



## Happiness and Friendship

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## Happiness and Friendship<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle notes that friendship is generally taken to be essential to happiness (*EN* 8.1, 1155a5-15). The *Confessions* suggest that Augustine is similarly unable to conceive of happiness without friends. However, it took Augustine some time to settle on a notion of happiness which he regarded as authentic, and also to resolve to conform his life to this notion. Friendship<sup>2</sup> proved to be an experience which was essential to this process, though it was also one which was somewhat paradoxical:

*This is the happy life and this alone: to rejoice in you, about you and because of you. This is the life of happiness, and it is not be found anywhere else. Whoever thinks there can be some other is chasing a joy that is not the true one.*<sup>3</sup>

Augustine subscribes to classical eudaimonism; he holds that human beings' end is happiness, and that this demands the realisation of a certain perfection,<sup>4</sup> namely, the acquisition of wisdom. As a Christian, he identifies wisdom with God, and maintains that our relations with others should be ordered in accordance with our love for God, though he does not hold that friendship is reducible to charity.<sup>5</sup> This search for an *ordinata dilectio* runs

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Lucy Sheaf.

<sup>2</sup> See M.A. McNamara : *amicitia* "most often designates friendship in the strict sense, i.e. the bonds uniting two persons in mutual sympathy" "rather than the sentiment itself" expressed by *amor*, *caritas*, *benevolentia* (*Friendship in saint Augustine*, Fribourg. The University Press « Studia Friburgensia » ; 20, 1958, p. 193-195). See D. Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 4/1, 1996, 87-113 ; 102-103 : "Augustine exploits the traditional terminology", unlike other christian authors, and specially in *Confessions*.

<sup>3</sup> *Conf.* 10. 22.32 : *Et ipsa est uita beata, gaudere, ad te, de te propter te : ipsa est et non est altera. Qui autem aliam putant esse, aliud sectantur gaudium neque ipsum uerum.* (trans. M. Boulding, *Saint Augustine, The Confessions*, New York, 1998 ['WSA', I/1, 1997], 218.

<sup>4</sup> See Ph. Cary in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> L. F. Pizzolato (*L'idea di amicizia nel mondo classico e cristiano*, Torino, 1993, p. 312) studies the interaction between friendship and charity, and the movement from one to the other. Charity directs us to be selfless: it places an obligation on us to love all human beings. Friendship is a love which is not obligatory ; it is spontaneous, and freer than charity. As long as it is subordinated to *caritas*, it is safeguarded from egoism. See also H. Pétré, *Caritas. Étude sur le vocabulaire latin de la charité chrétienne*, Louvain, 1948.

through the *Confessions*, and takes the form of a *conuersio*. What role does friendship play in the account of this conversion? In what ways does Augustine align himself with classical notions of friendship? For example, does he accept the hierarchical distinctions Aristotle makes between friendship which is based on pleasure, friendship which is based on self-interest, and friendship which is based on virtue (*EN* 8.2, 1155b)? And does he appeal to the contrast which Plato draws in the *Lysis* between 'friendship' and 'genuine friendship' (214d)? We can note at the outset that Augustine's loyalty to the Roman tradition is evident in his youthful<sup>6</sup> appropriation<sup>7</sup> of the definition of friendship given in Cicero's *De Amicitia*: «For friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection »<sup>8</sup>. This definition is not found in the *Confessions*,<sup>9</sup> but Augustine cites it in a letter which was probably written shortly afterwards. This letter is addressed to a friend, Marcianus, who has finally converted. Augustine tells him that until

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<sup>6</sup> *C. acad.* 3.6.13 : *Siquidem amicitia rectissime atque sanctissime definita est rerum humanarum et diuinarum cum beneuolentia et caritate consensio*. There Augustine comments solely on the notion of agreement and not on the 'ethical' and 'affective' tensions which can be found in *beneuolentia* and *caritas* respectively (as L. F. Pizzolato puts it in « L'amicizia in S. Agostino e il "Laelius" di Cicerone », *Vigiliae Christianae*, 28, 1974, p. 203-215 ; p. 207). He takes this 'agreement on divine matters' to be related to agreement on 'religio'. For Cicero, the agreement in question is intellectual, ideological, and political (Pizzolato, 1974, 206-207).

<sup>7</sup> This results from the inversion of the order of objects (*rerum humanarum-rerum diuinarum*), which corresponds to a dialectical progression. See M. Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron*. I. *Cicéron dans la formation et dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin*, Paris, 1958, p. 270 ; T. J. Van Bavel, « The Influence of Cicero's Ideal of Friendship on Augustine », in *Augustiniana Traiectina*, J. den Boeft – J. Van Oort (éd.), Paris, 1986, p. 59-72 ; p. 60. Ambrose formulates his own definition (*De off.* 3.134) in which the notion of the *alter ego* plays a central role. Cf. Pizzolato 1993, 270.

<sup>8</sup> *De amicitia (Laelius)*, 6.20 : "Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium diuinarum humanarumque rerum cum beneuolentia et caritate consensio". (trans. W.A. Falconer, "LCL", 1964, p. 131). J.-C. Fraisse, Philia. *La notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique. Essai sur un problème perdu et retrouvé*. Paris, 1984, p. 391-392, speaks of 'a rational agreement which humanises affective benevolence.' Cicero's source is Panetius (who, in turn, draws on Aristotle). A discussion of *eunoia* can be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (9.5 1166b 20 sq.). Willing the good of the other, and reciprocity are distinguishing features of *philia*.

<sup>9</sup> Though there are echoes of *De amicitia* in the section of the *Confessions* in which Augustine recalls his discussions of aesthetics in *De pulchro et apto*. See M. Testard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 63-65.

this point they had not been united by a genuine friendship, because agreement on human matters is in fact conditioned by agreement on divine matters: Their friendship was 'lame', « for one who holds things divine in contempt necessarily evaluates things human otherwise than he should.<sup>10</sup>»

In the *Confessions* a similar understanding of the relation between friendship and happiness is embedded in the narrative – not only in the sense that our progress on the path of happiness involves a transformation of friendship, but also in the sense that friendship itself allows us to make progress on the path of authentic happiness. In fact, although the affective experience of friendship resonates throughout the *Confessions*, the role ascribed to friendship in this account must be seen in the context of Augustine's desire to affirm the primacy of divine grace in salvation. This raises the question of the conditions under which friendship can contribute to genuine happiness (i.e., happiness which is anchored in eternal life).

## **I) The value of friendship, and its sweetness**

### **1) Unity and Sweetness**

In order to explain the attraction of friendship, Augustine often appeals to the concept of 'sweetness' (*dulcedo*), relating this to bond which unites many souls: *Amicitia quoque hominum caro nodo dulcis est propter unitatem de multis animis* (*Conf.* 2.5.10). In fact – as the *De ordine* indicates<sup>11</sup> – the ontological principle of unity is identified with God. Friendship is one of the manifestations of this aspiration to unity which marks all created beings, from stones to human beings whose rationality allows them to practise dialectic. It is

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<sup>10</sup> Aug., *Ep.* 258.2, trans. R.J. Teske, 'WSA', *Epistulae*, Part 2, vol. 4, New York, 2005, 195.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *De ord.* 2.18.48 : « And what else do friends strive for but to be one ? » (trans. R.P. Russell, 'Works of St Augustine', vol. 1, 'The Fathers of the Church', New York, 1948, 325).

a natural aspiration which also illustrates Augustine's view that human beings are social creatures. As such, it is among the goods given to us by our creator, though it should not be preferred to greater, or higher goods (such as truth and the divine law), as such a preference could lead to sin (2.5.10). This also implies that friendship is to be valued more highly than carnal love, as Augustine opposes the "bright boundary of friendship"<sup>12</sup> and the "mud of fleshly desires".<sup>13</sup> The latter involves seeking satisfaction in the other person's body, but in the former, satisfaction is sought in their soul. The fact that Augustine takes friendship to be a good is also consistent with the sensibility he manifests in relation to this judgement, as the different stages of the *Confessions* show.

Cicero, whose understanding of friendship influenced Augustine profoundly, had emphasised the *suavitas* of discourse and mores, 'which gives flavour to friendship'<sup>14</sup>. In contrast to *grauitas* and *dignitas*, friendship should be "more unrestrained, genial and agreeable" (*remissior, liberior, dulcior*).<sup>15</sup> What are the elements of this *dulcedo*? Perhaps the best description is the quasi-phenomenological one which Augustine gives in connection to his relationship with his Manichean friends in Carthage. Augustine claims that being with them enabled him to find consolation after the recent death of a friend from Thagaste (which is related in Book IV of the *Confessions*, and will be discussed later). What strikes him is that despite the vanity of the common 'fiction' (*fabula*) they share thanks to their allegiance to Manichaeism<sup>16</sup> – a fiction which blinds them to God («in whose company I loved what I was loving as a substitute for

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<sup>12</sup> On this "moral metaphor", see G.P. O'Daly, "Friendship and transgression : *Luminosus limes amicitiae* (Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2.2) and the theme of *Confessions* 2", *Reading ancient texts, Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, vol. II, *Essays in Honour of D. O'Brien*, ed. S. Stern-Gillet and K. Corrigan, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2007, 211-223 ; 212.

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* 2.2.2.

<sup>14</sup> Cic., *De amicitia* 6.22: "What is sweeter than to have someone with whom you may dare discuss anything as if you were communing yourself ? " (trans. cit., 131).

<sup>15</sup> *De amicitia* 18.66 : *Accedat huc suavitas quaedam oportet sermonum atque morum, haudquaquam mediocre condimentum amicitiae*. (trans. cit., 177)

<sup>16</sup> The ciceronian definition is thus respected, at least if that definition is taken at face value.

you<sup>17</sup>) – their friendship is essentially based on the joys deriving from mutual benevolence (*amare et redamare*) and a shared life. He is particularly preoccupied/charmed with this latter fact:

“There were other joys to be found in their company which still more powerfully captivated my mind– the charm of talking and laughing together and kindly giving way to each other’s wishes, reading elegantly written books together, sharing jokes and delighting to honor one another, disagreeing occasionally but without rancor, as a person might disagree with himself and lending piquancy by that rare disagreement to our much more frequent accord. We would teach and learn from each other, sadly missing any who were absent and blithely welcoming them when they return. Such signs of friendship sprang from the hearts of friends who loved and knew their love returned, signs to be read in smiles, words, glances and a thousand gracious gestures. So were sparks kindled and our minds were fused inseparably, out of many becoming one<sup>18</sup>”.

The ideal of unity underlies this passage: all these activities are opportunities to manifest reciprocal love, and to allow the fusing of souls in the same fire. One seeks the physical presence of the friend in order to multiply the (extralinguistic) signs of a fusion of souls which is, strictly speaking, impossible, and to alleviate the difficulty of seeing into another person’s mind (a difficulty which Augustine had always lamented).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Trans. cit., 62.

<sup>18</sup> *Conf.* 4.8.13 : *Alia erant, quae in eis amplius capiebant animum, colloqui et corridere et uicissim beneuole obsequi, simul legere libros dulciloquos, simul nugari et simul honestari, dissentire interdum sine odio tamquam ipse homo secum atque ipsa rarissima dissensione condire consensiones plurimas, docere aliquid inuicem aut discere ab inuicem, desiderare absentes cum molestia, suscipere uenientes cum laetitia; his atque huiusmodi signis a corde amantium et redamantium procedentibus per os, per linguam, per oculos et mille motus gratissimos quasi fomitibus conflare animos et ex pluribus unum facere.* (trans. cit., 62).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Pépin, “Le problème de la communication des consciences chez Plotin et saint Augustin”, *RMM* 55/2, 1950, p. 128-148.

The Manichean error notwithstanding, in Book VI Augustine explicitly argues that it is precisely this ardour of love which should be safeguarded. His argument is presented in the context of the discussions of *De finibus malorum et bonorum* which he had with Alypius and Nebridius in Milan. Augustine writes that he 'would have given the palm' to Epicurus, were it not for Epicurus's denial of immortality; at that time, Augustine's ultimate ideal was immortality and uninterrupted bodily pleasure<sup>20</sup>: "Nor did I in my wretchedness consider what stream it was whence flowed to me the power to discuss even these distasteful things with my friends and still find sweetness in our talk, or whence came my inability to be happy (...) without my friends<sup>21</sup>».

His pitiful moral and spiritual condition did not stop Augustine enjoying the benefits of friendship, which he explicitly takes to be an indispensable element of happiness. Thus friendship does not 'imply virtue' (Aristotle, *EN* 8.1.1155a). We should note that in Book III the same term *uena* is applied to friendship itself, which had degenerated into pseudo-compassion (which was, in fact, pleasure taken at the representation of another person's suffering). Such pseudo-compassion stoked his desire to watch tragic scenes<sup>22</sup>. In spite of this new error – opting for the ideal of life favoured by the Epicureans – friendship leads Augustine to the path of a love which is reciprocal and disinterested (*gratis*) (6.16.26). The distant model for this is God's love for his creatures, which is characterised by the couplet *amare-redamare*.<sup>23</sup>

## 2) The death of a friend

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Th. Fuhrer, "Contro I Platonici con Epicuro. Agostino sulla fisiologia del corpo umano.", *Eikasmos*, 26, 2015, 303.

<sup>21</sup> *Conf.* 6.16.26, trans. cit., 119.

<sup>22</sup> *Conf.* 3.2.2 : *Et hoc de illa uena amicitiae est. Sed quod uadit ? Quo fluit ?*

<sup>23</sup> *Cat. rud.* 4.7. Cicero uses the neologism *redamare* in *De amicitia* 14.49.

The aporetic character of this contradiction reveals itself precisely at the time of the death of a childhood friend, which is recounted in Book IV of the *Confessions*. This friend had initially followed Augustine on the path of Manichaeism, but was baptised and converted to Catholicism on the day before he died. It was a loss which affected Augustine on two levels. His appropriation of the classical tradition relating to grief over the loss of an *alter ego* can be seen as the first level. He feels as if he is only 'half alive' (*dimidius uiuere*), and writes: "still more amazed that I could go on living myself when he was dead"<sup>24</sup>. He describes a lack of stability which is felt in the very depths of his being, and which is described in strikingly physical terms. His soul is said to be "torn and wounded" *conclisa* and *cruenta* – a characterisation which foreshadows the *cor concisum* which results from the forced separation from his concubine (*Conf* 6.15.25). However, he rejects the heroic tradition of Orestes and Pylades (4.6.11)<sup>25</sup>, as he is overwhelmed by the fear of death. Yet it is this very fear which allows him to properly understand the value of this friendship. Indeed, in Book IV, his commitment to Manichaeism and his excessive attachment to this friend are errors which are linked not only by the narrative, but also conceptually. The intensity of his grief can be explained by the fact that, thanks to the *dilectio* which characterised this love, he had failed to understand that the object of his love could be lost. For this reason, it was a loss which brought him misery (§11).

Through comparing this love to the love which is due to God, who of course cannot be lost (§14), Augustine is able to see the folly of the love he had for his friend, and to contrast the divine *firmitas* with the 'sand' of this friendship. As he declares "Blessed is he who loves You, and loves his friend in you and his enemies for you sake", he points towards a more

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<sup>24</sup> 4.6.11. (trans cit., 61)

<sup>25</sup> This example of friendship is praised by Cicero (*De amicitia* 7.24).



authentic friendship, made possible by charity. In the absence of charity we cannot talk of 'genuine friendship' (*uera amicitia*), but only of friendship: « friendship is genuine only when you bind fast together people who cleave to you through *the charity poured abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us* (see *Rm. 5, 5*)<sup>26</sup> ».

God is not like a distinct object of friendship: he is the very source of it. Augustine picks up Aristotle's suggestion that virtue is the principle source of a fully realised friendship, and the cause of its stability.<sup>27</sup> The principle of such stability is in God, who enters every relationship of authentic friendship through charity. It is in this framework that we should understand the rejection of Augustine by his friend, who felt he had been made a mockery of by the baptism he had received the day before his death – a baptism which occurred whilst he had lost consciousness, but which was nonetheless valid (4.8). Augustine's later interpretation of *De amicitia* can shed light on his friend's attitude: the lack of 'agreement on divine matters' brings an end to their mutual dependence (*nimis pendamus ex inuicem*). To some extent, Augustine finds himself in a situation parallel to the one Marcianus seems to be in: although Marcianus was always full of 'benevolence' (*beneuolentia*)<sup>28</sup> towards Augustine, he nonetheless desired only a "mortal wellbeing" (*salus mortalis*) for him.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine's grief, described in poignant and quasi-elegiac terms, finds no relief in 'hope' placed in God, as long as he represents God as a '*phantasma*'. The account of this period foreshadows Book IX of the *Confessions*; it points towards Augustine's baptism in Milan in 387, and the change in his outlook which was brought about by the death of Monnica.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, in Book IV, the 'sweetness' of this old friendship is underlined, even though it

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<sup>26</sup> *Conf.* 4.4.7, trans. Boulding, p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> Friendship unites those who are « similar according to virtue » (Arist., *Eth. Nicom.* 8.4, 1156b), and for the virtuous person « his friend is another self » (*ibid.* 9.9, 1170b).

<sup>28</sup> Without this there is no friendship in the proper sense of the term (Cic., *De amicitia* 8.26).

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 258.2.

<sup>30</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere. (A.-I. Touboullic, « De la mort de l'ami à la présence divine (*Conf.* IV, 4, 7-12, 19) », *Vita Latina*, 153, 1999, 58-69 ; 57-58.

cannot be seen as *uera amicitia*. Augustine's account includes certain elements which feature in the *De amicitia* – for example, a commonality of tastes and of interests (*societas studiorum; cocta feruore parilium studiorum*)<sup>31</sup> – and which Cicero takes to constitute the foundation of friendship<sup>32</sup>. Still, as we have seen, Augustine led this friend along the path of Manichaeism, which can lead only to misery (« Already this man was intellectually astray along with me »), just as Caius Blossius would have been willing to burn down the Capitol if Tiberius Gracchus had asked him to. Cicero condemns this attitude on the basis that friendship should be founded on virtue.<sup>33</sup>

### 3) *Inimica amicitia*

Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship, according to the object on which the friendship is founded: i.e., pleasure, utility, and virtue. The first and lowest kind<sup>34</sup> is described in Book II of the *Confessions*, which famously recounts how his theft of some pears prompted Augustine to reflect on the depths of evil. He is aware of a *consortium* between those who commit the theft with him, and of the '*confricatio consociorum animorum*'<sup>35</sup>, a companionship in sin which is the determining factor in this theft, regardless of the appeal the pears had in themselves.

« On my own I would not have perpetrated that theft in which I felt no desire for what I stole, but only for the act of stealing ; to do it alone would have aroused no desire whatever in me, nor would I have done it. What an exceedingly unfriendly form of friendship (*O nimis*

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 4.4.7.

<sup>32</sup> *De amicitia* 4.15 : *uoluntatum, studiorum sententiarum summa consensio*.

<sup>33</sup> *De amicitia* 8.27.

<sup>34</sup> Augustine's friendship for Manichaeans at Rome was partially based on utility ; see *Conf.* 5.10. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Conf.* 2.8.16 : *confricatione consociorum animorum accenderem pruritum cupiditatis meae*. The term 'pruritum' is found in *De Gen. c. manichaeos* 2.15.23, in relation to the 'itch' which gives rise to Adam's and Eve's desire for pleasure, and leads them to lie after they have committed the first sin ('*Folia uero fici pruritum quemdam significant*').

A.-I. Bouton-Touboullic, paru dans *The Cambridge Companion to Augustines' Confessions*, ed. 10 Tarmo Toom, Cambridge, CUP, 2020, p. 138-153.

*inimica amicitia*) that was ! It was a seduction of the mind hard to understand, which instilled into me craving do harm for sport and fun<sup>36</sup>.» His friends (who are never named individually) were the 'adjuvants' (*adminicula*) to his wicked deed, and this friendship which re-enacts the temptation which led to the first sin can be described as a friendship which is orientated towards evil<sup>37</sup>. To this extent, it is similar to the case of the 'friends' who dragged Alypius to the games at the amphitheatre at Carthage, where the 'fall' of a gladiator was the occasion of Alypius' own fall (6.8.13). There is no doubt that the kind of life which is envisaged at this point is in opposition to authentic happiness.

## II) Friendship and progress

On the one hand, these friendships illustrate Augustine's progress on the path of a life which is in harmony with God, and throw this progress into relief. On the other hand, they are at the same time elements which enable this progress.

### 1) Friendship and progress towards wisdom

After Books II and IV, which were concerned with the negative or aporetic character of friendship, and with the period in his life when Augustine became ever more distant from God, Book VI describes a more focused search for a happy life, and for wisdom. This book also describes the first stage of the process of the return of the 'prodigal son'<sup>38</sup> : « Though I was so enamoured of a happy life I feared to find it in its true home, and fled from it even as I

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<sup>36</sup> *Conf.* 2, 9, 17, trans. Boulding, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> R. Lane Fox analyzes it as a "misapplied friendship", and underlines that "Augustine is the first Christian writer to explore friendship, rather than love, for a neighbour or for God." (*Augustine. Conversations and Confessions*, London, 2016, p. 68-69). On this topic, see Tamer Nawar, "Augustine's on the dangers of friendship", *The Classical Quarterly*, 2015, 1-16.

<sup>38</sup> *Conf.* 6.16.26 : *Ego fiebam miserior et tu propinquior*

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sought it.<sup>39</sup>» Augustine had to «abandon wordly ambition and apply ourselves singleminded to the search for God and a life of happiness<sup>40</sup>» (§19), but this aspiration seemed doomed to failure once his mother insists that he enters an 'arranged marriage' (§23).

This problem notwithstanding, in Book VI Augustine presents us with a friendship which will allow both parties to progress towards wisdom. In so doing, he returns to certain themes in ancient philosophy. For example, Cicero suggests that friendship has been given to us by nature for the perfection of virtue<sup>41</sup>, as we cannot attain to this perfection on our own. As such, friendship can produce a *comitatus* oriented towards the supreme good. In this respect, Books VI and IX complement each other, since the latter resolves the difficulties raised in the former (namely, the question of what kind of life to follow, and the place in that life which should be given to women). First we should note that the discussions with Nebridius and Alypius which are recounted in Book VI bear on the question of the supreme good and testify to their common search for happiness. Their search may be misguided, but they rightly take it for granted that there can be no happiness without friendship. Augustine's 'awarding the palm' to Epicurus (6.16.26) is perhaps an acknowledgement of the central role ascribed to happiness in the Epicureans' account of the goods which are necessary to happiness.

It is well known that in the course of his discussions with a dozen or so friends in Milan, Augustine conceived the project of a communal life involving withdrawal from society (*remoti a turbis*), and devoted to *otiose uiuere*. Such a project has parallels both in

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 6.11.20 : *amans beatam uitam timebam illam in sede sua et ab ea fugiens quaerebam eam.*

<sup>40</sup> trans. cit., p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> *De amicitia* 22.83.

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Pythagoreanism<sup>42</sup> and in the communities set up by the first Christians: in both cases we find an emphasis on communal ownership, with each member renouncing their private property in the name of *amicitiae sinceritas*,<sup>43</sup> and a certain rudimentary political structure (in which administrative responsibility lies with two 'magistrates', following Roman custom). It is clear that this project was made viable by the financial assistance of Romanianus (who was a patron of Thagaste, and Augustine's benefactor). However, there was no consensus on whether *mulierculae* could be admitted to this community (some of Augustine's friends were married, and others had been married before), and so the project ended in failure (*ibid.*)

Augustine's framework for understanding progress towards wisdom is consistent with his position in the *Soliloquies* (387): love for one's friends is to be proportioned to their inclination towards wisdom<sup>44</sup>. The first person to find wisdom can easily lead the others onto the same path (1.12.20). This project comes to completion during the time Augustine spent at Cassiciacum after his conversion. There, he enjoyed 'leisured freedom' (*libertas otiosa*) (9.3.6) and was able to 'rest in God', alongside friends and family (Monnica was the only woman in the group), far from the tumult of the age (*aestus saeculi*) (9.3.5).

We should also recall that Augustine was interested in the cenobitism of St Anthony, which had inspired vocations. Book VIII of the *Confessions* recounts how he heard about this from Ponticianus before the fateful day in the garden in Milan. Indeed, Augustine presents the new

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<sup>42</sup> See I. Hadot, s.u. *Amicitia*, *Augustinus Lexikon*, I, ed. C. Müller, Basel, 1986, 287-293 ; 290.

<sup>43</sup> *Conf.* 6.14.24. See D. Konstan, art. cit., p. 112.

<sup>44</sup> *Sol.* I. 12.20. This ascetic model, which is drawn from neoplatonism, is discussed by I. Hadot, art. cit., 292 ; Pizzolato, 1993, 309. Here, the problem of friendship is seen in terms of its relation to wisdom, rather than to charity; friendship is an instrument which puts ultimate truths within our grasp.

stage of his life which begins at Cassiciacum as the end of his attachment to the 'world' and a form of asceticism.<sup>45</sup>

This villa close to Milan was the property of Verecundus, who worked as a grammarian there. To his great disappointment, Verecundus was cut off from this *consortium*, as he was married,<sup>46</sup> and believed that a Christian way of life must involve the kind of continence to which Augustine was now committed.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless he 'generously' (*benigne*) gave his friends the use of this villa as a sign of his *benevolentia* and his friendship. Verecundus died shortly afterwards, but not before finally being baptised. Augustine asserts that thanks to this baptism, Verecundus would now be able to enjoy the *locus amoenus* of paradise.<sup>48</sup> God becomes the horizon of communal friendship after the turning point of Book VIII, and offers the promise not just of a happy life, but of eternal life – i.e. true happiness. Friendship is thus no longer understood in terms of a classical 'dyad', but rather in terms of a relation to something 'inward', which is shared by each party and which feeds their charity.<sup>49</sup>

The image of the *iter* from which Verecundus is excluded shows that Augustine's friends accompany him in their communal progress towards the good, and together they form a society which can be seen as a foretaste of the city of God. In Book IX, before recalling his time at Cassiciacum, Augustine reflects on the moral progress made by the friends who were

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<sup>45</sup> G. Folliet argues that this aspiration towards *deificari in otio* (*Ep.* 10.2) – which is synonymous with ascetism and purification through the virtues – is characteristic of porphyrianism ("Deificari in otio", Augustin, *Epistula* 10, 2", *RecAug.* 2, 1962, 225-236).

<sup>46</sup> Hindered by this, he is unable to set out on the path (*iter*) chosen by the others. *Conf.* 9.3.5.

<sup>47</sup> *Conf.* 9.3.5. This group is enriched by new arrivals such as Evodius, who converted before Augustine and shares his 'placitum sanctum'.

<sup>48</sup> *Conf.* 9.3.5. In a play on words, Augustine expands on the *mons incaseatus* of *Ps.* 67, 16.

<sup>49</sup> Pizzolato, 1993, 311-312 : "un termine medio situato all'interno dell'io". Cf. *Conf.* 10.3.3 : '*Caritas omnia credit*' (1 Co. 13.7), *inter eos utique, quos conexos sibimet unum facit*. In contrast, T. J. Van Bavel suggests that there is a 'triadic' structure to Cicero's account of friendship : the two friends and nature (or virtue) 'as a divine, impersonal power.' («The Influence of Cicero's Ideal of Friendship on Augustine », 64-65).

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with him in Milan. By means of a narrative prolepsis<sup>50</sup>, which looks beyond the events currently being related, he allows us to see the spiritual destiny of Nebridius, who moved from docetism to the Catholic faith, and died before Augustine's return to Africa in 391. In a quasi-elegy, Augustine takes pleasure in imagining him in 'the bosom of Abraham' (Luke 16, 22): « There my Nebridius is living, to me a friend most tenderly loved, to you, Lord, a freedman adopted as you son<sup>51</sup> ».

There are two aspects to the bond which Augustine describes, friendship and spiritual affiliation, and these give rise to two distinct points of view. On the one hand, the friendship continues regardless of Nebridius' spiritual state, but on the other hand, it becomes an enlightened friendship after his conversion. From that point onwards, Nebridius's thirst for knowledge is filled by wisdom as he enjoys happiness without end.<sup>52</sup> Yet, beyond the *eschaton*, friendship returns for Augustine and does not stop being reciprocal. It continues even as it is transformed by its relation to God: « Yet I cannot believe that he is so inebriated as to forget me, since you, Lord, from whom he drinks, are mindful to us.<sup>53</sup>»

An episode at Cassiciacum which is described in Book IX points towards the framework in which friendship will now be understood. When Augustine is afflicted by toothache, he asks the friends who are with him to 'pray [to God] for [him]'<sup>54</sup>. As he can no longer speak, he

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<sup>50</sup> This device is also used in the account of Augustine's friendship with Verecundus cited above.

<sup>51</sup> *Conf.* 9.3.6, *trans. cit.*, 174.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* : *Iam non ponit aurem ad os meum, sed spiritale os ad fontem tuum et bibit, quantum potest, sapientia pro auditate sua sine fine felix.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> See M.A. McNamara, 1958, 211.

writes his request on a wax tablet. As soon as they fall on their knees in supplication, an almost miraculous healing takes place.<sup>55</sup>

### 3) The case of Alypius: a communal and progressive appropriation of the good

Thanks to his long-established and ongoing friendship with Augustine, and his role in the genesis of the *Confessions*<sup>56</sup>, Alypius seems well placed to play the role of a friend who is an *alter idem* for Augustine. He could also throw into relief Augustine's apprehension of an authentic conception of friendship – one which not only offers consolation in the face of the trials of their age, but which can also contribute to happiness in the next life. But does Augustine escape the temptation to project onto his friend an ideal self<sup>57</sup>?

Their friendship is initially marked by a certain inequality: Alypius is younger than Augustine, and is his pupil in Carthage, but at the same time he belongs to a higher social class. Here Augustine breaks with the Aristotelian tradition which regards inequality as an obstacle to friendship<sup>58</sup>. The strength of their friendship is all the greater because it triumphs over obstacles – notably a disagreement between Alypius's father and Augustine.<sup>59</sup> Its complementarity and reciprocity reveal the foundations of this friendship.<sup>60</sup> The model which is relevant here is one in which friendship is founded on complementarity rather than

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<sup>55</sup> *Conf.* 9.4.13 : *ascendit in cor meum admonere omnes meos, qui aderant, ut deprecarentur te pro me, deum salutis omnimodae.*

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Aug. Ep.* 27, 3 to Paulinus of Nola. Cf. P. Courcelle, 1968, 45.

<sup>57</sup> About this relationship, I refer to my paper, "Alypius, l'ami sceptique d'Augustin ?", *Augustin philosophe et prédicateur, Hommage à G. Madec*, éd. I. Bochet, Paris, 2012, p. 295-314.

<sup>58</sup> Arist., *EN* 8.8. 1158b.

<sup>59</sup> *Conf.* 6.7.11 : Alypius gives this little weight and greets Augustine.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* : *et diligebat multum, quod ei bonus et doctus uiderer, et ego illum propter magnam uirtutis indolem, quae in non magna aetate satis eminebat.*



ressemblance<sup>61</sup>. We have an example of friendship in which one party is oriented towards knowledge, and the other oriented towards virtue<sup>62</sup>. In the *Confessions*, however, there are echoes of Cicero's suggestion that friendship develops when *benevolentia* is kindled through contact with a virtue which is embodied by another person.<sup>63</sup> Endowed with an honourable character, Alypius already possesses the humility which will lead to his baptism<sup>64</sup> and, being motivated by *continentia*, he is no longer attracted to women. Does this friendship allow its protagonists to make mutual progress on the path of authentic happiness?

The events which led to Alypius being freed of his passion for circus games are well known.<sup>65</sup> At first, Augustine cannot offer a *monitio* because the *amicitiae benevolentia* has not yet been firmly established (*ibid*); the *correctio* which comes later is clearly attributed to divine Providence, which already sees a future 'minister' of God in Alypius. Augustine, the *magister*, is simply God's instrument as he expounds a scriptural text (Prov. 9.8). Alypius takes this text to be addressed to him and is 'healed' of this passion.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, Alypius is unable to dissuade Augustine from seeking marriage (6.12.21) on the basis that this would stop them «to live together in the carefree leisure and devote ourselves to philosophy, as we had long desired ». Augustine insists that marriage is not incompatible with such a life; marriage does not preclude the possibility of cultivating wisdom and obtaining some merit before God, «having faithfully kept their friends and loved

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<sup>61</sup> When Plato defines friendship in *Lysis* 222a 5, he substitutes the idea of *oikeion* for the notion of *homoiotês*.

<sup>62</sup> See A.-I. Bouton-Touboullic, 2012, 309.

<sup>63</sup> *De amicitia* 8.28.

<sup>64</sup> *Conf.* 9.6.14 : He goes as far as walking on icy ground in Italy with bare feet.

<sup>65</sup> Conversely, we must note that Nebridius challenges some of Augustine's Manichaean ideas, as well as his attraction to astrology and divination (see *Conf.* 4.3.6 ; 7.6.8 ; 7.2.3.)

<sup>66</sup> *Conf.* 6.7.12. Cf. the *exemplum* of Polemon coming to Xenocratus' school (Diog. L. IV, 3, 16). See P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions*, Paris, 1968, 59.

them dearly<sup>67</sup>. » As we have seen, the problem of the incompatibility of these two ways of life will ultimately prove decisive. To a great extent this is due to the fact that far from desiring 'the good of marriage',<sup>68</sup> Augustine is in fact a hostage to the 'carnal fever' of concupiscence. He even plays the role of 'serpent' in his relationship with Alypius, because his assumption that life without a woman is a 'punishment' rather than a 'life'<sup>69</sup> provokes Alypius's desire to seek marriage, through eliciting his 'curiosity', or rather his 'mimetical desire'.

In the remarkable sequence of their conversion, Augustine hears the refrain '*Tolle, lege*' in the garden in Milan whilst he is away from Alypius (an episode recounted in Book VIII).<sup>70</sup> Alypius is not led on to the same path by anything Augustine says to him after his conversion, but rather by his own reading of Rm. 14.1, even if this passage comes immediately after the one Augustine had just read<sup>71</sup>: « He in return told me what had been happening to him without my knowledge<sup>72</sup> ». It is indeed the divine Word of the scriptures which plays the role of *admonitio* in relation to Alypius, who was "weak in faith" (see *Rm.*

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<sup>67</sup> *Conf.* 6.12.21 : *illis exemplis eorum, qui coniugati coluissent sapientiam et promeruissent deum et habuissent fideliter ac dilexissent amicos.* (trans. cit., 115).

<sup>68</sup> This is recounted in *Conf.* 6.12.22 : *coniugale decus in officio regendi matrimonii et suscipiendorum liberorum.* In *De b. conj.*, 9, 9 Augustine describes *amicitia* as a *bonum*, and suggests that marriage is a good which is necessary to friendship, as it supports the propagation of the human race. And he imagines "a certain relationship and kinship" (*amicalis quaedam et germana coniunctio*) (*ibid.* 1, 1) between Adam and Eve before the carnal relationship which was initiated after their sin. (trans. R. Kearney, WSA, Part I/9, *The Excellence of Marriage*, New York, 1997, 33).

<sup>69</sup> Here Augustine is not thinking of 'the happy life'.

<sup>70</sup> See A.-I. Bouton-Touboullic, "Body language in Augustine's *Confessiones* and *De doctrina christiana*", *Aug. St.*, 49/1, 2018, 1-23 ; 21.

<sup>71</sup> *Conf.* 8.12. 30 : *Adtendit etiam ultra quam ego legeram.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

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14.1; *conf.* 8.12.30), as he had wrongly attributed the heresy of Apollinarianism<sup>73</sup> to the Catholic Church (whereas Augustine had yielded to Photinianism.)

Alypius's and Augustine's conversion mirrors the conversion of the two officials in Trier. It should also be seen as the culmination of a series of parallels which have been drawn between these two friends, with Augustine leading the way as regards knowledge, and Alypius leading the way as regards mores<sup>74</sup>. This common quest for wisdom will finally lead them to ministry in the Church; indeed, these friendships validate the foundations of their communal life in Thagaste, before they are fully realised in the heart of the Church.

### Conclusion

In the *Confessions*, Augustine suggests that the quest for happiness is inseparable from the quest for wisdom. Friendship plays a major role here, not least in showing the social and affective dimensions of these quests. Augustine lays particular emphasis on the point that the sweetness of the bond of friendship is directly related to divine charity. The intersubjectivity manifested in the guidance and warnings which friends give each other is the fruit of a divine *dispensatio*. Augustine's understanding of friendship is certainly informed by classical ideas, but ultimately he is concerned to present friendship as the cornerstone of a Christian community which is yet to be founded.

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<sup>73</sup> *Conf.* 7.19.25 : *ad ipsam christianam fidem pigrius mouebatur*. See E. Feldmann, s.u. Alypius, *Augustinus Lexikon*, I, ed. C. Mayer..., Basel, 1986-1989, c. 248. G. Van Reyn, "*Ad christianam fidem pigrius mouebatur* (*Conf.* VII, 20, 25). Alypius More Reluctant Move to the Christian Faith (Compared to Augustine)", Part 2, *Augustiniana*, 60, 2011, 193-234. Alypius enjoins Augustine not to mention the name of Christ in the Dialogues of Cassiciacum (*Conf.* 9.4.7).

<sup>74</sup> See *De ord.* 2.10.28 : *magister uerborum/magister morum*.

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