augustine. The difference is that while wine, water and honey create a single new substance but are not that single substance any longer, in the case of the trinity of the mind, and therefore of the Divine Trinity too, these three substances stay three different substances while sharing one single essence, namely while becoming one single thing. What Augustine is doing here, following the Neo-Platonist precedent, is to deny the possibility of what the Stoics called mixture on a material level to make it possible on the immaterial one. This is the reason why Augustine can explicitly claim: that there is here no mixture whatsoever, in the Stoic sense.

But in these three, when the mind knows itself and loves itself, a trinity remains: the mind, its love, and its knowledge; and there is no confusion through any commingling [*nulla commixtione confunditur*], although each is a

⁷⁵ “Ita sunt haec singula in se ipsis. In alternis autem ita sunt, quia et mens amans in amore est, et amor in amantis notitia, et notitia in mente noscente. Singula in binis ita sunt, quia mens quae se novit et amat, in amore et notitia sua est; et amor amantis mentis seseque scientis, in mente notitiaque eius est; et notitia mentis se scientis et amantis in mente atque in amore eius est, quia scientem se amat, et amantem se novit. Ac per hoc et bina in singulis, quia mens quae se novit et amat, cum sua notitia est in amore, et cum suo amore in notitia; amorque ipse et notitia simul sunt in mente, quae se amat et novit. Tota vero in totis quemadmodum sint, iam supra ostendimus cum se totam mens amat, et totam novit, et totum amorem suum novit, totamque amat notitiam suam, quando tria ista ad se ipsa perfecta sunt. Miro itaque modo tria ista inseparabilia sunt a semetipsis, et tamen eorum singulum quidque substantia est, et simul omnia una substantia vel essentia, cum et relative dicantur ad invicem.” Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.8.

substance in itself, and all are found mutually in all, whether each one in each two, or each two in each one. Consequently, all are in all.⁷⁶

In the trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia*, Augustine has found the trace of an immaterial *unio inconfusa*.

It is now worth remembering that in his *De quantitate animae*, Augustine had turned to linguistic theory in order to prove the immaterial relationship that the soul entertained with the body, claiming that the soul is in the body like the immaterial meaning is in the materially distended signifier. He does the same in his *De Trinitate*, merging his Neo-Platonist reaction to the Stoic theory of mixture and his own Christian understanding of the Son as *Logos* or *Verbum* of the Father. The possibility of an immaterial mixture such as the trinity of *mens*, *amor notitia*, which corresponds directly to the Divine Trinity, where the *mens* is God, the *notitia* the Son and *amor* the Holy Spirit, finds thus further confirmation in Augustine's conception of the *verbum mentis*. According to Augustine, when one turns his mind towards itself and begins that process of self-knowledge and self-love that leads to God, this process always takes place "in language":

The true knowledge of things, thence conceived, we bear with us as a word [*verbum*], and beget by speaking from within; nor does it depart from us by being born. But in conversing with others we add the service of our voice [*ministerium vocis*] or of some bodily sign to the word that remains within, in order to produce in the mind of the listener, by a kind of sensible remembrance, something similar to that which does not depart from the mind of the speaker. Thus there is nothing that we do through the members of our body, in our words and actions, by which the conduct of men is approved or disapproved, that is not preceded by the word that has been brought forth within us. For no one willingly [*volens*] does anything which he has not spoken previously in his heart.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "At in illis tribus, cum se novit mens et amat se, manet trinitas: mens, amor, notitia; et nulla commixtione confunditur, quamvis et singula sint in se ipsis, et invicem tota in totis, sive singula in binis, sive bina in singulis. Itaque omnia in omnibus." Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.8.

⁷⁷ "Atque inde conceptam rerum veracem notitiam, tamquam verbum apud nos habemus, et dicendo intus gignimus; nec a nobis nascendo discedit. Cum autem ad alios loquimur, verbo intus manenti ministerium vocis adhibemus, aut alicuius signi corporalis, ut per quandam commemorationem sensibilem tale aliquid fiat etiam in animo audientis, quale de loquentis animo non recedit. Nihil itaque agimus per membra corporis in factis dictisque nostris, quibus

The result is that a silent word is generated within the mind. And this word is very different from the words one can express through one's voice, gestures, or other corporeal signs, because this word never leaves one's mind and precedes all those possible corporeal expressions.⁷⁸ Actually, it is this word that makes those material words possible and in turn what makes this interior, immaterial word of knowledge possible is the love or rather the will with which it is generated: "Love [*amor*], therefore, as a means, joins our word with the mind from which it is born; and as a third it binds itself with them in an incorporeal embrace, without any confusion [*sine ulla confusion*]. [...] The word that has been conceived and born is one and the same when the will [*voluntas*] rests in the knowledge of itself; this happens in the love of spiritual things."⁷⁹ It can be a will directed towards the external world or towards God, it can be *cupiditas* or *caritas*. But in any case, it is this will or love that binds together mind and word, that allows the mind to generate that interior word, and this is how God the Father generates the Son, his Word, in and through his own Spirit:

So in some such way we also see the Trinity that is God, because there by our understanding we also behold Him, as it were, speaking, and His Word, that is, the Father and the Son, and the Love preceding from them and common to both, namely, the Holy Spirit?⁸⁰

vel approbantur vel improbantur mores hominum, quod non verbo apud nos intus edito praevenimus. Nemo enim aliquid volens facit, quod non in corde suo prius dixerit." Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.12.

⁷⁸ On the relationship between voice and word in Augustine see also John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 69–71.

⁷⁹ "Verbum ergo nostrum et mentem de qua gignitur, quasi medius amor coniungit, sequere cum eis tertium complexu incorporeo, sine ulla confusione constringit. [...] Conceptum autem verbum et natum idipsum est, cum voluntas in ipsa notitia conquiescit, quod fit in amore spiritualium." Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.12–13.

⁸⁰ "Ita videmus etiam trinitatem deum quia et illic intellegendo conspicimus tamquam dicentem et verbum eius, id est patrem et filium, atque inde procedentem caritatem utrique communem, sanctum scilicet spiritum?" Augustine, *Trin.*, XV.6.10. On the linguistic side of Augustine's trinitarian arguments and the role of *intentional voluntas* in it, see Giorgio Santi's pivotal contribution. Giorgio Santi, "Interiorità e *verbum mentis*," in *Interiorità e intenzionalità in S. Agostino: Atti del I° e II° Seminario Internazionale del Centro di Studi Agostiniani di Perugia*, ed. Luigi Alici (Roma: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1990), 133–143.

With Augustine's *De Trinitate*, we enter a new realm altogether: the realm of the spirit. Everything that has to do with the senses, with the material and external world has lost here most of its meaning and become just the very first step of a possible return of the human being to God. However, what we discover in Augustine's *De Trinitate* is also how profoundly his conception of *intentio* penetrated his own philosophy as well as his most important theological notions, thanks to a new metamorphosis. Through a new, fascinating innovation, which we already partially observed in his *De Genesi ad litteram*, *intentio* shifts here from *attentio* to, first, *voluntas* and then love. But what is as important for us is that by studying this shift, we understand for the first time how *intentio* could come to be coupled, in the rest of the history of Western philosophy and culture, with the notion of will. By becoming *voluntas* and *amor*, *intentio* brings to an end the process of dematerialisation of the spirit, which had begun in Augustine's early works: the soul and the spirit have nothing to do with air any longer. The Trinity, whose image Augustine finds in the mind of the human being, is a completely immaterial and spiritual substance thanks to its will and love. In loving itself, or in other words in willing itself, God or the mind is completely present to itself, without necessity for an outside. In linguistic terms, God is his own interior word, the Son, generated by an act of will in his own immaterial voice, the Holy Spirit.

The Intention of the Spirit: Traces of *Intentio*
as *Tonos* in Augustine's and Earlier Texts

What we have done in this article is to show that Verbeke was right: Augustine was the one to bring to conclusion the process of the dematerialisation of the spirit. But what he had not noticed is that the way Augustine was able to reach that conclusion was through the concept of *intentio*. In his works, *intentio* is always an anti-pneumatological concept, which coupled with other concepts such as *attentio* and *voluntas* (or even *amor*) creates the possibility for an immaterial realm that Augustine called the Spirit.

And yet, *intentio* in Augustine remains for many reasons a mystery. The stunning amount of secondary literature on the topic too does

not seem to be able to reach an agreement on the origin and meaning of such a powerful concept, which penetrates Augustine's works from beginning to end. The dilemma arises from the fact that *intentio* seems to be a fully Neo-Platonist concept: as it was shown, most of the arguments in which *intentio* makes an appearance can be easily traced back to a Neo-Platonist line of argumentation. And yet, there does not seem to be in the Neo-Platonist texts that have been handed down anything like *intentio*, neither in Ancient Greek nor in Latin.⁸¹ In the last seventy years, since the debate on *intentio* has begun, numerous corresponding terms have been proposed – ῥοπή (*rhopé*; “inclination”), ἐπιστρέφειν (*epistrephein*; “turning”), προσέχειν (*prosechein*; “turning one's attention to”), προσοχή (*prosoché*; “attention”), but also τάσις (*tasis*, “stretching”) and ἐπίτασις (*epitasis*; “stretching”) – but none of them seems to be able to explain completely what *intentio* is doing here.⁸² In all the cases proposed, the Neo-Platonist influence on Augustine's use of *intentio* is clearly distinguishable and still something escapes it.

Perhaps the most fascinating theory regarding the origin of *intentio* in Augustine is the one introduced for the first time by Jean Rohmer in the 1950s and popularised in the 1980s by the influential work of Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*.⁸³ According to these critics, *intentio* would be in Augustine the Latin translation of the Stoic, materialist concept of τόνος (*tonos*, namely tension or tone), on which the Stoics based their whole philosophy.⁸⁴ Indeed if the Stoics believed that the soul as breath (*pneuma* or *spiritus*) was in the body as physically distended and mixed to it, they also believed in an opposite movement, which they deemed characteristic of the spirit in general, namely its

⁸¹ “Although the local presence of soul to body is variously expressed by Plotinus and Porphyry, there is no term among those most commonly used in their writings that can be compared with Augustine's use of *intentio* here.” O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 44.

⁸² ῥοπή was proposed by Pépin and προσοχή is the recent suggestion of Stéphane Toulouse. Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 89; Toulouse, “Influences néoplatoniciennes,” 239.

⁸³ Rohmer, “L'intentionnalité,” 497; O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 43–45.

⁸⁴ Even though this is well known in the secondary literature, the role of the *tonos* in Stoic philosophy has been mostly underplayed, not unlike their materialist pneumatology. This situation is due to an overall favouring of a mere ethical reading of this philosophical school, which has lasted almost two millennia. Unfortunately, I won't be able to explore this further in this essay.

tonos. According to the Ancient Stoics, it was this *tonos*, this internal tension of the air, that gave life to everything in the cosmos: the spirit, of which the soul is only a specific kind, was not just distended in bodies but also intended, keeping them together and even allowing movement, life.⁸⁵

However, such a lineage theory was and is easily disproved. Using as evidence for the most part a single correspondence between *tonos* and *intentio* in the Stoic and in Augustine's theory of vision, which we also studied in the context of his *De Genesi ad litteram* and his *De Trinitate*, the theory in question underestimates the complexity and equivocity of the term *intentio*, as well as the clear differences that exist between Augustine's theory of vision and the Stoic one.⁸⁶ Indeed, as this paper has also shown, Augustine's use of *intentio*, in his theory of vision, sensation or otherwise, is eminently and undeniably Neo-Platonist. And yet, it is also profoundly related to the pneumatological theory of *tonos* to which these critics have surreptitiously alerted us, and in ways that deserve an explanation.

The fact that *intentio* in Augustine is always an anti-pneumatological concept used by him to deny any form of corporeal distention and mixture, so as to make it possible on the immaterial level, suggests that Augustine is explicitly responding to the theory of the *tonos*. We could even go as far as to claim that he is explicitly rejecting something like a materialist theory of *intentio*. Once one reads *intentio* in Augustine in the (anti-)pneumatological context we have delimited, it is hard not to think that there could be behind *intentio* another meaning, perhaps a meaning that Augustine himself used to employ and embrace before he even became *Augustinus*. Perhaps the most surprising fact about this hypothesis is that Augustine himself tells us so in a fascinating appearance of *intentio*, in another explicitly pneumatological context, which has unfortunately received no particular attention. At the beginning of Book VII of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his beliefs regarding God and the soul before his conversion, first to Neo-Platonism and

⁸⁵ SVF, II.439–462. David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 136–184.

⁸⁶ The latter is Toulouse's main complaint against such a theory. Toulouse, "Influences néo-platoniciennes," 233.

then to Christianity, before he became the only Augustine we know. At the time, he confesses to God, he was completely unable to imagine a substance which he could not perceive by his own eyes. And therefore, he was not able to imagine a God that was not material. But it is worth lingering on Augustine's choice of words:

Hardly had they been dispersed when in the flash of an eye they had re-grouped and were back again. They attacked my power of vision and clouded it. Although you were not in the shape of the human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something corporeal [*corporeum*] occupying space [*per spatia locorum*] either infused [*infusus*] in the world or diffused [*diffusus*] outside the world through infinite spaces.⁸⁷

Augustine was able to understand that God was not like a human being, what pagans used to believe, and yet could imagine Him only in corporeal terms either *infusum* in the world or *diffusum* through every space, two terms that we have shown to be used as synonyms for *intensus* and *distensus* and to derive from the Stoic theory of mixture and the materialist cosmology related to it.

Indeed, such a link to pneumatology is confirmed right after. Trying to further specify the image of God he entertained before his conversion, Augustine claims:

I conceived even you, life of my life, as a large being, permeating infinite space on every side, penetrating the entire mass of the world, and outside this extending in all directions for immense distances without end; [...] thus I thought that you permeate not only the body of heaven and air and sea but even earth, and that in everything, both the greatest and the smallest things, this physical frame is open to receive your presence, so that by a secret breath of life [*occulta inspiratione*] you govern all things which you created, both inwardly and outwardly [*intrinsicus et extrinsecus*].⁸⁸

⁸⁷ "Et vix dimota in ictu oculi ecce conglobata rursus aderat et irruerat in aspectum meum et obnubilabat eum, ut quamvis non forma humani corporis, corporeum tamen aliquid cogitare cogere per spatia locorum sive infusum mundo sive etiam extra mundum per infinita diffusum." Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.

⁸⁸ "Ita etiam te, vita vitae meae, grandem per infinita spatia undique cogitabam penetrare totam mundi molem et extra eam quaquaversum per immensa sine termino [...]. sic tibi putabam non solum caeli et aeris et maris sed etiam terrae corpus pervium et ex omnibus maximis minimisque partibus penetrabile ad capiendam praesentiam tuam, occulta inspiratione intrinsicus et extrinsecus administrantem omnia, quae creasti." Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.2.

God is here a material God that, through some form of mixture, penetrates and pervades matter and, through some “*occulta inspiratione*,” namely as a corporeal breath, manages and controls everything through a double movement, towards the inside and towards the outside (*intrinsicus et extrinsecus*). The latter is the expression Augustine used in a passage from the *De quantitate animae* to describe the materialist theory he was rejecting.⁸⁹ As some critics have argued, such a conception of God seems to reflect more a Stoic monistic understanding of God, than the dualistic account proper of Manicheism, which we know from other works by Augustine.⁹⁰ But even if we doubt that this passage could count as evidence for a possible straightforwardly Stoic period in Augustine’s life, it is impossible to deny that the supposedly Manichean ideas depicted here are imbued with Stoic concepts to which Augustine had been exposed in some way.

But what matters the most for us is that in between these passages, Augustine does not only confess to his pre-conversion, Stoic-imbued materialism, but he himself gives a reason for it: surprisingly, *intentio*.

So my heart had become gross, and I had no clear vision even of my own self. I thought simply non-existent anything not extended in space or diffused or concentrated or expanding [*per aliquanta spatia tenderetur vel diffunderetur vel conglobaretur vel tumeret*], and which does not possess, or is incapable of possessing, such qualities. Indeed, my eyes were accustomed to these kinds of forms and those kinds of images my heart used to inhabit; and I did not see that the intention [*intentionem*] by which I formed these images was not such a thing, though it could not form them unless it were some great thing.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “A. Now, you do not think your soul exists anywhere except in your body, do you? / E. No, I don’t. / A. Is the soul inside [*intrinsicus*] the body only, like the contents of a waterskin, so to say, or only on the outside, like a covering, or do you think it is both inside and outside [*et intrinsicus et extrinsecus*]?” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 7. The same exact expression can also be found in Philo, to describe the double pneumatic force of the soul, a central tenet of Stoic psychology. *SVF*, II.802.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *Le confessioni*, ed. Maria Bettetini (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 675. The point was made quite powerfully by Charles Baguette. However, J. J. O’Donnell rejected Baguette’s theory, but his arguments do not seem strong enough. Charles Baguette, “Une période stoïcienne dans l’évolution de la pensée de saint Augustin,” *Revue d’études augustinienes et patristiques* 16, no. 1–2 (1970): 47–77; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. J. J. O’Donnell, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 392.

⁹¹ “Ego itaque incrassatus corde nec mihimet ipsi vel ipse conspicuus, quidquid non per aliquanta spatia tenderetur vel diffunderetur vel conglobaretur vel tumeret vel tale aliquid caperet

The reason why he understood God materially, he tells us, is because he understood his own soul materially, which means as something that is stretched (*tenderetur*) or distended and diffused (*diffunderetur*). But most importantly, he understood his own soul materially because he was not able to differentiate his own *intentio* from the very things he perceived, which is to say that he understood his own *intentio* as a material movement.

What this passage reveals to us is that Augustine's anti-pneumatological conception of *intentio*, as he developed it against the materialist theories of the Stoics, following the Neo-Platonists, came to replace and erase a previous theory of *intentio* that has gone almost completely lost. According to this theory, the soul as material breath had both a material *distentio* and a material *intentio*, it was both corporeally distended in the body but also corporeally intended, and it was this material *intentio* that made sensation and movement possible. And the same was true for God. Indeed, what the scholars who supported the hypothesis of the kinship between the Ancient Greek *tonos* and the Latin *intentio* in Augustine never noticed is that there are Latin precedents for such a translation. To give just one example, Seneca describes God thus in his *Ad Helviam*:

Believe me, this was the action of the great creator of the universe, whoever he may be, whether an all-powerful God, or incorporeal Reason contriving vast works, or divine Spirit [*divinus spiritus*] diffused in all things from the smallest to the greatest with uniform intention [*aequali intentione diffusus*], or Fate and an unalterable sequence of causes clinging one to the other.⁹²

Among the various conceptions of God that a late Stoic such as Seneca can contemplate, there is still the pneumatological one he inherited,

aut capere posset, nihil prorsus esse arbitrabar. Per quales enim formas ire solent oculi mei, per tales imagines ibat cor meum, nec videbam hanc eandem intentionem, qua illas ipsas imagines formabam, non esse tale aliquid; quae tamen ipsas non formaret, nisi esset magnum aliquid." Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.2.

⁹² "Id actum est, mihi crede, ab illo, quisquis formator universi fuit, sive ille deus est potens omnium, sive incorporalis ratio ingentium operum artifex, sive divinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffusus, sive fatum et immutabilis causarum inter se cohaerentium series." Seneca, "De Consolatione ad Helviam," in *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 8.3.

according to which God is a breath that is diffused in everything with equal intention.

And even if Augustine is said to have never explicitly cited Seneca in his *oeuvre*, one begins to doubt that he did not know the Senecan expression just cited, when he wrote, in another letter from the later years:⁹³

If I have been successful in treating of these matters, in proportion to my strength and by the Lord's help, when you set yourself [*te extendis*] to think of God everywhere present and everywhere wholly present, not distributed in different places as if by the stretching of physical mass [*distentione diffusum*], turn your mind from all corporeal images such as it is wont to fashion. That is not how we think of wisdom or justice or, finally, of love, of which it is written: "God is Love."⁹⁴

This is another of the many Augustinian texts that reject the conception of God (and soul) as a distended, material breath. But we see here how the Senecan formula "*intentione diffusus*" has become "*distentione diffusum*," because *intentio* has been moved to the immaterial level, expressed here by the verb *extendere*, which one can find often coupled with *intentio* in other passages.⁹⁵

⁹³ This is Hagendahl's conclusion in his famous, still authoritative study. Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, vol. 2 (Gothenburg: Elander, 1967), 569–584. However, there is new material to take into consideration. See Ilona Opelt, "Seneca bei Augustinus," in *Congresso Internazionale su s. Agostino nel XVI Centenario della Conversione, Atti I* (Rome: StudEphAug, 1987), 363–70.

⁹⁴ "Haec si pro viribus nostris, quantum Dominus adiuvit, rite tractavimus; quando Deum ubique praesentem, et non spatiis distantibus, quasi aliqua mole vel distentione diffusum, sed ubique totum cogitare te extendis, averte mentem ab omnibus imaginibus corporum, quas humana cogitatio volvere consuevit. Non enim sic sapientia, non iustitia, non sic denique caritas cogitatur, de qua scriptum est: Deus caritas est." Augustine, *Ep.*, 187.41.

⁹⁵ The most famous one from *Confessions*, Book XI: "Because your mercy is more than lives' (Ps. 62: 4), see how my life is a distention in several directions [*ecce distentio est vita mea*]. 'Your right hand upheld me' (Ps. 17: 36; 62: 9) in my Lord, the Son of man who is mediator between you the One and us the many, who live in a multiplicity of distractions by many things; so 'I might apprehend him in whom also I am apprehended' (Phil. 3: 12–14), and leaving behind the old days I might be gathered to follow the One, 'forgetting the past' and moving not towards those future things which are transitory but to 'the things which are before' me, not stretched out in distraction [*non distentus*] but extended in reach [*sed extentus*], not according to distention but according to intention [*non secundum distentionem, sed secundum intentionem*]. So I 'pursue the prize of the high calling' where I 'may hear the voice of praise' and 'contemplate your delight' (Ps. 25: 7; 26: 4) which neither comes nor goes." Augustine, *Conf.*, XI.29.39. On

Considering the almost complete disappearance of such a materialist meaning of *intentio* in the centuries that follow until our very day, we can only make hypotheses about how well-known such a materialist understanding of *intentio* was before Augustine. However, there are traces that show that it could have been as popular and pervasive as the pneumatological theories Augustine's philosophy came to replace. Perhaps the most fascinating example of such an obscure situation can be found in a letter exchange between Marius Victorinus and Arianus Candidus written around 360 CE, to which a young Pierre Hadot dedicated his first academic article.⁹⁶ This letter preserves some of the very few existing traces of a particular form of heresy that developed in the 4th century CE among some followers of the Monarchian Sabellus, such as Photinus and Marcellus of Ancyra. These thinkers spoke of the Trinity in terms of *typus*, a medical term that indicated the rhythmic movement of expansion and contraction. In the words of Arianus Candidus, who describes such a heresy:

Some say that generation from God is close to what is called *typum*. In fact, God is Spirit. And furthermore, the Spirit sometimes intends [*intendit*] its own nature and at other times it resides in itself. This kind of movement they call *typum*. What does that imply, then? Out of this kind of movement suddenly emerges a certain being-son [*filietas*] and this is generation from God.⁹⁷

As Hadot has shown, this Monarchian heretical movement understood the Trinity itself in Stoic terms. For them, God was *spiritus*, but this time in the sense of a vivifying breath. And what they believed to be characteristic of air is that air intends itself. Like Augustine, they argued that it is through intention that the generation of the Son in the Father takes place. But this *intentio* stood for the material tension

the relationship between *intendere*, *attendere*, and *extendere* in Augustine, see Gerard O'Daly, "Time as *Distentio* and St. Augustine's Exegesis of *Philippians* 3, 12-14," *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 23, no. 3-4 (1977): 265-271.

⁹⁶ Pierre Hadot, "Typus: Stoïcisme et Monarchianisme au IV^e siècle d'après Candide l'Arien et Marius Victorinus," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 18 (1951): 177-187.

⁹⁷ My translation. "Dicunt quidam generationem esse a deo iuxta nominatum typum. Deus enim Spiritus est. Spiritus autem naturam suam nunc intendit, nunc in semet ipsum residit. Istius modi motum typum nominant. Quid deinde vero? Ab istius modi motione repente erumpit filietas quaedam et haec est generatio a deo." Cited in Hadot, "Typus," 178. See also D. H. Williams, "Monarchianism and Photinus of Sirmium as the Persistent Heretical Face of the Fourth Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2006): 201-204, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001209>.

of the material *pneuma*, the materially sonorous voice of God. Augustine's philosophy came to replace and erase this theory, as well as most materialist precursors. Before Augustine, intention had intrinsically to do with breath.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to broaden our understanding of the concept of intention in the philosophical discourse, by proposing a new reading of what are considered its origins in the works of Augustine. While traditionally, intention has been examined in isolation from pneumatological considerations, this study contends that a pneumatological framework is crucial to comprehending Augustine's development of *intentio*. By delving into the pneumatological context in which Augustine and the Stoics operated, and by reevaluating the overlooked origins of *intentio* in the Stoic concept of *tonos*, I have illuminated the pivotal role played by air and breath in the history of intentionality.

Furthermore, this investigation has revealed that *intentio* serves as a linchpin in Augustine's overarching argument for the immateriality of God and the soul, a thesis that characterises everything he wrote after his conversion first to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, which in turn means everything available to us. Through a meticulous analysis of *intentio*'s evolution in his works from *attentio* to *voluntas*, I have demonstrated that this concept served as the fulcrum for the historical process Verbeke called the "spiritualisation of the spirit." If as Verbeke had argued, it is with Augustine that the dematerialisation of the spirit and its separation from anything related to air finally reached its conclusion, this was only possible thanks to the new meaning he attributed to *intentio*. This move consisted in an epochal conceptual shift, which inaugurated the forgetfulness of any pre-Augustinian Stoic materialist accounts of *intentio*.

In conclusion, I have therefore claimed that Augustine's *intentio* should not be seen as a mere continuation of the Stoic *tonos*, as some scholars have argued, but rather as an appropriation of it for Augustine's own spiritualist purposes. And yet, at the same time, Augustine's *intentio* unveils for us this very layer of materialist, pneumatological in-

tionality, a dimension that is at work underneath his spiritualist conception and that has largely eluded modern scholarship. I have found its traces in texts by Seneca, as well as in now-lost 4th-century Christian heretical theories. As we look ahead, it is imperative to recognise and reconstruct this materialist intention of the spirit, offering a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the historical and philosophical development of intention, both before and after Augustine. Indeed, this material intention did not completely disappear from the European tradition, but survived in other forms and contexts as the shadow of Augustine's hegemonically proliferating legacy. This study invites further exploration into the intricate interplay between pneumatology, materialism and intentionality, ultimately enriching our comprehension of this fundamental philosophical concept.

L I S T O F A B B R E V I A T I O N S O F R E F E R E N C E S A N D E D I T I O N S U S E D

The following abbreviations are used for the specified texts and their translations when one is provided:

Augustine, *Conf.*
Confessionum libri (Confessions)

Augustine. *Confessionum libri XIII*. Edited by Martin Skutella, H. Juergens, and W. Schaub. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Augustine, *Ep.*
Epistulae (Letters)

Augustine. *S. Augustini Epistulae*. Edited by Alois Goldbacher. Vienna: Tempsky, 1911.

Augustine. *Letters*. 6 volumes. Washington: The Catholic University Press, 1951–1989.

Augustine, *Gn. litt.*

De Genesi ad litteram (On the Literal Meaning of Genesis)

Augustine. *La genèse au sens littéral en douze livres / De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. Edited and translated by Paul Agaësse and Aimé Solignac. Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1972.

Augustine. *On Genesis: On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees; Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis; The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Edited by John E. Rotelle and translated by Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Im. an.*

De immortalitate animae (On the Immortality of the Soul)

Augustine. *De immortalitate animae / Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele: Zweisprachige Ausgabe*. Edited and translated by Christian Tornau. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2020.

Augustine. *The Immortality of the Soul; The Magnitude of the Soul; On Music; The Advantage of Believing; On Faith in Things Unseen*. Translated by Ludwig Schopp et al. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Mus.*

De musica (On Music)

Augustine. *De musica*. Edited by Martin Jacobsson. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.

Augustine. *The Immortality of the Soul; The Magnitude of the Soul; On Music; The Advantage of Believing; On Faith in Things Unseen*. Translated by Ludwig Schopp et al. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Qu. an.*

De quantitate animae (On the Quantity or Magnitude of the Soul)

Augustine. *De quantitate animae / The measure of the soul: Latin text, with English translation and notes*. Edited and translated by Francis E. Tourscher. Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly company, 1933.

Augustine, *Trin.*

De Trinitate (On the Trinity)

Augustine. *De Trinitate Libri I-XII*. Edited by W. J. Mountain. Turnhout: Brepols, 1968.

Augustine. *De Trinitate Libri XIII-XV*. Edited by W. J. Mountain. Turnhout: Brepols, 1968.

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SVF.
Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (Fragments of the Ancient Stoics)
Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta. Edited by Hans von Arnim. 4 volumes.
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