

STOIC AGAINST HIS WILL? AUGUSTINE ON THE GOOD LIFE IN *DE BEATA VITA* AND THE *PRAECEPTUM*¹

1. Introduction

1.1. Anthropological optimism in Christianity?

As far as directives concerning the good life are concerned, philosophy and Christianity do not appear to agree. Philosophical ideas concerning this theme have always been viewed with suspicion by Christian leaders, because human nature was represented in a too rosy colour and divine grace had no part in redemption.

Thus, Origen was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 553. Origen saw mankind capable of eliminating by himself the results of the fall of man and capable of rediscovering the personal godly "I". His optimistic view of mankind must have appealed to the Christian humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. He once remarked that he learned more from one page of Origen than ten pages of Augustine.¹ Maybe his opinion was based on the trust that Origen lets mankind shine through, while Erasmus had studied those sections from Augustine's work where mankind is represented as disorganized and thus incapable of reaching God's grace. Despite Erasmus' great influence on Church and society, Augustine remained throughout the ages the great *auctoritas*. Not Origen, who had an optimistic view of mankind and was indebted to pagan philosophy. The Church historian and later Cardinal J. de Jong remarked that Origen 'teveel den invloed ondergaat der Philosophie (Plato en Stoa)' (is too much influenced by Philosophy (Plato and Stoa)). He therefore agrees with the quote from Porphyry which Eusebius had included in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*,

¹ 'Plus me docet christianae philosophiae unica Originis pagina quam decem Augustini', Erasmus, *epistola* 844 (ed. Allen, dl. 3, 337), quoted in: A.J.M. Davids, *Patrologie en patristiek. Overwegingen naar aanleiding van Eusebius' geschiedenis van de Oude Kerk. Rede uitgesproken ter gelegenheid van het aftreden als hoogleraar in de Patrologie, Patristiek en Geschiedenis van de Oude Kerk aan de Faculteit der Theologie van de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen op vrijdag 30 augustus 2002* (Nijmegen 2002), 8.

that 'hij (Origen, pvg) leeft als een Christen, maar dacht als een Griek'. (he lived as a Christian but thought as a Greek).²

De Jong was certainly not the only one to voice a discrepancy between Christianity and pagan philosophy based on Augustine's elaboration of God's grace. It was always emphasized that the neo-platonists played down the effects of primal sin, did not consider grace as important, and that therefore in their intellectual teachings an idea of self-deification could be perceived.³ Because there it was stated that mankind could transcend the gulf between himself and God, the philosophers were imputed with an arrogance and pride which was considered typical neo-platonic or described as plotinian.⁴ Nevertheless, in time a certain ambivalence developed in the judgement of neo-platonism and Christianity. Thus, Augustine was also brought forward as the one in whom both streams of thought came together. Just as Plato and Plotinus, after all, he also considered the body to be subservient to the mind, and a lower state of being. This was because he as well was focussed on another world and thus considered being in this world as incomplete.⁵ It was also pointed out that in Augustine human reason and divine grace are not mutually exclusive.⁶ It was, however, remarked that the *humilitas* ('humility') was considered as exclusively Christian, and that Augustine considered this virtue as the basic attitude towards receptiveness for God's grace.⁷

² Kardinaal de Jong, *Handboek der Kerkgeschiedenis*. Herzien en verbeterd door dr. R.R. Post (Utrecht etc. 1947-1949*) 4 vols., vol.1, 172.

³ See f.i.: P. Maréchal, 'La vision de Dieu au sommet de la contemplation d'après Saint Augustin,' in: *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 58(1930), 89-109; 191-204; E. Hendriks, 'Platonisches und biblisches Denken bei Augustinus', in: *Augustinus Magister* I (1954-55), 285-299.

⁴ F. Cayré, 'Notes sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin. Premiers appels de Dieu à la vie intérieure', in: *L'Année theologique* 11 (1951), 239-243; id. 'La Mystique divine courante d'après Saint Augustin ou la sagesse priante, âme des "Confessions" et règle d'action', in: *Divinitas* 3(1959), 43-76; id. *La contemplation Augustinienne. Principes de Spiritualité et Théologie* (Bruges-Paris 1954²), 52-56; 262-263.

⁵ Cf. H. Kraft, *Einführung in die Patrologie* (Darmstadt 1991), 119.

⁶ Limited summary of this discussion in C. Koetsveld, *O schoonheid, zo oud en zo nieuw. Over christelijke spiritualiteit en de leer waarin zij wortelt, met de kerkvader Augustinus als gids* (Kampen 1992), 147-148.

⁷ Cf. e.g. M. Rosenberger, *Der Weg des Lebens. Zum Zusammenhang von Christologie und Spiritualität in der Verkündigung des heiligen Augustinus* (Regensburg 1996), 79-83; V. Grossi, 'Agostino', in: *Dizionario di Mistica* (Città del Vaticano 1998), kol. 58-65. Cf. also Th. Rutten, *Augustinus mysticus. Mystiek, narcisme en echoïsme bij Augustinus, geïllustreerd aan Confessiones en Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Baarn 2003), 64-118.

1.2 Towards a question

Because Augustine considers grace of the utmost importance, he does not appear to be the right person to teach modern man about the art of living. At best his early work can deliver some interesting points of view, as it was not yet steeped in the Christian teaching and still echoed of pagan philosophy. Augustine became explicitly involved in 386 in the discussion in late antiquity of the art of living and order of life with his *De beata vita*. In this small treatise the shrewd discussion of self-assured people echoes through. They appear to trust especially their own power of thought in their individual search for happiness. The influence of Cicero and Plotinus is obvious and appears larger than that of Scripture and the Christian tradition of faith.⁸ However, once a bishop, in around 397 in his *Praeceptum*, he presents his fellow brothers in his house a tangible order of life apparently based on another notion of life. In this, a superior dictates certain rules on behalf of an order of life which on first view appear to disqualify the care for oneself because the *communal* life is considered the way towards a receptiveness for grace.

This begs certain questions. Does Augustine as a young, not yet baptised, person share the anthropological optimism of the classical philosophers and Origen? Does he play down, once a bishop, the power of mankind, and only then amplifies the idea of bodily inferiority in order to emphasize the need for grace?

In this contribution, based on an analysis of the two aforementioned small treatises, I will try to make clear that the guidelines of ancient philosophy had a longer effect on Augustine than a study of his opinion of grace alone or even his own words in the *Confessiones* could surmise. In any case, in his practical work he integrates insights from the classical art of living into the Christian teachings in a manner which in no way shows any distrust of philosophy. To the contrary, he does this in a way which provides stepping stones for a modern discussion of the art of living and her contribution.

⁸ Cf. W. Beierwaltes, 'Agostino e il neoplatonismo cristiano', in: *Platonismo e filosofia patristica* (Milano 1995), 16f: states that even though Augustine thanks to the *Hortensius* became acquainted with philosophy, nevertheless in thinking through of the great questions he was more indebted to neo-platonism. He knew Plotinus' work a.o. through the translation by Marius Victorinus, cf. E.B.J. Postma, *Augustinus, De beata vita* (Amsterdam 1946), 38. By the way, the seven phases in Augustine's design for a spiritual way in *De vera religione* reflect his indebtedness as well to neo-platonism.

2. Ideas on the order of life and the art of living

2.1 *De beata vita*

In 386, Augustine, together with some family members and friends, stayed at the estate Cassiciacum near Milan. According with the neo-platonic view on friendship, in which dialogue served metaphysics as a way to happiness and the *Zweckfreundschaft* was based on mutual benevolence and respect, four discussions were held.⁹ The friends in fact embodied the ideal as stated by Cicero in his *Laelius. De Amicitia* in which he says that friendship is no more than the perfect agreement in way of seeing supernatural and natural situations and which involves mutual compatibility and devotion. Augustine himself filled the part of the *invitator* and later revised the conversations as noted by the stenographer into four writings: *De beata vita*, *Soliloquia*, *De ordine*, and *Contra academicos*. In all dialogues the view is echoed that living according to reason is necessary in order to gain insight into the order of things and to experience happiness.¹⁰ But not only do revelation and reason bring knowledge of God, an orderly way of life makes one receptive towards God.¹¹ Plotinus echoes through, when Augustine describes the unity with God – the One, for Plotinus – as the final destiny of mankind.¹²

The discussion which would be the foundation for *De beata vita*, began on November 13th 386, Augustine's 32nd birthday (*Beata*

⁹ I. Hadot, 'Amicitia', in: C. Mayer (red.), *Augustinuslexikon* (Basel 1986-.....), vol. 1, kol. 287-293, esp. 291, leaves it at this observation. The manner in which Augustine christianises friendship, which is discussed by Van Bavel, she does not discuss. Cf. for example, T.J. van Bavel, *Charisma: Gemeenschap. Gemeenschap als plaats voor de Heer*. Heverlee-Leuven, 2000; id., 'Natural en Spiritual Relationships in Augustine', in: *Augustiniana* 46(1996), 197-242; id., *Augustinus. Van liefde en vriendschap*. Kampen, 1986³.

¹⁰ Augustinus, *De ordine*. Ed. W.M. Green, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholti 1954 sqq.), vol. 29, II, 5, 16-17; 5, 18-19 (p. 115-117); II, 11, 30-34 (p. 124-127); II, 18, 48; 19, 49-51 (p. 133-135). (Henceforward abbreviated as *CCSL*); Augustinus, *Contra Academicos*. Ed. W.M. Green (*CCSL* 29), II, 2, 5 (p. 19).

¹¹ See P. van Geest, *Integriteit als weg naar God. Over de spiritualiteit van Augustinus. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar Augustijnse Studies aan de Katholieke Theologische Universiteit te Utrecht op vrijdag 18 oktober 2002* (Utrecht 2002), 11-14.

¹² J. Doignon, 'Beata uita (De-)', in: A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge 1999), col. 618- 624, esp. 621.

vita I, par. 6). For three days it formed an effervescent interruption of the dialogue upon which *Contra academicos* would be based.¹³ It is considered the most religious work by Augustine himself (*ibidem* I, par. 5).

Because human sinfulness is not explicitly catalogued, it is assumed that Augustine in *De beata vita* did not describe his conversion to Christianity but to neo-platonism. He later would reflect this in a variant which witnesses a Christianised recollection in his *Confessiones*.¹⁴ In a certain sense this is true. In *De beata vita*, Augustine uses images for his conversion which he, probably to avoid misconception, does not use any longer in the *Confessiones*. In the images in *De beata vita*, after all, his tribute to ancient philosophy resounds. For example, the stay at Cassiciacum evoked Plotinus' and Cicero's image of philosophy as a safe haven in a stormy world (*Beata vita* I, par. 1). His own past he indicates according to this image in the idea borrowed from Seneca of the seafarer. This he uses in order to invite the maecenas and Plotinus follower Manlius Theodorus to categorise him into a certain group. There is a group that lands in calm waters at a certain age by 'just' tugging at the oars. There is a group that only reaches for books, and is thus brought back to the harbour, after the wind has led them to deep misery (*altissima miserarium*; *ibidem* I/26). This misery goes together with the caress of the deceptive comfort of pleasure and honours (*falacissima serenitas uoluptatum honorumque*; *ibidem* I/27). Finally, there is the group, that at full sea thinks of the motherland and – immediately or after wanderings – courses for the longed-for peaceful life (*ibidem* I/28-32).¹⁵ In order to have his maecenas make the best choice, Augustine then gives an outline of his life. Especially in this biography an act of dependence on the philosophers resounds, more

¹³ Augustinus, *De beata vita*. Ed. W.M. Green, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholti 1954 sqq.), vol. 29, II, 2, 65-85, inz. *Beata Vita* 9 (p. 70); Augustinus, *Retractationum libri II*. Ed. A. Mutzenbecher (CCSL 57), I, 2, 4.

¹⁴ Based on a comparison with the account on this matter in *De beata vita*, many have doubted since Harnack the historical authenticity of Augustine's story of conversion in the *Confessiones*. Cf. J. Mc William, 'Cassiciacum Dialogues' in: *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, kol. 135-143, esp. 36-138; Pierre Courcelle had already discovered in his innovative research into the *Confessiones* that Augustine strived for historical accuracy in his attempt to fathom his inner self before God and find the image of God within himself: P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*. Paris, 1968.

¹⁵ Cf. V.H. Drecoll, *Die Entstehung der Gnadenlehre Augustins* (Tübingen 1999), 27, note 9 and 10 (*Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* 109). One finds literature and references here, mostly derived from the edition by Green (cf. footnote 13).

than faith in Scripture. After all, he first states that he was attracted to philosophy by Cicero's *Hortensius*.¹⁶ Nevertheless, his disappointment with manichaeism and the academics evolves in a confession that he has learnt from Ambrosius' sermons that nothing corporal can be understood for soul and God. However, also Manlius Theodorus is mentioned as a teacher in this context. Furthermore, Augustine professes that women and ambition have withheld him from sailing into the harbour of philosophy and that social esteem made him tally in studying Plotinus' books (sic), books considered highly by his maeceenas.¹⁷ Besides the wish to study the philosophers, Augustine was apparently also accustomed to coquetry

2.2 The influence of classical philosophy

Even though he would still have to undergo a *pectoris dolor* (*ibidem*, I/105) in order to be able to set course for the harbour of philosophy, in the introductory part of the actual dialogue of *De beata vita* Augustine appears to ascribe reaching this to his own powers. However, also in the rest of the work, the influence of neo-platonism is obvious. The *De beata vita* thus seems to reflect the awareness of life of the modern, self-conscious human being who, especially in his aspirations towards autonomy, tries to find happiness.

Thus, Augustine, in the onset to the actual debate with Cicero, links malignity (*nequitia*) as the mother of all deficiencies (*vitia*) to transience, evanescence, and 'nothingness'. Together with Cicero, Augustine also mentions fertility (*frugalitas*) and temperance (*temperantia*) as the most important parts of virtue (*virtus*), which remains, and is always the same (*ibidem* II/60-73).¹⁸ At the end he repeats the contradiction between *nequitia* and *frugalitas* in terms of "nothingness" and "being". He describes *frugalitas* as *temperantia* and *modestia*: moderation and self-control (*ibidem* IV/194-204).¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. T. van Bavel, 'The influence of Cicero's Ideal of Friendship on Augustine', in: J. den Boeft, J. van Oort (ed), *Augustiniana Trajectina. Communications au Colloque International d'Utrecht 13-14 novembre 1986* (Paris 1987), 59-72 (*Études Augustiniennes*).

¹⁷ Cf. however Augustinus, *Confessionum libri XIII*. Ed. L. Verheijen (CCSL 27), 9, 2.

¹⁸ 'Est autem aliquid, si manet, si constat, si semper tale est, ut est uirtus. Cuius magna pars est atque pulcherrima, quae temperantia et frugalitas dicitur' Green mentions as source: Cicero, *Tusc.* (=Colloquies in Tusculum, pvg), 3, 8, 16; Ed. Green, 70.

¹⁹ 'Merito etiam uirtutum omnium matrem multi frugalitatem esse dixerunt. Quibus consentiens Tullius etiam in populari oratione ait: *ut uolet quisque accipiat; ego tamen frugalitatem, id est modestiam et temperantiam, uirtutem maximam iudico*', ed. Green, 70.

Trygetius and Augustine, in *Beata Vita* II, 8 derive the *virtus* from the human mind and admonish to take good care of it. Mankind is thus individually capable, through a tempered life which leads to fertility, to attain something immortal. It is this positive view of humanity upon which Cicero's ideas of virtue are based.

In the following actual discussion, it appears that Augustine's confession to be tributary to Cicero's *Hortensius* is no mere sycophancy.²⁰ Not only the theme 'We wish to be happy' (*Beatos nos esse uolumus*; *ibidem* II/85), but many of the convincing thoughts can be traced back to this work. Thus, Augustine lets Monnica say that someone who wishes for something bad, is *miser*, even if he has all he wants. In order to support this idea of his mother's in the dialogue, he uses a quote from the *Hortensius* in which it is stated that it is no great problem not to receive what one wants, rather than to wish for something that is not appropriate. A corrupt will brings a person more bad things than fate will grant in good things.²¹ Even the portrayal of Orata Augustine has borrowed from Cicero. Orata is a rich man who longs for nothing and thus appears wise, but is *miser* because of his fear of losing everything. Contrary to the fullness of the *sapientia* through his fear he knows the *animi egestas* (*ibidem* IV, par. 26-28, esp. 120-127). Does the appreciation for the *apatheia* resound here? Tribute to the Stoa resounds when Augustine places the *egere* not on the bodily level but on the level of the *animus* (cf. also *ibidem*, IV/35-40). Augustine's view of corporality is also Stoic: the *sapiens* moves away from bodily imperfection, does not fear *mors corporis* nor *dolores*, even if he will try to avoid these (*Beata vita* IV/32-60). Because Augustine here reflects as someone who accepts his suffering out of self-respect rather than from longing for it in order to be like Christ, he rather looks like the ideal of the gentleman more than illustrating a Christian.²² Finally, his emphasis on the necessity of

²⁰ cf. Drecoll, *o.c.*, 34, noot 38: *De beata vita* II/ 95 – 101 = *Hortensius* frg. 59-59b. Cf. ed. Green, 70.

²¹ 'Ecce autem *Falsum id quidem; uelle enim quod non deceat, id est ipsum miserrimum. Nec tam miserum est non adipisci quod uelis, quam adipisci uelle quod non oporteat. Plus enim mali prauitas uoluntatis adfert quam fortuna cuiquam boni*', *De beata vita*, II, 10, ed. Green, 71.

²² K. Löwith, 'Can there be a christian gentleman?', in: *Vorträge und Abhandlungen zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung* (Stuttgart 1966), 28-38, states that there are no gentlemen nor Christians any more in this world, because both gentlemen and Christians believe that their respective attitudes can be reconciled. That Augustine assumes that humility flows from the longing to be more like Christ is seen in his elaboration of the *Christus-medicus* idea. Cf. P. van Geest, 'Inveni medicum, qui in caelo habitat et in terris spargit medicamenta... Augustinus van Hippo over ziekte en genezing', in: *Leidschrift. Historisch Tijdschrift* 17 (2002), 29-50.

modesty (*modestia*, derived from *modus*) and *temperantia* (can be reduced to *temperies*: the right mixture) reflects his preference for Stoicism, that it is good in life to be temperate.²³ Excess from abundance of scarcity are seen by Augustine as deficiency, based this thought because both lack temperance. Happiness for him exists in that wisdom which encompasses measure and balance and shuts out excesses as imperfections.²⁴ The basis for all these words are the ideas of the Stoa. From these, and other parts of the text, one may safely adduce that Augustine's vision of the happy life in no way surpasses classical thought, but, even more so, actually derives from this an attraction for people who find the key to good life in inner stability and self-control. A.H. Armstrong once stated that the attractiveness of Christianity lies in the elements it has borrowed from Greek philosophy.²⁵ *De beata vita* seems to agree with this scholar.

2.3 *The stratification of virtue and wisdom*

Paradoxically, this last thought is both true and not true. Augustine considered balance and self-control essential, and not the only possibility to reconcile man with his existence and experience a preview of redemption.

From *De beata vita* it is also clear that around 386 he went to lengths to appropriate and interiorize the Christian mysteries. This process did not entail that the ideas of the ancient philosophers were considered outdated and pagan; these were after all used with agreement and appreciation. Nevertheless, Augustine's renewed study of Scripture added another perspective to the classical thoughts on the good life.

This change in perspective is already seen in the beginning when Augustine names the good life not only as a task but also as a *donum dei* (*Beata vita* I/ 125-127).²⁶ Up to the end of *De Beata vita*

²³ Ferwerda quotes as source Terentius, *Andria*, 61; cf. Augustinus, *Over het gelukkige leven*. Bezorgd, vertaald en van een inleiding en verklarende noten voorzien door dr. R. Ferwerda (Baarn-Kapellen z.j.), 83; Cf. however also: R. Jolivet, 'Introduction', in: *Oeuvres de saint Augustin*. 1re série: *Opusculs I: Problèmes fondamentaux* (Paris 1939), 216-217 (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne*).

²⁴ 'Quidquid igitur uel parum uel nimium est, quia modo eget, obnoxium est egestati. Modus ergo animi sapientia est. Etenim sapientia contraria stultitiae non negatur et stultitia egestas, egestati autem contraria plenitudo: sapientia igitur plenitudo. In plenitudine autem modus: modus igitur animo in sapientia est. Vnde illud praeclarum est et non inmerito diffamatur: *hoc primum in uita esse utile, ut ne quid nimis*', ed. Green, 83.

²⁵ A.H. Armstrong, 'Negative Theology, Myth and Incarnation', in: *Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard* (Fontenay-aux-Roses 1981), 47-62, esp. 54.

²⁶ Drecoll, o.c., 27-49.

the strain remains visible between human activity ('festinantes') and passivity ('perduci') in order to attain the *beata vita* (cf. *ibidem* IV/291 f).²⁷ In addition, it has recently been shown that Augustine ascribes in *De Beata Vita* a decisive meaning to *Deum habere* in order to be *beatus* (cf. *ibidem* II, par. 11). The *Deum habere* is in first instance linked by Licentius to the good life, by Trygetius to doing the will of God (*ibidem* II, 12f), and by Adeodatus finally to *caste vivere* (*ibidem* III, par. 18). Augustine brings together these definitions in the statement that whoever does what God wills, lives a good life (*ibidem* III/22-27; cf. III/ 48-50; III/41-46). Then he concludes that, if someone does what God wills, he does not have God, for he is still searching (*ibidem* III/51-61; III/65-68). As *Deum invenire* is similar to *beatus esse*, *Deum quaerere* does not include the *beatus esse*. Searching after all goes together with change and thus is not similar to God's being, *semper manens*. Thus Augustine deprives man the possibility of making himself *beatus*. In this, Augustine differs radically from Cicero who did consider the search for truth as an activity leading to *beatus* and thus conceded mankind the possibility to reach the state of being *beatus* all by himself.²⁸

That Augustine sees happiness within the finding, and, in the process of becoming Christian, not in the searching, he also shows in Monnica's words in *De beata vita*. The dependant relation of mankind to God she reflects in her proposal to replace the *Deum habere* by *Deum propitium habere*. Whoever leads a good life will find a merciful God, whoever leads a bad life an *infestus Deus* (*ibidem* III/68-73). By considering God either as *propitius* or *infestus* (unkind) Augustine shows the link between how man lives to his vision of God. Just before he also suggested that a virtuous life by itself is not good, but especially leads to a kind of receptiveness, or sensitivity towards God. In *De beata vita* II, 11 after all, he lets Monnica say that only through spiritual self-control (*anima sui moderatione*) man can reach being *beatus*. Augustine adds to this: except for spiritual temperance (soul) one must acquire what is *semper manens* (*ibidem* II/145-146). At the end of II, par. 8 he characterised the *virtus* as seen as *semper manens*; at the end of II, par. 11 he is allowed to call God *aeternus* and *semper manens*.²⁹ Because he not only

²⁷ Drecoll, *o.c.*, 44.

²⁸ Drecoll, *o.c.*, 37 (points at *Contra Academicos* 1, 3).

²⁹ 'Deus, inquam, uobis aeternus esse semper manens videtur? – Hoc quidem, inquit Licentius, ita certum est ut interrogatione non egeat, ceterique omnes pia deuotione concinuerunt. – Deum igitur, inquam, qui habet, beatus est', ed. Green, 72.

describes the *virtus* (or *frugalitas* and *temperantia*) but also *Deus* in terms of *semper manere*, all the more because in *De beata Vita* IV he specifies the *certissimae res* as *virtutis prescriptum* together with *divina lex sapientiae* (*ibidem* IV/40-60; IV, 25), Augustine suggests an intrinsic link between acting virtuously and a sensitivity towards God's being. Augustine thus opens Cicero's description of *virtus* by linking virtue to the ontological distinction between *nihil esse* and *esse*, nothingness and being. And by ascribing the same qualities to *virtus* as to God, *aeternus et semper manens*, he brings about the belief that the good order of life clarifies God's being. Moreover, he suggests an obligation for exertion if one wishes to 'own' this being, if one wishes a receptiveness, or sensitivity towards God.

Through a similar procedure, Augustine in *De beata vita* adds another level of meaning to the words *sapientia* and *modus* which they did not yet have in the classical philosophy. In IV, par. 32, he connects wisdom to being able in the mind to keeping the right measure. Based on the Stoic *Ne quid nimis* (nothing too much) – principle, wisdom appears to go together with inner balance. When one goes into excess in luxury and ambition, or, on the contrary, if he is fearful or depressed, then the mind will not find wisdom (IV, par. 33):

‘Habet ego modum suum, id est sapientiam, quisquis beatus est.’³⁰

As Augustine in the following calls Christ *sapientia dei* (IV/250 f), in *De beata vita* he already demonstrates his conversion to Christianity rather than to neo-platonism. He equates Christ to the *veritas*, issuing forth from the *summus modus*, God, and also returning to Him (*Beata vita* IV, par. 34). *Beatus*, now, appears to be the one, who, enjoying truth, is bound through truth to the highest measure (*ibidem* IV/281-283).³¹ *Sapientia* and *modus* are thus used in a double meaning. The *modus* stands for virtue and the *summa modus* for the being of God the Father; the *sapientia* for virtue and for the being of the Son.³²

³⁰ This principle is stated in: Terentius, *Andria* 1.1, 34; Cicero, *De finibus*, 3, 22; Seneca, *Epistula* 94, 43. Cf. note 24.

³¹ ‘Illa est igitur plena satietas animorum, hoc est beata uita, pie perfecteque cognoscere, a quo inducaris in ueritatem, qua ueritate perfruaris, per quid conetaris summo modo’, ed. Green, 84.

³² *Beata Vita* IV, par 33-34; ed. Green, 83-84. Cf. ook: Cf. G. Madec, ‘Si Plato viveret... Augustin, De vera religione 3.3’, in: *Néoplatonisme: Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, 231-247, esp. 232-235; Madec argues that Augustine for example in *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42 with the philosophical terminology does express ‘la spécificité du christianisme’: l’abaissement de l’intellect, la kénose du Noûs, est bien dans son esprit l’incarnation du Verbe’.

Even though the meanings remain clearly distinct, Augustine's optimism on mankind echoes through in the use of the same words for a divine and human characteristic. By reusing the words he makes it clear that man, by his own powers, can reach a sensitivity for God's being through gathering the human *modus* and *sapientia*. And, despite the fact that an exertion is required in order to attain this receptiveness, one must also rely on grace. Augustine after all also indicates that the *admonitio*, the Holy Spirit, enlightens man so that he may remember God (*ibidem* IV/268-270). Thus all appear dependant of the Trinitarian *summus modus-veritas-admonitio*, Father-Son-Holy Spirit. Even the guidelines emanate from the divine *admonitio*!³³

Whether his *tranquillitas* after the *pectoris dolor* grew from reading Plotinus' books, Augustine does not mention in *De beata vita* I, par. 4. Maybe he was silent through tactical reasons. Did he do so in order not to upset his neo-platonic maecenas Manlius Theodorus and did he realise that his understanding of *modus*, *virtus* and *sapientia* partly, but in essence, differed from the philosophers whom he nevertheless admired? He wisely does not diverge. In any case, in *De beata vita* Augustine does not drown the classical philosophers' understanding of ethics and virtue by emphasizing the primacy of God's grace. He adds with respect to the philosophers a new perspective to the words *virtus*, *modus* and *sapientia* by, on the one hand, recognising it as a way to insight into God's being, but, on the other hand, also and especially as a quality of God Himself. Thus in these words an anthropological optimism resounds, which owes to classical philosophy. But furthermore, a concept of life sounds through in which man is reconciled with life and tastes a preview of the deepest salvation by realising his dependence on a merciful God. In the words *virtus*, *modus* and *sapientia* Augustine thus interweaves the human and divine reality in a manner which was then as yet unknown.

3. Applied art of living

3.1 The Praeceptum

As will now become clear in the *Praeceptum*, this connection between the human and divine reality was always remembered.

³³ See for the trinitarian formula of Augustine especially J. Doignon, 'Notes complémentaires', in: *Oeuvres de saint Augustin* 4/1, *Dialogues philosophiques. De beata vita – La vie heureuse* (Bruges 1986). Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et tables par Jean Doignon, 151-152 (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne*).

Nevertheless, Stoic against his will so it seems, Augustine still owed much to the Stoa when writing this small treatise as a bishop. We will come to this now.

In 396, when he succeeded Valerius as bishop of Hippo, he founded in the bishop's house a community of clergy. Before he settled there himself, he had written the *Praeceptum* around 397 for the lay convent in the garden of the diocese where he had been attached to as priest and superior. It was a small, normative treatise with a long genesis, rooted in classical philosophy, but also rooted in the *experience* that Augustine had undergone since his return to Africa in communal life.³⁴ In his bishop's house, he needed to keep in consideration that even though people could together choose an ideal, they may not be compatible in character. In Cassiciacum he lived with similarly minded and moulded people, in Hippo, for example, there was Possidius, who, contrary to Augustine, had never enjoyed an education before he entered the convent. Augustine's earlier ideas on friendship were tested and purified through these experiences.³⁵ It is no longer a question of a pure neo-platonic view on friendship.³⁶ In his *Confessiones*, which he also began in 397, he states explicitly that friendship only exists where God is the adhesive between people, who are attached to each other with the love poured out into the hearts by the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Apparently, the emphasis on the Spirit is accompanied by the insight that communal life is not simple as is suggested in the neo-platonic ideal of friendship.

By the way, this is not the only difference which becomes obvious when one compares *De beata vita* to the *Confessiones*. Besides the fact that he defines the dialogues from before his baptism as issuing from 'the school of arrogance', the thoughts on Manlius Theodorus are radically different.³⁸ In *De beata vita* he praises him for his knowledge of Plotinus

³⁴ The research done by P. Verheyen has shown that the text had a long genesis. At its basis lays another small treatise: *De ordine*. This work was inspired by the "Pythagoras", a piece of work which Augustine considered an archetypal for early Christian thinking on behaviour, values and an example of a treatise in which the process of ascent is developed. Cf. L. Verheijen, 'Vers la Beauté spirituelle', in: *Nouvelle Approche de la Règle de Saint Augustin* (Bégrolles en Mauges 1980), 201-242, esp. 239-242 (*Vie monastique* 8).

³⁵ For the dating, see L. Verheijen, 'La Loi et la Grâce. La "date ancienne" et la "date récente" de la Règle', in: *Nouvelle Approche* (1980), 58-73, and id., 'Réflexions sur les identités augustiniennes 386, 397, 412, 426, "1215"', in: L. Verheijen, *Nouvelle approche de la Règle de saint Augustin. II. Chemin vers la vie heureuse* (Louvain 1988), 74-85, esp. 80-81.

³⁶ I. Hadot, 'Amicitia', in: *Augustinuslexikon*, vol. 1, kol. 287-293; esp. 291.

³⁷ Augustinus, *Confessionum libri XIII*, 4,4,7; cf. 4, 5,5.

³⁸ *ibidem*, 9, 4, 7 (137). Cf. Drecoll, *o.c.*, 31, footnote 24 for further literary references.

and for his generosity, as we have seen, eleven years later Augustine calls his *maecenas* a bombastic and arrogant man (*Confessiones* VII, 9, 13). The coquetry, typical for his younger years, appears to have been conquered by the bishop, but somehow the change in attitude seems strange. Even though based on his *Confessiones* Augustine is seen as the author in whom the modern subject (as far as the interior and experience are concerned) for the first time plays an important part, in his work it does appear that he disqualifies the 'care for himself' which he had borrowed from the Stoa. He extensively describes his sins, in the hope that God in His mercy will accept him anyway. The aspiration of the self-assured searcher who in *De beata vita* sees the receptiveness for God originate from a personally wrought proper way of living, no longer resounds. Much more a man speaks out here who knows that feelings of sinfulness and powerlessness will be overshadowed by God's power.

Despite the qualification of his earlier work in the *Confessiones*, his distancing from Manlius Theodorus, and the repeated emphasis of his own sinfulness and need for grace, Augustine's thinking before and after his baptism shows more unity than he wishes to convey in the *Confessiones*. The anthropological optimism and his tribute to the Stoa resound in the *Praeceptum* which he wrote shortly before the *Confessiones*. Apparently against his wish, since he defines the dialogues from before his baptism as issuing from 'the school of arrogance'! But in spite of this, the thoughts on finding a merciful God through a proper way of living form the introduction and theoretical foundation to the guidelines which he described for his community in the *Praeceptum*.

3.2 *The community as a way to a merciful God*

In order to discover the influence of the philosophers in Augustine's *Praeceptum*, it is important to keep in mind that the young Augustine saw receptiveness for God enclosed within a proper way of life. This insight, as described in *De beata vita*, he never abandoned. He only recognised after his baptism and ordinations that the community should receive more credit than was initially assumed. As bishop, it became clearer that the unity of a community is no foregone conclusion, but is nevertheless a way to God.

Thus Augustine opens his *Praeceptum* with the admonition to live together 'of one soul and one heart, on the way to God'.³⁹ This

³⁹ Augustinus, *Praeceptum*, I, 2, in: *Praeceptum*, in: L. Verheijen, *La règle de saint Augustin*. Paris, 1967. 2 vols., vol. 1 *Tradition manuscrite*; vol. 2 *Recherches Historiques (Etudes Augustiniennes)*, vol. 1, 417-437, quotation: 417.

unity of heart and soul was ascribed to the first Christians in Jerusalem in Acts 4:32, and was considered an ideal for him. At the end of the first chapter he connects the sensitivity for the mystery of God, reached through the unity of heart and soul, with the vision of a communal relationship:

'Primum, propter quod in unum estis congregati, ut unanimes habitetis in domo *et* sit vobis anima una *et* cor unum in deum.'⁴⁰

The inclusion in the first chapter makes it clear that for Augustine from 397, the perfection of the individual is correlated to the wholeness of the community. The latter as we have seen, is more of a task than a gift. The directives for the order of the day, prayer times, fasting, distribution of tasks, brotherly admonition, and obedience in the following chapters after all serve towards this unity. They are the evidence for the fact that Augustine saw this unity carried by the manner in which the specific daily existence is experienced. However, it is also clear that he has not abandoned the ideas from his youth: an ordered life is still a way to God. Furthermore, at the end of the *Praeceptum* his loyalty to the insights stated in *De beata vita* are seen. The orderly life, and thus the exertions of man himself, leads to a community through the order and measure which exists. *Idealiter* the community, by living this orderly life, finally tunes in to the wavelength in which it would be captured by a desire for spiritual beauty and becomes sensitive to the power of God's grace. In the eighth and final chapter Augustine writes:

'Donet dominus, ut obseruetis haec omnia cum dilectione, tamquam spiritalis pulchritudinis amatores *et* bono Christi odore de bona conuersatione flagrantes, non sicut serui sub lege, sed sicut liberi, sub gratia constituti.'⁴¹

Thus a fundamental principle appears which Augustine stated a year before his baptism in *De beata vita*. It turns out here, that this principle is still relevant in his thoughts on the proper life when he is bishop: Through a proper way of living man is focussed on and sensitive to *deus propitius*.

Although in the *Praeceptum* the community is now made explicit as an indispensable link in the process towards a receptiveness for God, the same principle resounds as in *De beata vita*. The ethically justified way of life makes receptive to, sensitive for immortality

⁴⁰ *Praeceptum*, I, 8, (418).

⁴¹ *Praeceptum*, VIII, 1 (437).

(*Beata vita* II, par. 8; IV, par. 31), the being of God. Augustine still believes that man through his own effort and within the earthly reality can reach the wavelength on which he will be receptive to the grace of God.

3.3 *Stoic against his will? The application of the Ne quid nimis principle.*

In several of the directives of the *Praeceptum* it is clear that from 386 to 397 Augustine had not only studied and interiorised the Christian mysteries. The distancing of his works from his youth discloses that this process of making it his own went together with the influence of Stoic principles on his thoughts on communal life. Even more so: in *De beata vita* he 'only' catalogues the *ne quid nimis*-principle, he appears to have applied it in the side-notes for two directives in the *Praeceptum*. The Stoa remains influential whether he wishes or not.

Within the inclusion through which he proposes the unity of heart and soul as a way to God, Augustine introduces the communal property. There must be no personal property, everything amongst the brothers must be shared and the superior must provide for food and clothing.⁴² The communal unity is thus based on a specific foundation. But the standard is followed by a side-note which shows that Augustine sees the standard as a directive for personal growth. After all, he writes that the superior should not give an equal amount to all, after all, not all are equally strong, but to each must be given what he needs.⁴³

Augustine shows he is aware that sharing goods does not necessarily emerge from the fact that this is a standard. The unity of heart and soul would after all be founded on quicksand should the standards be implemented from a top-down approach. He must have realised that freedmen go through a different process of becoming accustomed to communal goods than owning freeborn. In order to let each discover the value of communal property and thus strive towards an authentic unity of heart and soul, Augustine takes each individual separately.⁴⁴ He appears to grant each the room for growth towards unity of heart and soul. But he does not tally in calling those who are

⁴² *Praeceptum*, I, 3 (418).

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Cf. F. van der Meer, *Augustinus de zielzorger. Een studie over de praktijk van een kerkvader* (Brussel-Utrecht 1947), 155.

not yet accustomed as 'weak'.⁴⁵ However, in spite of this sharp definition his conviction resounds that each individual's development must be taken seriously, only then can he grow naturally towards the measure of the community. But especially at the beginning of this process it is clear: *ne quid nimis*. In fact, Augustine states explicitly the foundation of the side-note of the *Praeceptum* in *De beata vita* when he writes:

'Vnde illud praeclarum est et non inmerito diffamatur: *hoc primum in uita esse utile, ut ne quid nimis*.'⁴⁶

Even in the advice concerning fasting, the *ne quid nimis*-principle is applied. First, Augustine states the standard to be followed by two side-notes. He first advises to control the body through fasting and abstinence from food and drink, immediately following he adds that this is only allowed where one's health allows. The sick must receive appropriate food, but he must be able to let go of this treatment when well.⁴⁷

Fasting as a means to control bodily desires must never be to the detriment of one's health, and thus the weak must be spared. The right measure must be kept, and therefore: nothing too much. For the unity within the community it is possible that not all follow the same regime, however paradoxical this may seem. Already in *De beata vita* Augustine stated explicitly that a person must keep in mind the measure which nature has set for the body: not eating leads to loss of weight, eating to growth and strength (*De beata vita* II/23-24). Thus it appears that he does not ascribe to the idea of negating the body because the spirit is higher in the order of being; he also does not ascribe to rigid ascetics.⁴⁸

From this second side-note as well, it appears that the bishop was still inspired by the principles of the Stoa, and that these were the foundation for his guidelines for an order of life which would enhance communal unity. This unity must be fought for. The insights of the Stoa have had more influence than he would care to admit in public. And even longer! Also in his letter to Proba, written in 412, he is still loyal to this principle. First of all Augustine states, as he does in *De beata vita*, that a happy life does not necessarily means that you get what you want, but that it is related to not doing anything improper (5.10; cf. *De*

⁴⁵ See also *Praeceptum* I, 3-7; III, 3-4 (418-419; 421-422).

⁴⁶ Cf. note 24.

⁴⁷ *Praeceptum* III, 1-5 (421-423).

⁴⁸ Cf. for Plato and Plotinus: H. Kraft, *Einführung in die Patrologie* (Darmstadt 1991), 119.

beata vita IV/194-204). But he also states that prayer is a struggle with fasting and abstinence, and each must do what they can. What one can only do less, is done in another who can do more...⁴⁹

4. Conclusion

Because of the stratification in Augustine's work it is necessary for a complete study of his reliance on the Stoa to find a proper method in order to keep the thoughts of the Stoa separate from these of Scripture. J. Doignon and R. Ferwerda have undoubtedly contributed through the comparison between sources and their interest in parallelism in Plotinus' *Enneads* and *De beata Vita*. Especially the former has stated, based on the *Soliloquia*, that the thinking of the Stoa is included in prayer; this prayer already betrays Augustine's Christianity because it is there that he deeply believes that for purification man is still dependent on God.⁵⁰

In a certain sense, this contribution can be seen in line with the previously mentioned research. After all, as we have seen now, it was attempted to make clear that Augustine, on the *word-level* tries to intensify the sensitivity for and at the same time the knowledge of dependence on God through a word which is considered by the *veteres* a virtue as much as a quality of God. Thus he opens up the meaning and Christianizes it at the same time. That Augustine mentions his conversion to Christianity already in his early works is also seen in this word level. In the guidelines for an order for life, but also in the description of the word *virtus* the great respect for philosophy rings out. F.i., the *virtus* appears to be the *way* to insight in God's being, but on the other hand, also and especially as a characteristic for describing God *Himself*. He thus provides the expression with a new perspective.

It is also on the level of the application of the stoic *Prinzipienlehre* that the effect of the *veteres* in Augustine's work can be noticed. It appears in the comparison of *De beata vita* and the *Praeceptum* that

⁴⁹ Augustinus, *Epistula 130 ad Probam*. Ed. J. Zycha. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Pragae-Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1877 sqq.), vol. 41, 303-343, esp. 343.

⁵⁰ J. Doignon, 'Notes complémentaires', in: *Oeuvres de saint Augustin 4/1 Dialogues philosophiques. De beata vita – La vie heureuse* (Bruges 1986) Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et tables par Jean Doignon, 145-146; 148-149 (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne*); id., 'La prière liminaire des *Soliloquia* dans la ligne philosophique des Dialogues de Cassiciacum', in: J. den Boeft, J. van Oort (ed), *Augustiniana Trajectina. Communications au Colloque International d'Utrecht 13-14 novembre 1986* (Paris 1987), 85-105, esp. 86-87, 104-105 (*Études Augustiniennes*); R. Ferwerda, 'Plotinus' Presence in Augustine', in: *ibidem*, 106-118.

Augustine at least in his works on the art of living and order of life was always inspired by the principles and optimism of the classical philosophers. Although he does not share their view of the affects for instance, and Professor van Bavel has successfully shown that Augustine has turned around Cicero's sequence. At the passing of the years, Augustine saw that friendship is more than an intellectual affair because in friendship eternity can be tasted. That is why, contrary to Cicero, he places the human before the divine. This can be seen in the *Praeceptum* as well. Nevertheless, in the line of thought suggested and indicated by Van Bavel the influence of the *veteres* resounds in Augustine's work on the level of the application of principles. Already before his baptism he presents in his first treatise the theoretical foundations for this, based on the classics. Not only does an anthropological optimism ring out, thanks to classical philosophy, but also a awareness that man is reconciled with his existence and already tastes the deepest redemption because he knows that he is dependant on a merciful God.

In his *Praeceptum* Augustine has let this dual insight become the foundation for the organizational advice for an order of life in his community. The bishop has remained faithful to the insights of his youth, more than he will admit. Indeed, in the *Confessiones* he distances himself from his earlier works by stating the arrogance, and is Manlius Theodorus gradually less favoured. But in the *Praeceptum* he catalogues not only several principles from classical antiquity concerning the order of life, as in *De beata vita*, but he also applies them in the guidelines. In this, the typical Stoic 'care for oneself' is in no way disqualified. There are no stark guidelines resulting in a rigidly ascetic way of life, in which the vision of man as sinful is the foundation. His thoughts on the *ne quid nimis* principle probably have saved him from an anthropological pessimism.

The principles within the Stoic ideal of the good life are thus in no way 'evaporated' in Augustine's practical works. To the contrary: in *De beata vita* they are happily appreciated in the course of a design for life where the vision of God is intensified, and in the *Praeceptum* with this in mind applied. Thus it appears that the indebtedness to the guidelines of the Stoa has made Augustine, like Origen, an optimist, at least in his work written for life itself. But faith in human ability was for Augustine apparently not redeeming enough. According to him, this did not bring about the reconciliation searched by his brothers. A foretaste of the final redemption man will find when he becomes sensitive to God through his *ordo vitae*.

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