

Karla Boersma / Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.)

Wellbeing in Early Modern Christianity

Perspectives and Practices for a Happy Life



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Karla Boersma / Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.)

Wellbeing in Early Modern Christianity

Perspectives and Practices for a Happy Life

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List of Abbreviations

CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.
CO	Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformatorum vol. 29–87, Guilielmus Baum/August E. Cunitz/Eduard W.E. Reuss (ed.), 59 vol., Braunschweig (1863–1900): C.A. Schwetschke.
CR	Corpus Reformatorum.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
JHC	Journals of the House of Commons, Vol. 17 (1711–1714), [London:] Re-printed by Order of the House of Commons, 1803.
JHL	Journals of the House of Lords, Vol. 19 (1709–1714), London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1767–1830.
KJV	King James Version (King James Bible).
MBW	Melanchthons Briefwechsel: kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe/im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, hrsg. von Heinz Scheible, Abt. Regesten/bearb. von Heiz Scheible, Walter Thüringer, Bd 1ff, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: 1977ff.
MSA	Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl/hrsg. von Robert Stupperich, 7 Bde. in 9 Teilbdsn., Gütersloh: 1951–1975.
OHT	Oxford Historical Treaties.
RAC	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum.
RÉA	Revue des études anciennes.
ZKG	Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte.

Introduction

Today, wellbeing is high on the personal and societal agenda, but thinking about wellbeing certainly is not a new phenomenon. The Greek philosopher Aristotle, for example, came up with the concept of *Eudaimonia* – the contented state of feeling healthy, happy, and prosperous – and this concept has been influential through the centuries and up until today.

This volume is the result of a Coram Deo Program sponsored conference held at Campo Santo Teutonico (Rome) in March 2023 on the theme of wellbeing in Early Modern Christianity. During the conference, the topic was approached from three perspectives by an international group of scholars: physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. The volume starts with an article by Mathijs Lamberigts, a leading expert on Augustine, describing the church father's thoughts on wellbeing, which had a great influence on theologians and other thinkers in the Early Modern Era. This introductory article is followed by twelve other contributions that reflect on the theme in different content-related and geographical contexts and from different disciplines.

Our thanks go to Dr. Albrecht Weiland, former director of Schnell und Steiner Verlag, for being such a wonderful *trait-d'union* with Campo Santo Teutonico. The good care of the staff guaranteed the wellbeing of the conference participants, ensuring an unforgettable experience at this special cemetery right within the Vatican walls.

Karla Boersma
Herman J. Selderhuis

Mathijs Lamberigts

“Omnes esse beati volunt” (*Confessiones* 10,23,33)

Augustine on Happiness

1. Introduction

Throughout his work, Augustine time and again insists on the fact that human beings want to be happy, a reason why this topic is extensively discussed in contemporary literature.¹ In *Confessiones* 10,20,29, he states: “Nonne ipsa est beata uita, quam omnes uolunt et omnino qui nolit nemo est?”² The same idea is already present in works such as *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1,3,4, written in 387–388. It is a recurring theme in his sermons. In sermon 150, probably held in 397, he makes clear that the search for a happy life is the subject of philosophers’ reflection. It is a reason why the faithful have become Christians, for they long for a happy life. Indeed, it is a universal desire – common to all human beings, including Christians and philosophers.³ The topic of happiness is the explicit subject of sermons such as 53 and 306 and it is also the point of departure for Augustine in the much later *De civitate Dei* 10,1,1, where it is said that all reasonable people want to be happy.⁴

In *De Trinitate* 13,8,11, for example, Augustine suggests that the creator has implanted this desire for happiness in our nature: “Aut si uolunt (beati esse) ut ueritas clamat, ut natura compellit cui summe bonus et immutabiliter beatus creator hoc indidit [...]”⁵ A bit further, in 13,20,25 he adds: “Beatos esse se uelle omnium hominum est,⁶ nec tamen omnium est fides qua cor mundante ad beatitudinem

1 The literature on Augustine’s ideas with regard to the topic of happiness is overwhelming; see, e. g., the bibliography as offered by de Noronha Galvão: 1986–1994, 624–638; cf. also Buddensiek: 2009, 63–85, 84–85; Tornau: 2015, 265–280, 265, n. 1. The best study on this matter is still Holte: 1962.

2 *Confessiones* 10,20,29, CCSL 27, 170.

3 Sermo 150,4, in RĒA 45: 1999, 41: “Unde uideor parum dixisse hunc appetitum beatae uitae philosophis Christianisque communem: debui enim dicere omnium hominum, prorsus omnium bonorum et malorum.” In the sermon’s title, it is explicitly said that it is De epicureis et stoicis, a reading which reminds us of Possidius, *Indiculum* 1,41; see the pertinent comments of Elfassi: 1999, 22–23.

4 De civitate Dei 10,1, CCSL 47, 271: “Omnium certa sententia est, qui ratione quoquo modo uti possunt, beatos esse omnes homines uelle.”

5 De Trinitate 13,8,11, CCSL 50A, 398.

6 As the notes to the critical edition make clear, this idea is also present in classical authors such as Epictetus and Cicero.

peruenitur.”⁷ All are searching for happiness but not all will find it, while some do not even want to find it. Indeed, not all want to follow the right way needed to reach it. Consider how a thief wants to be happy and believes that theft will offer him happiness.⁸ In any case, up to the end of his life, Augustine will repeat that people want to be happy (*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 6,11–12).⁹ However, in his unfinished work, written against the Pelagian bishop Julian of Aeclanum, Augustine at the same time offers ample proof of the fact that the Christian religion also teaches that human history, including the history of Christians, is thoroughly characterized by sin, physical and intellectual miseries, death and the like – all apparent threats to humanity’s shared efforts to achieve happiness.

In this introduction to the theme of the conference, I want to show that Augustine’s views on happiness have been subject of a profound evolution, if not change. Before discussing this evolution, I think it is helpful to offer a short survey of the antique reflections on happiness.

2. The Historical Context

Augustine’s reflections on happiness are to be situated in a long Greek and Roman philosophical tradition of discussion of the happy life,¹⁰ but are also influenced by the Biblical idea of beatitude in the sense of *makariotès*, which for Christians seemingly has a more positive religious connotation than the other classic concept of *eudaimonia* (evoking the idea of a demon). *Makariotès* seemingly is preferred over *eudaimonia* in (Greek) Christian literature.¹¹ The initial religious connotation of the term *eudaimonia* is clear: it has to do with happiness because the demon is well disposed to a human being, something that can be reflected in a long life, health, power, honour, richness and the like.¹² Gradually, it becomes a situation in which the divine aspect is actively present in the life of human beings, a presence that is characterized by virtue and wisdom.¹³ The distinction between *eudaimonia* and *makariotès* seems to disappear in the Latin Christian reflection because both will be

7 De Trinitate 13,20,25, CCSL 50A, 417

8 Sermo 150,4, RÉA 45 (1999), 42.

9 Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum 6,11–12, CCSL 85,2, 316–321.

10 See J. Doignon: 1986–1994, 618–624, esp. 621–622. For more detailed surveys, see Holte: 1962, 29ff; Beierwaltes: 1981, 10–20; Holte: 1981, 246–270; Topping: 2012, 73–78.

11 Braun: 1970: 177–182, 177; de Noronha Galvão: 1986–1994, 625. For the non-Biblical use of *makariotès*, see Holte: 1981, 247.

12 Holte: 1981, 246.

13 For the details, see Holte: 1981, 249–250.

translated as *beatus*, *beatitudo*, and *beatitas*,¹⁴ the adjective being preferred over the two substantives,¹⁵ an indication that the translation blessedness (Glückseligkeit) with all its (Christian) theological connotations is less correct than happiness. In any case, blessedness does not fully do justice to the evolution of Augustine's thinking about this matter.¹⁶

Traditionally, people distinguish two conceptions of happiness in the Western tradition. The first line is qualified as the hedonic understanding (cf. Aristippus of Cyrene and Epicurus). A second line puts happiness in the center of the moral life. Happiness is considered as the supreme good for human beings. It is linked with human flourishing, i. e., with the actualization of one's rational powers. To be sure, it is in this line that interpreters situate Augustine. In Augustine's view on happiness, reason certainly has a role to play, be it that Augustine gradually will focus on God as the true happiness – grasped by faith, and in glimpses also by reason.¹⁷ In other words, Augustine's thoughts on this matter have to be situated within the interaction between ancient philosophical and Christian traditions.

In general, it is accepted that Augustine's early reflections on happiness are influenced by Neoplatonic and Stoic ideas.¹⁸ On this matter, Augustine probably found inspiration in the works of Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Seneca (1–65 CE). Cicero was a mediating source for Greek philosophy, for at the time Augustine wrote his own *De vita beata*, his knowledge of Greek was not good and Greek would remain a language Augustine struggled with up to the end of his life.¹⁹ It is well known how important the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* was for Augustine.²⁰ This book stimulated the love of Augustine for philosophy, even wisdom *per se*.²¹ In *Hortensius* he came across the teleological axiom of antique philosophy: "Beatos

14 Holte: 1981, 262.

15 And this since the time of Cicero. Moreover, in Biblical and Christian Latin, *beatus* becomes gradually more frequent than *felix*, the latter seemingly still having a pagan connotation; see Braun: 1970, 178–181.

16 I think that de Noronha Galvão: 1986–1994, 626–627 does not sufficiently take into account that Augustine never used the nouns *beatitudo* and *beatitas*, when dealing with the happy life in his *De beata vita*.

17 See Eardley: 2013, 1093–1097. Within the first group, a distinction is to be made between the Epicurean option for the pleasure for oneself (individualism) and the utilitarian hedonism that claims that the morally correct course of action always involves taking into account the happiness of the other.

18 See, e. g., Horn: 2011, 132–134; Harwardt: 1999, 153–171.

19 See Lamberigts: 1994, 151–161.

20 Cf. *De beata vita* 1,4, CCSL 29, 66; *Confessiones* 3,3,7, CCSL 29, 30; *Confessiones* 8,7,17, CCSL 29, 124; cf. also Catapano: 2020, 191–206, 192–195; cf. also Topping: 2012, 67–68.

21 *De beata vita* 1,4, CCSL 29, 66: "Ego ab usque undeuicesimo anno aetatis meae, postquam in schola rhetoris librum illum Ciceronis, qui Hortensius uocatur, accepi, tanto amore philosophiae succensus sum, ut statim ad eam me ferre meditarer."

nos esse volumus”.²² Cicero argued in this book that wisdom was an absolute prerequisite for the happy life, happiness at that time being a matter of the mind, the leading principle. Only through reason we can gain insight in what really matters. Only through reason one will discover what true happiness is.

Augustine also knew works of Seneca, even although he seemingly kept some distance from this philosopher.²³ Seneca, clearly referring to the Stoics, wrote a *De vita beata* in which he defined a happy life as following:

Happy is a life that is in accordance with its own nature. This can only come to us when first the mind is sound, then strong and energetic, then extremely patient, adapted to the circumstances, caring for the body and all that has to do with it, but without being anxious, careful in other things that enrich life, without falling into admiration for anything, thus intending to make use of the gifts of fortune, without becoming a slave of them.²⁴

Reason distinguishes human beings from animals, and chases away fear and desire. The one who chooses for happiness will live a life according to measure.

A last (possible) source may be Plotinus, for whom true happiness is to be found in the contemplation of and the unification with the One through the soul.²⁵ Such unification is preceded by a purification of the soul through the practice of virtue. True happiness lays in the unification with the One, living a life of reason, this mortal life being a preparation for such a transcendent unification. Because of this unification, the wise individual does not worry about suffering and evil, for both affect the body, but do not harm the soul of the wise. There is no doubt that Augustine was familiar with Plotinus' *Enneads* I,4–5 when living in Milan. Plotinus discussed in this passage the question whether a long duration of happiness may result in an increase of this happiness.

In line with this classical view, Augustine insists that all human beings possess an innate drive towards supreme happiness. In fact, supreme happiness functions as the end towards which our daily life and actions are directed. Happiness is thus the final aim of our life, not a medium to something else. It is as it were a state that one is striving for because of itself.

22 Hortensius, frg. 58 Grilli; see also *Tusculanae disputationes* 5, 28.

23 Cf. Fuhrer: 2019, 199–201.

24 Seneca in *De vita beata* 3,3 (*Dialogi*, 7), ed. Teubner, 198: “Beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae, quae non aliter contingere potest, quam si primum sana mens est et in perpetua possessione sanitatis suae, deinde fortis ac vehemens, tunc pulcherrime patiens, apta temporibus, corporis sui pertinentiumque ad id curiosa non anxie, tum aliarum rerum quae vitam instruunt diligens sine admiratione cuiusquam, usura fortunae muneribus, non servitura.” See also Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 113–114.

25 Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 115–117. With regard to Plotinus' views, see Holte: 1962, 45–61.

Happiness is also a Biblical theme, and it is present both in the Old Testament (cf. the Psalms 1, 32, 40; 41; 112; 119) and in the New Testament (the beatitudes). Whether Augustine had a great familiarity with the Old Testament texts at the time he lived in Milan and Cassiciacum, is to be questioned, for during his Manichaean past, the Old Testament was not really part of his daily literature. Moreover, Augustine had joined the Manichaean sect after he was deeply disappointed about the poor Latin of the *Vetus Latina* he had at his disposal. Other reason was that he experienced some Old Testament stories as "immoral" and thus was of the opinion that they were a hindrance for his search for wisdom.

After his conversion to orthodox Christianity – Augustine never converted to Christianity for he was, from the very beginning of his life, a Christian; Manichaeism functioned in North Africa as a Christian sect – Augustine, who suffered at that moment from serious health problems, went to the estate of his friend Verecundus in Cassiciacum²⁶ and it was there that the discussion on happy life, *De beata vita*, took place. At the time he wrote this work, Augustine was 32.²⁷

3. De beata vita

When people celebrate their birthday, they quite evidently expect to receive some gifts, or, at least, they hope that their family and friends will not forget that day. Augustine's work *De beata vita*, was begun on November 13, 386, the day he celebrated his birthday.²⁸ It was a book that was completed after three days of discussion. It was a common search of Augustine and the members of his Cassiciacum-group. Present were family members (his son – Augustine proves to be a "normal" father, full of admiration for his son – , his mother – an uncultivated lady praised for her judgement, faith and understanding of the divine mystery – , his brother (Navigius), cousins (Lartidianus and Rusticus) and friends (Trygetius and Licentius, fellow citizens and students of Augustine).²⁹ Augustine emphasizes that this group reflection

26 There has been discussion about the exact location of Cassiciacum; today, there seems to be a consensus that Cassiciacum is modern Cassago Brianza, 35 km northeast of Milan; see O'Daly: 1986–1994, 771–781, here 772–774.

27 One should keep in mind that people like Cicero, Seneca and Plotinus wrote their work on happy life at the age of about sixty years, while Augustine is still a "youngster"; cf. Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 117.

28 *De beata vita* 2,9, CCSL 29, 70; *Retractationes* 1,2, CCSL 57, 11.

29 Whether all the people present (except Monnica) are as literate as suggested by Topping: 2012, 68, is something that should be examined in more detail. In fact, while Augustine is very proud on the intellectual performances of his son, it is to be said that Adeodatus is fourteen years old, and the so-called illiterate mother plays a rather remarkable role in the dialogue.

on the happy life was a common search,³⁰ for no one questioned that all people want to be happy, happiness belonging to one of the ideas impressed in our mind.³¹ It is an interesting book, for it also summarizes Augustine's trajectory up to that moment. In a sense, one can read *De beata vita* as a kind of autobiography.³²

It is, like *Contra Academicos*, a severe critique of skepticism,³³ the philosophical tradition that searched for truth but was of the opinion that the best one could get was a kind of probability.³⁴ Augustine could not live with such lifelong incertitude about the final truth and was convinced that there existed conformity between truth and happiness. *De beata vita* thus should be read as an attempt to find and touch the true happiness, Augustine at this moment in life being aware of the fact that unhappiness is a kind of absence of wisdom.³⁵ Augustine needed friends and a community in order to live a happy life.³⁶ Before his conversion to orthodox Christianity, he lived in Milan with his friend Alypius. After his conversion, he decided to give up his position as orator at the court of Milan and to build a community life in Cassiciacum.

De beata vita is the result of Augustine's initial optimism. The statement that all want to be happy is supported by all dialogue partners.³⁷ Happy is the one who wants to do the good and possesses that good.³⁸ He and his dialogue partners agreed that the one who possesses God is happy,³⁹ for true happiness must be

30 *Retractationes* 1,2, CCSL 57, 11: "In quo libro constitit inter nos, qui simul quaerebamus, non esse beatam uitam nisi perfectam cognitionem Dei."

31 With regard to the Aristotelian background of this idea, see Rist: 1994, 50.

32 Cf. J. Doignon: 1986–1994, 618–624, 620.

33 See, e.g., He: 2022, online version consulted May 2023, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222022000400086; cf. Doignon: 1986–1994, 620.

34 For a detailed study of *Contra Academicos*, see Holte: 1962, 73–109; cf. also Topping: 2012, 95–124.

35 In *De beata vita* 3,25, CCSL 29, 79, this absence of happiness is qualified as foolishness (*stultitia*), according to de Norinha Galvão: 1986–1994, 627, a position influenced by the Stoics through Augustine's reading of Cicero.

36 On the relation between happiness and friendship, see Bouton-Touboul: 2020, 138–152 (with further literature).

37 On the arguments, see Harwardt: 1999, 157. In *De beata vita*, one will look in vain for a concept such as humility; warnings for pride are also rather minimal; see *De beata vita* 1,3. Augustine warns for the haughty desire for very hollow vain glory.

38 *De beata vita* 2,10, CCSL 29, 70; a similar idea is also present in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1,3,4, CSEL 90, 6; with regard to the Ciceronian background, see Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 120 and 221.

39 *De beata vita* 3,17, CCSL 29, 75: "Nam cum ratio demonstrasset eum beatum esse, qui Deum haberet, nec huic quisquam uestrum sententiae restitisset [...]". Doing God's will and living a good life are considered to be identical; see 3,18, CCSL 29, 75. Apart from the *Deum habere*, Augustine also uses formulations such as *frui Deo*, *adhaerere Deo*, and the like; see Tornau: 2015, 266.

permanent, and this can only be the case for the one who possesses God.⁴⁰ They also agreed that those possess God, who do the will of God or live a good life.⁴¹ There is a relation between the *bene vivere* and the *beate vivere*, between ethics and true happiness.⁴² In fact, happiness is the essence of doing philosophy: "Nulla est homini causa philosophandi, nisi ut beatus sit."⁴³ In passing, it should be said that philosophy in antiquity was (also) a way of living in search for happiness through inner autonomy, being free of all what hinders personal harmony.⁴⁴ At this stage in Augustine's life, true Platonic ideas and Christian faith do have much in common.⁴⁵ In this regard, one can say that Augustine's conversion to orthodox Christianity can also be read as an experience of happiness that coincides with a conversion to philosophy, a journey to the inner life on the way to happiness.⁴⁶ In *De beata vita*, Augustine and his dialogue partners are of the opinion that happiness is related to a God who is favorable to these people.⁴⁷ In other words, happiness has to do with relation between God and human beings. It is also said that happy life in this time of life only resides in the soul of a wise person. The wise does not fear the death of the body or pain,⁴⁸ even although he will try to avoid them. It should be said that Augustine's conversion to orthodox Christianity was considered by himself

40 *De beata vita* 2,11, CCSL 29, 72: "Deum igitur [...] qui habet, beatus est." With regard to the possible influence of Plotinus, see Buddensiek: 2009, 67, n. 19; for the Stoic background, see Harwardt: 1999, 159; Doignon: 1986, 142–143.

41 *De beata vita* 2,12, CCSL 29, 72: "Deum habet qui bene vivit. [...] Deum habet [...] qui facit quae Deus vult fieri."

42 On this relation between the Stoic idea of virtue and the Platonic idea on the possession of God as constituting human beings' happiness, see Holte: 1962, 196. Throughout his life, Augustine will underline that virtue is a necessary condition for happiness; see Horn: 1999, 173–190, here 176–182. However, the more grace becomes dominant in Augustine's teaching, virtue's efficacy will be related to it. I do think that the best way to respect this development is a chronological reading of Augustine; see Pizzolato: 1987, 31–112. In my opinion, a thematic reading that does not sufficiently respect the chronological developments in Augustine's reflections underestimates how much Augustine owed to the "philosophers" during the eighties of the fourth century.

43 *De civitate Dei* 19,1, CCSL 48, 659.

44 Cf. the Stoic idea of *apatheia*; see Tornau: 2015, 271.

45 See the remarks of Fuhrer: 1999, 191–211, 192.

46 It is not without reason that Augustine discusses which philosophy deserves to be qualified as *vera philosophia*, thus being in agreement with the beatitudes of the New Testament; see de Noronha Galvão: 1986–1994, 627.

47 See *De beata vita* 3, 19–22, CCSL 29, 75–77. Possessing and searching God implies a relation in which God shows that he is propitius: favorable, well-disposed, gracious, kind, propitious to people. Buddensiek: 2009, 71, referring to *Ad Simplicianum* 1,2,21, rightly observes that at this stage it is unclear whether God's grace or human beings' efforts will result in happiness.

48 *De beata vita* 4,25, CCSL 29, 78: "[...] non igitur metuit sapiens aut mortem corporis aut dolores [...]."

as entering the ‘port of happiness’,⁴⁹ a port (or door) that only could be attained at that time by a small group of learned men, as becomes clear in another work, *De ordine* 2,9,26.⁵⁰ As he said in *De beata vita*, happiness will be found once one has reached the port after the storm.

Without doubt, happiness is to be linked to wisdom, precisely insofar as the latter concerns reason, measure, limits of nature and a kind of aversion for all that has to do with need, fear, and the like.⁵¹ Wisdom is nothing but the measure of the soul that neither longs for too much nor remains short of its fullness.⁵² Such wisdom is to be identified with the wisdom of God: true happiness consists in the possession of God’s wisdom. Christ is the wisdom of God. All who are happy, possess God. For, indeed, wisdom is identical with truth.⁵³ When the ultimate and supreme measure is God (*De beata vita* 33–34), the changeable elements such as need and fear cannot contribute to happiness. True happiness is a revealed one: Christ does play a role in our happiness (*De beata vita* 34). However, in this life this happiness cannot be perfect because we are not yet wise and happy. The full satisfaction of our souls is to recognize piously and perfectly through whom we are led into truth, truth we will enjoy and by which we will be connected with the highest measure.⁵⁴

In *De beata vita* 14, Augustine argues that the Academici search for truth, but do not find it. Therefore, they will not be happy, for nobody is wise when not happy.⁵⁵ Therefore, the Academici cannot be wise. For Augustine, like for Cicero and the Stoics, *stultitia* (folly) is the place of unhappiness. The concordance between happiness and wisdom – evidently imbedded in the philosophical thinking of his time⁵⁶ – is based on the thesis that the fullness of perfection of virtues results in happiness. Because wisdom is the highest of all virtues, it results in happiness. Wisdom directs the use of external goods through modesty and temperance. It is a matter of measurement of the mind, for wisdom is the opposite of foolishness.

49 Rist: 1994, 94.

50 *De ordine* 2,9,26, CCSL 29, 122: “Ad quam cognitionem in hac vita pervenire pauci [...]”.

51 See the observations of Holte: 1962, 196–197.

52 *De beata vita* 4,32–33, CCSL 29, 83–84; see also Buddensiek: 2009, 67.

53 With regard to the possible influence of philosophy on these positions, see Ferwerda: 1999, 84–86, notes. Augustine does not discuss the incarnation of Christ when dealing with wisdom and the tone of his argumentation sounds rather neo-platonic; cf. also Lekkerkerker’s detailed comparison of Augustine’s and Plotinus’ positions: 1944–1945, 131–135. Lekkerkerker suggests that Porphyry may have played a role of mediator between Plotinus and Augustine.

54 *De beata vita* 4,35, CCSL 29, 84: “Illa est igitur plena satietas animorum, hoc est beata uita, pie perfecteque cognoscere, a quo inducaris in ueritatem, qua ueritate perfruaris, per quid conecaris summo modo.”

55 *De beata vita* 2,14, CCSL 29, 73: “At nemo sapiens nisi beatus: sapiens igitur academicus non est.” See also Doignon: 1986, 143.

56 See Holte: 1962, 63–67.

In that sense, happiness also has an ethical aspect: it is related to virtue and is expressed in the saying *ne quid nimis* (nothing too much).⁵⁷ Being happy is nothing else than being wise and is related to the measure of the spirit. Everybody who is happy, possesses his or her own measure, *id est*, wisdom.⁵⁸ Augustine identifies wisdom with the wisdom of God and relates it to Christ who is nothing else than the wisdom of God and the son of God and thus truly God. Therefore, everybody who is happy possesses God.⁵⁹ Augustine, quoting John 14:6: "I am the truth", identifies wisdom and truth. Everybody who comes to this truth, is happy. For the soul this means to possess God, thus enjoying God.⁶⁰ In fact, God can only be enjoyed, not used.⁶¹ It goes without saying that such a transcendent, Christian wisdom must be distinguished from the Stoic ethics and all kind of immanent philosophies of that time.⁶² Augustine concludes the work stating that happiness consists in a perfect knowledge of God, a knowledge he has not yet acquired, but such knowledge one can reach through well-founded faith, joyful hope, and burning love, as was said by Monnica, the mother of Augustine.⁶³ In sum, one can possess God, even although Augustine and his friends are not yet on the level of the possession of God, but at this moment in his life, Augustine still believed that he may enter the port of happiness.⁶⁴

When writing his *Retractationes* in about 427, he regretted that he had stated in *De beata vita* that during our life the happy life dwells only in the soul of the wise man, regardless of the condition of his body,⁶⁵ for Paul hopes for a perfect knowledge of God in the life to come, for that alone can be called a happy life where the incorruptible and immortal body will be subject to the spirit without any burden or reluctance.⁶⁶ At that time, the consequences of Adam's fall for his progeny, described in terms such as death, suffering, rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, original guilt from birth onwards and the like, had replaced the initial belief that a wise man could be perfectly happy because of his inner tranquility. Surely, in *Opus imperfectum*, Augustine still insisted on the fact that people are

57 *De beata vita* 4,32, CCSL 29, 83.

58 *De beata vita* 4,33, CCSL 29, 84: "Habet ergo modum suum, id est sapientiam, quisquis beatus est."

59 *De beata vita* 4,34, CCSL 29, 84: "Deum habet igitur quisquis beatus est [...]."

60 *De beata vita* 4,34, CCSL 29, 84: "Hoc est animis Deum habere, id est Deo perfrui."

61 On this topic, see Chadwick: 2002–2010, 70–75 (with further bibliography).

62 de Noronha Galvão: 1986–1994, 628.

63 *De beata vita* 4,35, CCSL 29, 85.

64 Rist: 1994, 49.

65 *De beata vita* 4,25, CCSL 29, 78; see also Doignon: 1986, 145–146.

66 *Retractationes* I,2, CCSL 57, 11: "Displicet [...] quod tempore uitae huius in solo animo sapientis dixi habitare beatam uitam, quomodolibet se habeat corpus eius, cum perfectam cognitionem Dei, hoc est qua homini maior esse non possit, in futura uita speret apostolus, quae sola beata uita dicenda est, ubi et corpus incorruptibile atque inmortale spiritui suo sine ulla molestia uel reluctance subdetur."

searching for happiness. He considered it as congenital and inadmissible: all human beings want to be happy even in case they do not want what will lead to happiness.⁶⁷ It might well be that the discovery of the incorporeality of the soul at the time of the writing of *De beata vita* influenced Augustine's optimism, for this had helped him to leave the Manichaeans. But forty years later, Augustine no longer believed that true happiness could already be present in this life.⁶⁸

4. Grace in the Early Works of Augustine

Augustine is always described in the Western tradition as the *doctor gratiae*. However, when discussing the happiness issue in his *De beata vita*, Augustine does not speak of God's grace in the gift of happiness. When admitting that God helps us in our search, he adds that even with the help of God we are not yet wise and happy (*De beata vita* 4,35). However, he nowhere mentions the active role of grace in this process of happiness, grace seemingly being absent. One can even claim that this self-confidence remains present in works written before he will be forced to become a priest in Hippo. In *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum libri duo* 1,2,4,⁶⁹ he takes up again the Ciceronian idea that all human beings want to be happy and states that the happy life can be found when a human being loves and possesses the highest good.⁷⁰ Happiness is related to enjoying (*frui*) the highest good and this highest good must be available if we think we live a happy life.⁷¹ Like in *De beata vita*, that highest good is God, whom we must love and towards this highest good we must direct all our plans: God is for us the sum of all good

67 Opos imperfectum VI,11, CSEL 85/2, 316: "Hominis vero liberum arbitrium congenitum et omnino inamissibile si quaerimus, illud est quo beati esse omnes volunt, etiam hi qui ea nolunt quae ad beatitudinem ducunt."

68 Cf. also a series of other retractations with regard to early works; see, e. g., Hofer: 2021, 228–250, here 234–235.

69 For a detailed discussion of this book, see Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 221–227.

70 *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,3,4, CSEL 90, 6: "Quantum restat, ut uideo, ubi beata uita inueniri queat, cum id quod est hominis optimum, et amatur et habetur."

71 *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,3,4, CSEL 90, 6–7: "Quid est enim aliud quod dicimus frui, nisi praesto habere quod diligis? Neque quisquam beatus est, qui non fruitur eo quod est hominis optimum nec quisquam, qui eo fruitur, non beatus. Praesto ergo esse nobis debet optimum nostrum, si beate uiuere cogitamus." On the origin of the *frui Deo* concept, to be situated in the writings of Varro, see Lorenz: 1952–1953, 34–60; cf. also his Nachtrag in ZKG 54 (1952–1953), 359–360, where he, after the reading of Courcelle: 1950, admits that next to Varro, also Plotinus may be a source for this *frui Deo*-idea.

things. He is for us the highest good.⁷² In Augustine's hierarchical view on reality, at this moment very much influenced by Neoplatonism where one will also find such hierarchical line,⁷³ the human being becomes equal to God (*Deo similis*) only under the condition that the human being subjects itself to God.⁷⁴ In Augustine's view, turning away from God is choosing for the lower things, for stupidity and unhappiness. Augustine insists on the importance of living a good life in order to receive happiness. Living a good life is loving virtue, wisdom and truth. In opposition to the Stoic philosophers, Augustine identifies *virtus*, *sapientia* and *veritas* with a person, Jesus Christ. Through sanctification we unite ourselves with Christ who brings us to the Father through the power of love, a gift of the Holy Spirit who renews us (I,13,22–23). In line with Neoplatonism, Augustine says that we become similar to God through subjection of the soul to God who illuminates the soul. God is the true light. We are illuminated through this light. The community with God is described in terms of touching, adhere, inhere and the like. In this work, more than in *De beata vita*, obedience to the authority (God) is emphasized, for it is the adequate remedy against pride and audacity. When one compares *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* with *De beata vita*, one will immediately observe that the number of biblical quotes or references has expanded. However, one will look in vain for a discussion of the grace of Christ as necessary means for salvation of sinners. Surely, Augustine underlines the importance of being illuminated by the one we must love, God,⁷⁵ but at the same time, Augustine is still convinced that the good works of the soul earn the grace of happiness: happiness is a reward for our good works and in this process, the absence of a restoring and healing grace is obvious.⁷⁶

However, the initial optimism about happiness disappeared once Augustine was active as a priest and bishop in Hippo, and in this disappearance, the study of the Bible will play its role.

72 *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,8,13, CSEL 90, 15–16: "Bonorum summa Deus nobis est. Deus nobis est summum bonum."

73 See the pertinent remarks of Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 224–225.

74 *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,12,20, CSEL 90, 25: "Fit enim Deo similis quantum datum est, dum illustrandum illi atque illuminandum se subijcit."

75 Cf. *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1,11,18, CSEL 90, 21; 1,12,20, CSEL 90, 25.

76 Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 227, rightly concludes that the letters of Paul, especially when dealing with grace, are still a closed book for Augustine. It is a pity that studies like those of Lekkerkerker are not used by people like Topping: 2012, 156–157, who argues: "How these forms mediate grace Augustine does not at this point elaborate; that such graces, mediated by authority, are required, he is already sure." I think that the reading of Paul has a tremendous impact on Augustine's view on grace as from 391 onwards.

5. The Priest Augustine Studies Scripture

After his (forced) ordination to the priesthood, Augustine would extensively study Scripture: *De Genesi ad litteram opus imperfectum*, *De sermone Domini in monte*, *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula apostoli ad Romanos*, *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas*, *Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*. Augustine started to develop his doctrine of grace and thus of original sin, the first “mature” work being *Ad Simplicianum* in the sense that Augustine invested much energy in this work “pro libero arbitrio voluntatis humanae”, but, he added, “vicit Dei gratia”.⁷⁷ As becomes clear in *Confessiones* 9,4,7 Augustine begins to place distance from his early works such as *Contra academicos*, *De beata vita*, and *De ordine*, dialogues dedicated to people who were not (yet) Christians.⁷⁸ This may explain why Augustine qualifies these works as written in the school of pride.⁷⁹ Augustine himself thus considered at the time of the writing of his *Confessiones* these early works as problematic, a proof that Augustine underwent a serious evolution in his thinking. At the same time, the identification of wisdom with God is already present at the time he lived in Cassiciacum.⁸⁰

Already in *De libero arbitrio* 2,16,41 Augustine rejects the idea that (perfect) happiness can be attained in this life. He starts distrusting both the concept and the existence of wise men in this life.⁸¹ Since the time of his service to the Christian community, Augustine will pay much attention to pride (*superbia*) as an existential category which constantly hinders the knowledge of wisdom and the experience of perfect happiness. In this context, Augustine will also pay more attention to humility, which is considered as a condition for conversion. Humility is closely related to love which is considered as a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5).

In book 10 of *Confessiones*, Augustine reflects on our search for God and in this context he pays attention to *memoria* as the place where one can discover much about oneself and about God.⁸² It is in this context that Augustine pays much attention to the issue of happiness, which in fact will dominate *Confessiones* 10,20,29–23,34, a section within which both references to Scripture and classic

77 *Retractationes* 2,1, CCSL 57, 89–90.

78 See the observations of O'Donnell: 1992, 85–88.

79 *Confessiones* 9,4,7, CCSL 27, 136: “Ibi quid egerim in litteris iam quidem seruientibus tibi, sed adhuc superbiae scholam tamquam in pausatione anhelantibus testantur libri disputati cum praesentibus et cum ipso me solo coram te [...]”.

80 Cf. Catapano: 2020, 194.

81 See the pertinent remarks of Rist: 1994, 169.

82 On this topic see Karfiková: 2020, 175–190 (with further literature).

Latin literature go hand in hand.⁸³ Augustine explicitly states that his search for God is a search for a happy life.⁸⁴ This search for happiness is present in all people. It is a search for something we in one or another way know. Happiness is something which is kept in human beings' memory,⁸⁵ for we search for something we do not yet possess but hope to reach. That we have an idea of the happy life, that we love it and long for it, suggests that desire for such beatitude is common to all, even although the personal interpretation can differ from person to person.⁸⁶ In any case, the happy life is related to and invokes joy. Augustine insists that this joy is not given to all but only to those who serve God without looking for a reward and this is the happy life: "[...] gaudere ad te, de te, propter te."⁸⁷ In other words, people can also long for a happy life that is not the true happy life, for, according to Augustine, the true happy life is the one that focuses on God. In what follows, Augustine closely holds together happiness and truth: happy life is defined as joy about truth for this is the same as joy because of God who is the truth.⁸⁸ Indeed, at this stage, happiness is rooted in an absolute truth.⁸⁹ All long for a happy life and this happy life is related to the joy because of the truth.⁹⁰

This search for truth must be a search of the human mind in itself. For Augustine, we search God in our mind (cf. *memoria*) for we will not find God outside it. Memory is a typical characteristic of the human mind. It is tempting to associate this somewhat hidden presence of God with the (Neo)Platonic world of the ideas (cf. the soul that has to separate from the body in order to return to the world of the Ideas). However, there is a fundamental difference. Augustine does not put God in the world but in the memory of the human being. Through introspection one

83 All in all, words related to happiness (*beatitudo*, *beatus*, *beatificus*, *beatificare*) appear 67 times in *Confessiones*, but more than half of these words will be found in *Confessiones* 10,20,29–23,34.

84 *Confessiones* 10,20,29, CCSL 27, 170: "Cum enim te, Deum meum, quaero, uitam beatam quaero." Augustine explicitly states here that he is not discussing whether we were individually or as a group happy in Adam before his fall: in him we all died and from him we all are born with misery.

85 *Confessiones* 10,20,29, CCSL 27, 171: "Quod non fieret, nisi res ipsa, cuius hoc nomen est, eorum memoria teneretur."

86 *Confessiones* 10,21,31, CCSL 27, 172.

87 *Confessiones* 10,22,32, CCSL 27, 172.

88 See Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 231–232.

89 *Confessiones* 10,23,34, CCSL 27, 174: "Beatus ergo erit, si nulla interpellante molestia de ipsa, per quam uera sunt omnia, sola ueritate gaudebit." For the Neoplatonic aspect, see Lekkerkerker: 1944–1945, 234–235; see also Beierwaltes: 1981, 26.

90 *Confessiones* 10,23,33, CCSL 27, 173: "Beata quippe uita est gaudium de ueritate. Hoc est enim gaudium de te, qui ueritas es, deus, inluminatio mea, salus faciei meae, Deus meus. Hanc uitam beatam omnes uolunt, hanc uitam, quae sola beata est, omnes uolunt, gaudium de ueritate omnes uolunt." Truth is abundantly present here and is related here to Christ, the truth; see O'Donnell: 1992, 193.

will find God: “Manes in memoria mea, et illic te invenio, cum reminiscor tui et delector in te.”⁹¹

6. Augustine's Commentary on the First Letter of John

In his commentary on the first letter of John, written in 407, thus during the Donatist controversy, Augustine discusses at length the central topic of this letter: *caritas*,⁹² gift of God and invitation to love God and each other.⁹³ The exegesis of this letter is personal and original, as becomes clear in his interpretation of the phrase God is love.⁹⁴ Love was not absent in Augustine's teachings before his commentary⁹⁵ on this letter and remains an important theme up to the end of his life.⁹⁶ *Caritas* will be the basis for the development of a theology of happiness, characterized by peace and joy.⁹⁷ Augustine comments on this letter of John during Easter time, *id est*, during a period of joy. He discusses first the obstacles to true joy such as love of this world, which is indeed loving creation and created things instead of the creator himself.⁹⁸ Augustine insists that we do appreciate creation, but this should never result in a neglect of the creator.⁹⁹ The love for the world is characterized by *desiderium carnis*, *desiderium oculorum*, and the *ambitio saeculi* (1 John 2:16).¹⁰⁰ Carnal concupiscence is related to misuse of food, drinks, sexual life etc. Things that should be used (*uti*) will be enjoyed.¹⁰¹ The desire of the eyes is related to curiosity, loving to go to spectacles, theaters and the like.¹⁰² The worldly ambition is characterized by pride, often based on richness, influence and power.¹⁰³ However,

91 Confessiones 10,24,35, CCSL 27, 174. On the biblical background of this topic, see Lorenz: 1950–1951, 75–132, 114.

92 For the details, see Dideberg: 1996–2002: 1064–1070, esp. 1064–1065. The bibliography added to this lemma is abundant.

93 Dideberg: 1996–2002, 1067.

94 Dideberg: 1996–2002, 1066.

95 Although one has to admit that the reflections on *caritas* are rather marginal in his early works such as *Contra academicos*, *De beata vita*, and *De ordine*.

96 See the surveys of Canning: 1993, 93 and Dideberg: 1986–1994, 730–743, and Dideberg: 1996–2002, 435–453.

97 See Pauliat: 1975, 89.

98 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,10 PL 35, 1995: “Quare ergo non amem quod Deus fecit? Spiritus Dei sit in te ut uideas quia haec omnia bona sunt, sed uae tibi si amaueris condita et deserueris conditorem.”

99 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,11, PL 35, 1995.

100 In his commentary, Augustine can speak of both *desiderium* and *concupiscentia*.

101 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,12, PL 35, 1996.

102 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,13, PL 35, 1996.

103 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,13, PL 35, 1996.

also joy itself can be a threat for people as becomes clear in the stories of Adam and Job: it was in happiness that Adam fell down, while Job won in temptation, a proof that humility must be preferred.¹⁰⁴

After having made clear that sinfulness in all its varieties – for Augustine, human beings' pride is the most important cause of this sinfulness¹⁰⁵ – is a hindrance for true joy described in terms of an alliance with God, Augustine insists on the fact that such joy is *in spe*, for we are hoping for eternal life.¹⁰⁶

The question is then: what makes us happy? Augustine first mentions the beauty of creation, God's work. Creation is as it were a permanent praise of God.¹⁰⁷ This creation is given to humanity and it functions as a kind of mirror, revealing God's existence, goodness and beauty. Creation is referring to God, and in faith, it is a place of joy for the faithful longing for the life to come.¹⁰⁸ This "eternal" perspective makes clear that we have to recognize our own sinfulness. True happiness will be given to those who confess their sinfulness: *Ante omnia confessio*.¹⁰⁹ Recognition of one's sinfulness goes hand in hand with praise of God.

A next joy is love, described as a relation with God, a *dilectio Dei* through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Love of God is intrinsically related to the love of the neighbour: it has to do with solidarity and the like. Loving the neighbour is in fact doing like God. This love makes us happy because we become similar to God. Following God and his ways makes human beings happy for they become "Gods", thus longing for eternal life.¹¹⁰ However, in this aim to "become Gods", the love for the world remains an important challenge, for it is a choice against self-recognition, it is an expression of faith that Christ is our savior and guarantee for what we qualify as our final destination. He became man in order that we may become Gods.

7. Original Sin and Eternal Life

In Augustine's view on happiness as something we expect for the life to come, his doctrine of original sin played an important role.¹¹¹ It was a doctrine already present in a work such as *Ad Simplicianum*, but fully developed during the Pelagian

104 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 4,3, PL 35, 2007. See also Pauliat: 1975, 92.

105 Cf. Pauliat: 1975, 93.

106 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 1,5, PL 35, 1981.

107 In *Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos Tractatus* 2,11, PL 35, 1995.

108 Cf. Pauliat: 1975, 95.

109 Cf. Pauliat: 1975, 96.

110 Cf. Pauliat: 1975, 99–100.

111 On this doctrine, see Lamberigts: 2012–2018, 599–615.