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LIFE IN HIMSELF THROUGH ETERNAL GENERATION: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO'S METAPHYSICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 5:26 AND ITS RELEVANCE

Vida en sí mismo a través de la generación eterna: análisis metafísico de San Agustín de Hipona sobre Juan 5:26 y su relevancia

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Abstract

This study examines St. Augustine of Hippo's metaphysical interpretation of John 5:26, explores its philosophical foundations, demonstrates how his argument establishes the Son's equality with the Father, and evaluates its novelty and relevance for contemporary theological scholarship. Within the broader patristic corpus devoted to Trinitarian exegesis, this verse occupies a pivotal place, since it raises the decisive question of how the Son possesses divine life without compromising the Trinity's essential unity or lapsing into Arian subordinationism. The research adopts a comparative qualitative approach, combining textual study of Augustine's Tractates on the Gospel of John with conceptual-philosophical reflection, historical-theological contextualization, and comparative engagement with modern scholarship. The findings confirm that Augustine fundamentally distinguishes between Essential Life, possessed by God alone, and Participatory Life, possessed by creatures in dependence on Him. Crucially, he interprets the phrase "has granted the Son also to have life in himself" as a description of the act of eternal generation, whereby the Son is Life itself, equal in essence with the Father, precisely by being from the Father. This demonstrates that Augustine provides a sophisticated metaphysical framework for understanding the mode of the Son's possession of divine life, one that effectively counters subordinationism without relying solely on relational categories. This research contributes to the fields of theology and philosophy by highlighting that Augustine's metaphysical analysis offers a novel perspective often underemphasized in modern scholarship. It offers valuable theological and philosophical resources for articulating the Son's essential equality and deepens theological understanding of the divine nature and Trinitarian relations.

Keywords: Augustine, John 5:26, Trinity, eternal generation, divine metaphysics, patristic theology, exegesis, Essential Life, Participatory Life

Resumen

Este estudio examina la interpretación metafísica de san Agustín de Hipona sobre Juan 5:26, explora sus fundamentos filosóficos, demuestra cómo su argumentación establece la igualdad del Hijo con el Padre y evalúa su novedad y relevancia para la teología contemporánea. Dentro del amplio corpus patrístico dedicado a la exégesis trinitaria, este versículo ocupa un lugar central, pues plantea la pregunta decisiva sobre el modo en que el Hijo posee la vida divina sin comprometer la unidad esencial de la Trinidad ni caer en el subordinacionismo arriano. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo comparativo que combina el estudio textual de los Tratados sobre el Evangelio de Juan de Agustín con la reflexión conceptual y filosófica, la contextualización histórico-teológica y la comparación con la investigación moderna. Los resultados confirman que Agustín distingue de manera fundamental entre la Vida esencial, que solo pertenece a Dios, y la Vida participada, que poseen las criaturas en dependencia de Él. Además, interpreta de forma decisiva la expresión «ha concedido también al Hijo tener vida en sí mismo» como una descripción del acto de generación eterna, mediante el cual el Hijo es la Vida misma, igual en esencia al Padre, precisamente por proceder de Él. Esto demuestra que Agustín ofrece un marco metafísico sofisticado para comprender el modo en que el Hijo posee la vida divina, el cual refuta eficazmente el subordinacionismo, sin depender únicamente de categorías relacionales. Esta investigación contribuye a los campos de la teología y la filosofía al mostrar que el análisis metafísico de Agustín ofrece una

perspectiva novedosa, a menudo subestimada por la investigación contemporánea. Aporta valiosos recursos teológicos y filosóficos para articular la igualdad esencial del Hijo y profundiza la comprensión teológica de la naturaleza divina y de las relaciones trinitarias.

Palabras clave: Agustín, Juan 5:26, Trinidad, generación eterna, metafísica divina, teología patrística, exégesis, Vida esencial, Vida participada.

Introduction

John 5:26, "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself," presents a fundamental theological challenge that has occupied Christian thought throughout history. The phrase "to have life in himself" (ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ) expresses an exclusive divine attribute, existential self-sufficiency (aseity), or being from oneself (Carson, 1991). However, the verse also states that this unique divine attribute "has been granted" (δέδωκεν, *dedoken*) to the Son by the Father, raising the theological question of how to reconcile the affirmation of the Son's full divinity and equality with the Father (as implied by the possession of "life in himself") with the notion that this essential divine attribute is "granted" to Him by the Father, which might be misinterpreted as implying subordination or a secondary origin within the divine nature of the Son.

Modern scholarship has extensively discussed John 5:26 within the framework of the high Christology of the Gospel of John and the Father-Son relationship. Contemporary scholars have contributed valuable contextual analyses that place Jesus' claim within the debate with Jewish authorities regarding His equality of authority with God (Keener, 2003; Barrett, 1975; Hurtado, 2003; Witherington III, 1995). They emphasize that "life" here refers to Essential divine Life, which is an exclusive attribute of God (Thompson, 2001; Köstenberger, 2009; Barry, 2016; Michaels, 2010), and that the granting of this divine life to the Son affirms His participation in the divine identity of the Father (Hurtado, 2003; Dunn, 1989) and their unity in creative and salvific authority (Brown, 1988; Wright, 2016; Beasley-Murray, 1999; Moloney, 2005; Morris, 1995; Gorman, 2009). Leading commentators and theologians (including Bultmann, 1971, and Dodd, 1953) convincingly confirm that John 5:26 is a strong affirmation of the Son's divinity and His unity with the Father in nature and mission, often interpreting it within the framework of functional, missiological, or ontological relations within the Trinity. This reading is further supported by literary, narrative, and compositional studies of the Gospel's overall coherence (Cpepper, 1987; Talbert, 1992; Smith, 1995; Anderson, 1996; Schnackenburg, 1982; Zumstein, 2014), including narratological treatments of the Bethesda healing narrative in which John 5:26 is embedded (Hahn & Van Eck, 2021), and by Loader's (2013) observation that John 5:19–47 marks a distinctive departure from the Gospel's more typical envoy Christology.

Recent studies have examined the philosophical implications and monotheistic debates related to the concept of "life in himself" (Antombikums, 2025; Meadows, 2023; Von Wahlde, 2004). The exegetical plausibility of grounding the doctrine of eternal generation specifically in John 5:26, rather than treating it as a purely systematic inference, has also been freshly reassessed in recent evangelical scholarship, which argues that the verse's grammar of the Son having life "in himself," yet as "granted," does supply a genuine, if underused, biblical anchor for the doctrine (DeBord, 2025). Overall, modern scholarship has successfully identified John 5:26 as a key text for high Christology, Jesus' authority, and His divine nature.

Despite the success of modern scholarship in affirming the theological conclusion regarding the Son's equality from John 5:26 through various lenses, some aspects remain less emphasized compared to the depth of patristic reflection**.** One of these is the detailed metaphysical analysis of the *mode* or *manner* in which the Son "has life in himself" *through* the act of being "granted" by the Father. Modern scholarship tends to state that this granting demonstrates essential equality, but rarely elaborates philosophically on *how* this granting of an essential divine attribute should be understood in a way that does not imply essential subordination, or how the phrase "has granted" (δέδωκεν) can be interpreted as a description of the eternal relation of origin (divine generation) without implying that the Son was ever without this attribute The potential not yet widely explored in contemporary dialogue is to re-examine the richness of the philosophical analysis of the Church Fathers, particularly St. Augustine of Hippo in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Tractates 22, 23), who explicitly wrestled with the metaphysical implications of the language of John 5:26 and developed a sophisticated theological-philosophical argument from this text (Johnson, 2009), within the broader patristic consensus on the eternal generation of the Son and the unity of divine operations that had crystallized by the late fourth century (Kelly, 1978; Pelikan, 1971; Ayres, 2010).

To fill this "gap," this article proposes that a deep analysis of St. Augustine's interpretation of John 5:26, particularly his argument equating "has granted the Son also to have life in himself" with the act of eternal generation, can offer a fresh and valuable perspective for contemporary scholarship. Augustine uniquely distinguishes between having life *participatorily* (as creatures do) and having life *essentially in oneself* (as God does), and he argues that this granting to the Son is not a bestowal of something new or additional, but a description of the very being of the Son who is from the Father through perfect and essentially equal eternal generation.

The purpose of this study is fourfold: (1) provide a detailed explication and analysis of Augustine's metaphysical argument concerning John 5:26, (2) explore the philosophical bases and analogies he employs to support his interpretation, (3) demonstrate how this argument effectively establishes the Son's essential equality with the Father and counters subordinationism, and (4) evaluate the potential relevance and novelty of Augustine's metaphysical approach for

contemporary theological and philosophical scholarship on the divine nature and Trinitarian relations. In doing so, this study aims to highlight a path perhaps less trodden in current modern research and offer valuable theological-philosophical resources from the Patristic tradition.

Method

This study employs a comparative qualitative approach to analyze St. Augustine's interpretation of John 5:26. The method begins with a primary textual analysis of *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Tractates 22-23) to understand Augustine's interpretation of the phrases "life in himself" and "has granted," as well as the metaphysical arguments and analogies he uses. This is followed by a historical-theological contextualization of Augustine's interpretation within the broader patristic debates.

The core of the method consists of a systematic comparative analysis between Augustine's interpretation and modern scholarship on John 5:26, engaging with the works of Carson, Thompson, Köstenberger, Barry, Michaels, Beasley-Murray, Moloney, Morris, Brown, Wright, Hurtado, Bauckham, Dunn, Gorman, Keener, Witherington, Bultmann, Dodd, Antombikums, Meadows, Von Wahlde, Johnson, Barrett, DeBord, Hahn and Van Eck, Loader, Culpepper, Talbert, Smith, Anderson, Schnackenburg, and Zumstein for the biblical-exegetical dimension, and with Kelly, Pelikan, Ayres, Holmes, Swain, O'Collins, Levering, Emery, and Daley for the historical and systematic-theological dimension of Trinitarian doctrine. The comparison is further informed, where relevant, by other patristic witnesses to the doctrine of eternal generation and inseparable operations, including Hilary of Poitiers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor, as well as by text-critical and reception-historical work on Augustine's citation of John (Houghton, 2008) and on the chronological development of his Trinitarian exegesis (Beckwith, 2022a, 2022b). The purpose of this comparison is to evaluate the potential novelty and relevance of Augustine's metaphysical analysis, with particular attention to his understanding of eternal generation as the mode of granting divine life, for contemporary theology and philosophy. The primary data consist of Augustine's own writings, cited here from Gibb's translation in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series, with reference also made to Rettig's (1988–1995) Fathers of the Church translation, supported by modern secondary literature.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, and his interpretation in dialogue with modern scholarship. The results are organized according to Augustine's exegetical and theological progression, emphasizing the key aspects of his interpretation that reveal the unity and equality of the Son with the Father.

Augustine's Interpretation of John 5:26: Essential Life vs. Participatory Life

Analysis of Augustine's *Tractates* 22 and 23 reveals that he begins his interpretation of John 5:26 with a fundamental metaphysical distinction regarding the concept of "life." For Augustine, the phrase "the Father has life in himself" (ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ) refers to Essential Life. This kind of life is an attribute inherent in the divine essence itself; it originates from no external source, depends on nothing outside Himself, and is inherently immutable and undiminished. Augustine emphasizes that this Life is God Himself ("life itself to Him is Himself," *Tractate* 23.11). This is an absolute, self-sufficient (*aseity*) existence, which does not participate in something else to be life (Antombikums, 2025; Meadows, 2023). He explicitly states that God "alone has unchangeableness, because He alone has true eternity" (*Tractate* 23.9), linking this Essential Life to the immutability and eternity possessed only by God. In *Tractate* 22, when discussing spiritual resurrection, Augustine implicitly distinguishes this life from the life received by humans through faith: "Whoever hears my word, and believes in Him that sent me, has eternal life" (*Tractate* 22.2). This eternal life is possessed as a result of hearing and believing, indicating that it is a *received* life, not a life possessed from oneself.

In contrast to this Essential Life, Augustine explains that creatures, including the human soul, have life in a different way, namely, Participatory Life. The human soul is indeed alive (giving life to the body, possessing consciousness), but its life is not "in itself." The life of the soul depends on God as the source of its life, and it is mutable (e.g., from unrighteousness to righteousness, from ignorance to wisdom). Augustine sharply distinguishes the soul's "mutable" life from divine immutability (*Tractate* 23.9). He uses powerful analogies, such as the eye that only has light (sight) when open and participating in an external source of light (the sun or a lamp), to illustrate that having life participatorily means needing something outside oneself to maintain that existence or quality of life. He states, "I answer: You do not speak truly that you have light in yourselves: you have light, but in the sky... Not in yourselves have you light; keep it if you can when the sun is set" (*Tractate* 23.11). He concludes, "Consequently, to have light in himself is not to need light from another" (*Tractate* 23.11). This analogy is directly applied to the soul: "If by coming to Him you live, and by departing from Him you die, your life is not in yourselves" (*Tractate* 23.11). This shows that only God is Life in the fullest and most independent sense, Essential Life in Himself (Von Wahlde, 2004). Augustine asserts, "Whatever therefore dies, both from better to worse, and from worse to better, is not God; because neither can supreme goodness proceed

to better, nor true eternity to worse" (*Tractate* 23.9), explicitly placing God outside the realm of mutable and participatory existence. In *Tractate* 22, he refers to the present life of humans as "false life" compared to "true life" (i.e., eternal life), because the present life is temporal and unstable (*Tractate* 22.3), further underlining the participatory and dependent nature of creaturely existence.

In dialogue with modern scholarship, Augustine's emphasis on the metaphysical distinction between Essential Life and Participatory Life offers a philosophical depth that potentially goes beyond the primary focus of some contemporary interpretations. Modern scholars widely acknowledge that "life" (ζωή) in John 5:26 refers to Essential divine Life (Thompson, 2001; Köstenberger, 2009; Barry, 2016). They correctly link the phrase "life in himself" to divine attributes such as aseity and self-sufficiency (Carson, 1991; Antombikums, 2025). However, their analysis may not always explicitly and deeply explicate the metaphysical implications of the distinction between having life *as one's essence* (God) versus having life *through participation* (creatures) as a basis for understanding the uniqueness of the Father's and the Son's possession of life. While modern scholarship discusses the Christological implications of Jesus' possession of divine life (Hurtado, 2005; Bauckham, 2008), Augustine carefully uses this ontological distinction as a fundamental step to explain *how* the Son can have the exact same divine attribute as the Father without being a duplication or a subordinate entity. He directly contrasts Christ's life with Participatory Life: "Not so Christ, not so the Word of God. But how not? As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given also to the Son to have life in Himself; so that He lives, not by participation, but unchangeably, and is altogether Himself life" (*Tractate* 23.10).

In sum, Augustine's interpretation provides a coherent metaphysical framework for understanding "life in himself" not merely as a marker of divinity, but as a concept that ontologically distinguishes between the Creator and creation and prepares the discussion for the Father–Son relationship in this verse.

"Has Granted": Eternal Generation as a Description of the Son's Essential Life

After establishing the fundamental distinction between the Essential Life possessed only by God and the Participatory Life possessed by creatures, as discussed in Section 3.1, Augustine turns his attention to the second part of John 5:26: "so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." If "to have life in himself" is an essential divine attribute possessed only by God, and this is granted to the Son "just as" the Father has it, then a crucial question arises: how to understand this act of "granting" (δέδωκεν, *dedoken*) without implying that the Son was previously without essential life, or that the Son is a subordinate entity who receives life as creatures receive life through participation? This is the core of Augustine's most sophisticated metaphysical argument in interpreting this verse.

Augustine firmly rejects a temporal or subordinationist understanding of this act of "granting." He maintains that the phrase "has granted the Son also to have life in himself" is not a description of a past event where the Son *received* something He previously did not possess, as if the Son were a passive and dependent recipient. Instead, for Augustine, the act of "granting" by the Father to the Son in this context is the way the Gospel of John describes the Father's eternal act of begetting the Son. The Son is Life itself ("He Himself is life itself," *Tractate* 23.9, 23.11) precisely *through* being begotten by the Father who is Life itself. Augustine explicitly equates these two concepts, stating: "Therefore what is said, *gave* to the Son, is such as if it were said, *begot* the Son; for by begetting He gave. As He gave Him to be, so He gave Him to be life, so also gave Him to be life in Himself" (*Tractate* 23.10). He restates this point concisely: "I will say it briefly, He begot the Son. For it is not that He was without life, and received life, but He is life by being begotten. The Father is life not by being begotten; the Son is life by being begotten" (*Tractate* 23.13).

Augustine's argument is driven by the need to preserve the Son's essential equality with the Father. If the Son received life as if He were ever without it, or if He received life through participation like creatures, then He would not have life "in himself" in the same essential sense as the Father. Augustine emphasizes, "But it is not so with the Son of God as if at first He was without life, and then received life. For if thus He received life, He would not have it in Himself" (*Tractate* 23.9). Therefore, the act of "granting" *must* be understood as a description of the eternal relation of origin in which the Son perfectly and eternally possesses the divine essence (i.e., Essential Life) through generation from the Father.

Augustine illustrates this difficult concept through analogies, although he repeatedly warns of the limitations of human analogies when applied to God. He uses the analogy of a builder who "grants" a house *to be* (not grants to something already existing) to show that this granting is a granting of existence itself through an act (*Tractate* 23.13). Another analogy he uses is how memory "shows" something to the mind, resulting in a vision, where both (memory and mind) are from the same substance (the soul), and no external words are needed (*Tractate* 23.11). Although these analogies try to capture the aspect of "showing" or "granting" within the same substance without an external or temporal process, Augustine emphasizes that divine reality transcends all such comparisons: "But when I shall have spoken, and you have understood, you must not think that spoken of to be something just such as our example... If you are not able now to comprehend what God is, comprehend at least what He is not" (*Tractate* 23.10). In essence, the act of "granting" divine life to the Son is the act of eternal generation, resulting in a Son who is fully equal in divine nature and has Life "in Himself" just as the Father has it.

In comparison with modern scholarship, Augustine's explicit emphasis equating "has granted" with "begot" as a way to explain *how* the Son has Essential Life offers a perspective potentially less emphasized in much contemporary literature. Modern scholars indeed recognize that John 5:26

affirms the Son's equality and His authority as the source of life (Carson, 1991; Brown, 1988; Keener, 2003). They discuss the Father-Son relationship within the framework of the Trinity (Thompson, 2001; Köstenberger, 2004, 2009) and the ontological implications of Jesus' possession of divine life (Meadows, 2023). Yet few analyses explicitly link the phrase "has granted" to the doctrine of eternal generation as the very mode by which the Son possesses Essential Life. Augustine does not merely assert the Son's equality; he demonstrates philosophically and textually that the Son's possession of Essential Life arises through eternal generation from the Father (Johnson, 2009). This approach reveals the theological precision and originality of Augustine's exegesis, offering a valuable patristic framework for contemporary reflection on Trinitarian ontology.

Philosophical Foundations and the Argument for Equality from John 5:26

Augustine's approach to interpreting John 5:26 is heavily influenced by his philosophical background, particularly his understanding of the fundamental difference between immutable and self-sufficient divine existence and mutable and dependent creaturely existence. He effectively transforms philosophical concepts, sometimes paralleling Neo-Platonic ideas of the One Source and participation, to serve Christian theology and clarify the doctrine of the Triune God. For Augustine, this adaptation marks a decisive shift from philosophical speculation to theological affirmation, where Father is the divine source, but the manner in which the Son is from the Father (begotten) and the manner in which the Son has "life in himself" (that is, the divine nature) differ radically from how creatures are from or participate in God's being.This metaphysical register is precisely what sets John 5:19–47 apart from the Gospel's more typical envoy Christology, in which the Son's authority is cast primarily in terms of a sent messenger acting on his sender's behalf (Loader, 2013); Augustine's reading pushes past that functional idiom toward an explicitly ontological account of the Son's origin.

Augustine explicitly rejects a "carnal" understanding that would view the Father-Son relationship in John 5:19-20 ("The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise") as a temporal process where the Son observes the Father doing something and then imitates it. He questions, "Did God make all these, and show them when made to the Son, that He also should make another world full of all these? Certainly not" (*Tractate* 23.7). Instead, Augustine argues that "seeing" and "doing" here refer to essential unity and perfect joint action. "For whatever things He has made, these," not others, "these also the Son does," not differently, "but in like manner" (*Tractate* 23.7). This implies that the Father's action and the Son's action are one and the same, not two separate actions.Recent text-critical and chronological scholarship confirms that this reading of John 5:19 was not incidental for Augustine but matured over the course of his anti-Homoian and anti-Arian writings of the 410s into his considered doctrine of the Trinity's inseparable operations, a development traceable through his shifting citation of the verse and his engagement with Pseudo-Athanasian material (Beckwith, 2022a, 2022b; Houghton, 2008).

More deeply, Augustine connects this "seeing" and "showing" to the act of eternal generation. He wrestles with the phrase "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things which Himself does" (John 5:20). If the Father shows *after* doing, then the Son would not act together with Him. However, if the Father does everything *through* the Son (John 1:3), then the Father must "show" to the Son *before* doing. Augustine concludes that "it is not by doing that He shows to the Son, but by showing He does through the Son" (*Tractate* 23.7). The Father's act of showing and the Son's act of seeing are not external or temporal processes, but intrinsic to the divine relation of origin. "The Father's showing begets the Son's seeing, just in the same manner as the Father begets the Son" (*Tractate* 23.11). In this way, Augustine unites the language of 'seeing' and 'showing' with his doctrine of eternal generation, emphasizing that both belong to the single, timeless act of divine self-communication.

The phrase "just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26) becomes a primary textual proof for Augustine to affirm the essential equality (consubstantiality) of the Son with the Father. He argues that "has granted" (δέδωκεν) in this context cannot mean the granting of something the Son previously lacked, for that would imply the Son is a dependent creature. Instead, as discussed earlier, "has granted" is synonymous with "begot" ("Therefore what is said, gave to the Son, is such as if it were said, *begot* the Son; for by begetting He gave," *Tractate* 23.10). The Son is begotten in such a way that He *is* Life itself, having Life "in himself" in precisely the *same manner* as the Father has it (Von Wahlde, 2004). "So has He given also to the Son to have life in Himself; so that He lives, not by participation, but unchangeably, and is altogether Himself life" (*Tractate* 23.10). This directly contrasts the Son with creatures who live only by participation and are mutable (*Tractate* 23.9, 23.11).

This interpretation decisively addresses subordinationist views, particularly Arianism, although Augustine may not always explicitly name them in this homily. By showing that the Son possesses the most essential divine attribute, Life in Himself, in exactly the same way as the Father, Augustine establishes that the distinction between the Father and the Son is not in nature (both are Life itself, fully God), but in the personal relation of origin (the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten of the Father). The phrase "I can do nothing on my own" (John 5:30) is also interpreted within this framework: it is not about incapacity, but about the Son's origin from the Father. "He that is of the Father is not of Himself. If the Son were of Himself, He would not be the Son: He is of the Father" (*Tractate* 22.14). This is a dependence in terms of personal origin (the Son is from the Father), not a dependence in terms of nature or power.

In this interpretation, Augustine's logic preserves both divine simplicity and relational distinction, ensuring that derivation never implies inequality but expresses personal identity within the one Godhead. Augustine is not alone in this exegetical instinct among the Fathers: Hilary of Poitiers (2002) similarly reads the Father-Son unity of John 5 as grounded in a shared, undivided

nature communicated through generation rather than through a temporal act; Gregory of Nyssa (1893), directly rebutting Eunomius, argues that whatever the Father possesses by nature the Son possesses by the very same nature through begetting, not by a subsequent bestowal, while Basil of Caesarea (2011) extends an analogous logic to the Spirit, arguing that Father, Son, and Spirit must share equal glory precisely because they share one and the same, inseparable, activity. Augustine's Latin argument from John 5:26 thus stands within a broader pro-Nicene consensus, East and West, that eternal generation communicates the whole of the divine essence rather than a delegated attribute (Elowsky, 2007).

Augustine uses analogies, such as memory and mind, builder and house, speaking and word, to help his audience grasp these truths, while consistently warning of the limitations of these analogies when applied to the simple and immutable God (*Tractate* 23.8, 23.9, 23.10, 23.11). He emphasizes that divine reality transcends human understanding bound by physical forms and temporal processes. "If you are not able now to comprehend what God is, comprehend at least what He is not" (*Tractate* 23.9, 23.10). The core of his philosophical argument is that John 5:26, when read carefully at a metaphysical level, actually affirms the Son's full divinity and equality, grounded in His eternal generation from the Father as Essential Life itself.

Novelty and Relevance for Modern Scholarship

In modern scholarship, John 5:19-30, including verse 26, is often examined through various frameworks, such as Jesus' missional authority, the Father-Son relationship in terms of covenant or function, and both realized and futuristic eschatology (Brown, 1988; Bultmann, 1971; Dodd, 1953; Moloney, 1998, 2005; Wright, 2004, 2016). While the concepts of eternal generation and the Son's equality are standard doctrines in Christian theology, the depth of Augustine's metaphysical analysis of key phrases like "to have life in himself" and his argument that this describes the begotten Son's nature, receives comparatively little attention in modern literature. Contemporary studies tends to place less emphasis on how Augustine philosophically examines the ontological implications of "having life in himself" as a marker of divine essence (Antombikums, 2025), or how he carefully employs philosophical analogies to explain the fundamental difference between dependent existence (creatures) and self-sufficient existence (God).

Comparative Methodological Analysis: Augustine employs an exegetical-metaphysical method that integrates careful textual reading with deep philosophical reflection on the nature of being, immutability, and relations within the Godhead. He explicitly grapples with the seemingly "human" or "humble" language of the Gospel (such as "seeing" and "hearing") to unveil higher truths about God. Through analogies, such as memory and mind, builder and house, he aids understanding while constantly reminding his audience of the limitations of these analogies when applied to the simple and immutable God (*Tractate* 23.8, 23.9, 23.10, 23.11). Comparing this method with

modern exegetical methods, including historical-critical commentary (Schnackenburg, 1982), narrative criticism (Culpepper, 1987; Talbert, 1992), sociological readings of the community's conflict (Neyrey, 1988), and studies that seek theological coherence amid the Gospel's inner tensions (Smith, 1995; Anderson, 1996), reveals what may be gained or lost when texts like John 5:26 are approached from different perspectives. This analysis shows how Augustine's metaphysical approach allows for a deeper understanding of the *mode* of divine existence and relations, extending beyond methods focused primarily on function or historical setting.

Inspiring Philosophical Theology: Augustine's metaphysical argument about "having life in himself" as an essential attribute of Being itself, ontologically distinct from the participatory existence of creatures, has direct relevance to ongoing debates in philosophical theology regarding divine attributes such as aseity, divine simplicity, and immutability (Antombikums, 2025; Meadows, 2023). Augustine's way of interpreting this granting of life to the Son as the act of eternal generation, resulting in a Son equal in divine essence, can serve as a model for developing robust metaphysical accounts of Trinitarian relations, of the kind recently urged by systematic theologians seeking to recover eternal generation as a load-bearing doctrine rather than a speculative addition (Holmes, 2012; Swain, 2020; O'Collins, 2014; Levering, 2016). This perspective goes beyond approaches that may overemphasize functional or relational aspects in a way that obscures the essential equality of the Trinitarian persons, and resonates with Emery's (2007) demonstration that the medieval Latin tradition, through Aquinas, inherited and systematized precisely this Augustinian grammar of relations of origin without inequality. Augustine's method invites contemporary philosophical theology to re-engage with biblical texts at a deep ontological level (Johnson, 2009; Daley, 2018).

Novelty in Analogies: The specific analogies Augustine uses to explain Trinitarian concepts and generation such as memory and mind in the human soul, or builder and house, offer insights distinct from more common Trinitarian analogies such as lover, beloved, and love, mind, knowledge, and will. The analogy of memory and mind, for instance, emphasizes an internal origin within the same substance (the soul), illuminating how the Son is from the Father within the same divine essence (*Tractate* 23.11). Re-examining these distinctive Augustinian analogies can enrich contemporary theological thinking on how to articulate the mystery of the Trinity in ways that avoid the pitfalls of subordinationism or tritheism, offering new ways to conceive of divine relations of origin and unity.

Relevance for Contemporary Debates: Augustine's argumentation from John 5:26, that the Son *is* Life itself because He is begotten by the Father who *is* Life itself, provides a strong theological resource for addressing contemporary views that tend to reduce the Father-Son relationship to overly anthropomorphic or functional models. His emphasis on the Son having Essential Life "in himself" *just as* the Father does, obtained through eternal generation, firmly places the Son

within the realm of immutable and self-sufficient divine existence rather than as a dependent or merely functional entity. This perspective remains relevant in current Christological and Trinitarian debates that seek to maintain the Son's full divinity and equality within the Christian monotheism, including recent attempts within evangelical scholarship to test directly, rather than merely assume, whether eternal generation can be read out of this very verse (DeBord, 2025); Augustine's Tractates supply exactly the kind of close textual argument such attempts are looking for. Agustine's approach thus affirms essential equality that is firmly rooted in careful biblical exegesis and meticulous metaphysical reflection.

In sum, Augustine's analysis not only enriches Trinitarian theology but also offers a model for integrating philosophical depth and biblical faithfulness in contemporary theological inquiry

Conclusion

This study addresses the theological challenge posed by John 5:26, namely, how to understand the Son's possession of "life in himself," an exclusive divine attribute, in relation to the statement that this attribute "has been granted" by the Father. The purpose of this research was to offer a detailed explication of St. Augustine's metaphysical analysis of this verse, explore its philosophical foundations, demonstrate how his argument establishes the Son's equality, and evaluate its novelty and relevance for contemporary theological scholarship.

The results of this study confirm that Augustine, in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Tractates 22 and 23), offers a profoundly coherent exegetical and metaphysical model for uncovering the meaning of John 5:26. The key findings show that Augustine begins by making a fundamental distinction between Essential Life, possessed by God alone in a self-sufficient and immutable manner, and Participatory Life, possessed by creatures in a dependent and mutable manner. This ontological distinction serves the theological and philosophical foundation for his interpretation. Furthermore, the study finds that Augustine crucially interprets the act of "has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (δέδωκεν) not as a temporal bestowal or as an addition to something previously lacking, but as a description of the act of eternal generation by the Father. In Augustine's view, the Son *is* Life itself, having Essential Life fully and equally with the Father, precisely *through* being eternally begotten. The philosophical foundation of Augustine's thought, which employs analogies such as memory and mind and builder and house (with all their limitations), allows him to articulate how the Son's origin from the Father within the same divine essence is radically different from the origin or participation of creatures. This metaphysical argument effectively establishes the essential equality (consubstantiality) of the Son with the Father and counters subordinationist interpretations.

Although modern scholarship has widely acknowledged that John 5:26 affirms the Son's divinity and equality, this study's analysis highlights that the depth of Augustine's metaphysical analysis, particularly regarding the mode of granting "life in himself" as eternal generation, and the philosophical implications of the Essential Life and Participatory Life distinction, is often not the primary focus of contemporary literature. While modern studies may touch upon ontological (Meadows, 2023) or philosophical aspects, Augustine's systematic approach that explicitly equates δέδωκεν with begetting as the key to understanding *how* the Son has the exact same divine attribute, offers an interpretative precision often absent from recent treatments (Johnson, 2009).

Thus, this research contributes to the fields of theology and philosophy by demonstrating that revisiting patristic interpretations, particularly Augustine's metaphysical analysis of John 5:26, can enrich contemporary debates concerning the divine nature and Trinitarian relations. Augustine's approach provides valuable theological-philosophical resources for robustly articulating the Son's essential equality, firmly grounded in careful biblical exegesis and deep philosophical reflection on the nature of divine being. It offers a way to understand the "granting" of a divine attribute not as a sign of subordination, but as an expression of the eternal relation of origin within the unity of the divine essence, an insight that remains highly relevant for advancing current discussions in systematic and philosophical theology. In doing so, the study underscores Augustine's enduring significance as a thinker who unites Scripture, tradition, and rigorous reasoning in a coherent theological vision.

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