

merit (*virtus*) and reward (praise, honour). Already in his first writings we can see Augustine opposing this traditional ideology, when he posits in the introductions of *De beata vita* and *De academicis*, that one's *virtus* is not strong enough to reach the happy life, and that the help of *Fortuna* is required. This help from *Fortuna* can be understood as God's freely given grace. Augustine's long-standing aversion for the traditional, aristocratic ideology may therefore have contributed to his hostile reaction against Pelagianism.

Despite this criticism of lack of overall structure and occasional sloppiness, there is no doubt that the positive aspects of this study greatly outweigh these minor points. Each chapter of this concise publication contains such a wealth of insights and enough food for thought to make it worth reading it again and again.

Geert VAN REYN

Johannes BRACHTENDORF, *Augustine's Confessiones*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005, 315 p. ISBN: 3-534-15423-1

Augustine's *Confessiones* is a classic of world literature in which many a person has buried himself willingly or unwillingly. The many available commentaries which help the reader to penetrate into the deeper layers of the work are, if only from a historical viewpoint, certainly not superfluous. The assistance Brachtendorf offers with his study purports to be more than historical. The author masterfully paints the philosophical background of Antiquity, from which the inquisitive Augustine profusely drew to embellish his new ideas. But even this is not sufficient for Brachtendorf: each time he wants to show the mark Augustine left on his legacy of the past. This backward projection he also carries through within the work of Augustine itself, in which he already was engaged in an in-depth exploration of the subject. When it emerges that Augustine has developed the matter further at a riper age, Brachtendorf also makes a projection in the future. This so to speak forward projection goes further than Augustine, since Brachtendorf witnesses the same subject reemerge centuries later, demonstrating how much this Church Father has become the hinge for many a theme in the history of ideas of Western thought. Later philosophers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein are being dealt with where required. Also here the author shows the indebtedness of these people towards Augustine, and he points out where they are at variance with him.



To all readers of Augustine – among whom some very distinguished – Brachtendorf gives some valuable advice in his introduction: ‘*Vielmehr halt (Augustin) stets alle Fäden seines Denkens gleichzeitig in der Hand, so dass er von einem Thema aus Brücken zu mehreren anderen schlagen kann. Doch Augustines Kompositionsstil zeugt keineswegs von logisches Schwäche, sondern eher von systematischer Stärke, insofern er nämlich sachliche Verbindungen zwischen Gegenstandsgebieten herstellt, die zunächst als unverbunden erscheinen*’ (p. 13). Therefore, do not read to fast, otherwise one fails to notice a certain play of rethoric in the text. Brachtendorf also considers the tenacity with which *Confessiones* has to fit one particular genre to be a consequence of the same haste. From the very beginning the author wants to work out what ties together the individual books of this work. After an in-depth study it turns out that the question of happiness is the leitmotiv of *Confessiones*, which not incidentally occupies itself with *ars vivendi* of our *conditio humana*. This question of happiness also occupied Plato, Plotinos and Cicero. However, the Church Father will fundamentally alter their terminology, which he so abundantly used to paint the misery of this earthly life after Original sin. A return from the false happiness in the sensible order, where everything passes and nothing remains, Augustine derives from Plotinos. Also his call to turn towards your inner self, where truth resides, is taken over by the Christian philosopher, but he will substitute emanation with the idea of Creation and monism with monotheism. Philosophy may try to develop a therapy for the mentally ill, but only the Christian way heals and leads to the goal which the classical philosophers are able to discern, but unable to attain, simply because they do not know Christ. The true therapy to lead to happiness will belong to Christianity (pp. 17-39).

Augustine will posit his own analysis of human existence against the Hellenistic and Neo-platonic philosophy. From the first book of *Confessiones* on, he deduces from his personal and biographic road to God a general structure of being-human, of which the *memoria*-theory in the tenth book renders the clear outlines. To be able to find happiness, rational insight will no longer suffice; belief in the activity of God will become indispensable. The ethical understanding based on the nature of man in classical philosophy, no longer suffices to lift a man out of his natural misery (p. 49). The bishop of Hippo will repeat after Paul as a catchphrase that man will find misery if he exchanges his Creator with His creatures and ultimately looks for himself in them (pp. 41-62).

For this erring man the preacher not only uses the Plotinos’ metaphor of the soul straying from the Father: he finds this imagery also in the parable of the lost son. The cause of this sin is pride,



through which man seeks to put himself in the place of God. The same madness Augustine recognizes in his juvenile prank of the pear theft, when he sought to contest the prohibition because it was prohibited. It is really no small sin wanting to challenge the order of being, through which man rejects his appointed place and in so doing cannot find his happiness (pp. 63-68)? In book III Brachtendorf outlines the gnostic religion in so far that the quest for happiness led Augustine fall in the Manichean guile (pp. 69-84). In book IV the deep mourning for the loss of a childhood friend provides Augustine once more with the opportunity to present unhappiness as a perverted love, in which a temporary creature has been put in the place of the everlasting God. Here, Augustine takes the opportunity to appreciate and correct the stoic understanding of the affects. The therapy of feelings will consist herein that the orientation of the human will shall be given back to the will of God. With this Brachtendorf connects the relation between *uti-frui*, in which he strips *uti* of its instrumental meaning. Perhaps the author could have made an appeal to a broader bibliography regarding this subject. Man's urge to imitate and be himself God in this mourning episode as well as in the pear theft, Brachtendorf regrettably did not wish to elucidate from *superbia* in the (original) Fall (pp. 85-99). Book V, in which Augustine describes the undermining of his Manichean belief, is for Brachtendorf the opportunity to place the faith defection, against the philosophical background of scepticism (pp. 99-112). In book VI Augustine examines the arguments to believe, and he also scrutinizes his erring concerning the highest good, through which he already can partly reach forward to the conversion of the will in book VIII (pp. 113-118). In book VII the author follows the breakthrough of neo-platonic thought which helped Augustine to liberate himself completely from the dualism of Manicheism, with his so-called rationalism and his genealogy of evil. With its grab for the divinity, evil has been caused by no-one else but mankind. Evil in its state as non-being will keep Augustine from considering evil as a power apart from God. Also here, the author neglects to look into the later works to see what Augustine further thinks of *superbia*. The new point of view of rationality causes the imminent convert to stand in a new relation to faith. What does Augustine have to do with the relation Plato-Paulus unless he not only lets faith refer to historical facts, but also let count as a condition to grasp the rationality of the content of faith. The metaphysical order of Being from the platonic world will show how much Augustine is indebted to this philosophical tradition to grasp his idea of God as the spiritual reality at the top of everything which exists. This invites Brachtendorf of course to compare the *Confessiones* with his earliest writings, in which also the spiritual ascent



to the divine has been developed (pp. 113-154). In book VIII the author follows the line of thinking of Augustine's conversion regarding the will, in which continence (abstinence) *in* sexuality proves to be the most difficult obstacle. Here, the author clarifies the text frequently with developments in later writings. The weakness and disunity of the will can only be healed through the intervention of grace. At the end of this book Brachtendorf halts to give an expanded 'status quaestionis' of the development which Augustine's doctrine of grace has gone through, at the moment when he composes his *Confessiones*, providing a clear and successful analysis (pp. 155-188). In book IX Augustine places the death of his mother Monnica in sharp contrast with the mourning he went through at the loss of his childhood friend in book IV. Against the mourning for his mother the young adolescent of before feels himself armed with the Christian hope as opposed to those who do not believe in the resurrection. Regrettably, the author does not refer to the editorial link which unmistakably exists between the *visio* which precedes the death of Monnica and the way in which the son comes to terms with this sorrow. Is not the handling during the grieving process precisely the discovery of *tenere* which only exists in the love towards God (p. 192)? Even though the adolescent who thought himself to be a god is dead and is striving for a different happiness ever since his acknowledgment of God, the *visio* of Ostia has not completely conquered death (pp. 189-201). Book X in which *memoria* takes up a central place, Brachtendorf considers to be a pivotal text between the first nine and the three remaining books, through which *Confessiones* undeniably form a unity. In his pursuit of happiness man has to come across the question of God, before he can come into touch with the historical Divine Revelation (of God). Rightly, the author points to the fact that to be aware of happiness, does not necessarily imply that one is aware of God. Yet, implicit knowledge of God is essential for the restlessness of the heart, that only finds its rest in God.

This theoretical insight Augustine will from book I on bring to the practical level, when he starts recounting his life story: the search for happiness in friendship, with Cicero, with the Manicheans, in honour, and in lust. Only the (Neo-)Platonic philosophers will help him acquire a correct insight of himself and of God, in the world and the people. With Paul and his Christology of humility he sees the possibility of bringing to unity the complex will, and to finally reach his highest happiness in book IX, after being driven by a restless heart from the beginning. It is now obvious that Augustine will investigate in *memoria* and in time the conditions which would make it possible to further ascend towards God. Whereas in the previous books it was



still not clear that Augustine had set his sight on something more than conversion in his own life story, it becomes clear from books X and XI onwards 'dass Augustinus seine eigene Bekehrungsgeschichte interpretiert als Zeugnis für eine allgemein menschliche Situation. So wie er selbst sich Gott zuwandte, so vermag jeder Mensch sich zu bekehren und Gott zu suchen, weil jeder Mensch kraft seiner Vernunftnatur ein implizites Wissen um Gott besitzt' (p. 216). With the inevitable references to *De trinitate* where the Church father describes human consciousness within his Trinitarian structure, Brachtendorf shows that, throughout the whole history of ideas, philosophers were fascinated by Augustine's analysis of memory in book X and of time in book XI. After a preceding analysis of time itself the author compares Augustine with the tradition of Antiquity, out of which he drew, and after summing up the similarities and differences, to continue the dialogue of Heidegger with Augustine in which *Sein und Zeit* takes up a central position. In book X Brachtendorf treats the three temptations or the so-called *cupiditas triplex* of the converted person in a rather neglectful fashion. The reason eludes us why this time he does not make a comparison with an earlier text such as *De vera religione* 37,68 – 54,106 (pp. 202 – 235, X; 236 – 265, XI). The exegetical approach of the first verses of Genesis in book XII prompts the author again to make a comparison with the aftereffect of Augustine, which this time he places in a hermeneutic dialogue with Gadamer (pp. 266–277). In book XIII Brachtendorf underlines once more the similarities and the differences with Plotinos regarding Creation as an allegory of salvation. Finally, the author discerns in the very last part the initial impetus to a trinitarian reflection in humankind (pp. 278–289).

In the concluding remarks the author sums up all the arguments, which he has built up in the course of the study, to demonstrate that the genre of *Confessiones* should not be narrowed down to a Protreptikos with philosophical content after the manner of Aristotle or Cicero, but that it exhorts to a wisdom which reaches beyond philosophy and which comprises faith (p. 292).

In the course of his commentary the author has found enough reasons to see that the unity in this masterpiece (I–IX, X, XI–XIII) should be seen above all in the question of happiness and destiny, which returns as a refrain in the study. The number of pages Brachtendorf devotes to each book allows us to discover his aim: how did Antiquity look at human happiness, what did Augustine inherit and what did he change in this aspect, and how did generations after him pick up this subject matter? Because of his sick soul, Augustine kept pursuing his apparent happiness and continued to search for the highest



good in the wrong places, through which it became clear what could have been the reason for his unhappiness. With the adoration of temporary pleasure in earthly goods the searcher of happiness wanted to be a god and at the same time he repeated the primal sin from which all later misery stemmed. The return to happiness lies on the road of Christological humility, which wishes to be a victory of pride as cause of all misery on earth. Not philosophy holds the key of therapy, but Christian faith (pp. 290-303).

*Confessiones* is certainly not a book which one should present to someone as a first introduction to Augustine. Taking up Brachtendorf's study as preparation for reading this classic from Christian Antiquity certainly is highly recommended, but it will not be easy for beginners. Nevertheless, this work has to its merit the fact that it guides the reader into the philosophical setting of those days and allows the aftereffects to be felt right up to the present day. To grasp the full bearing of *Confessiones*, Brachtendorf has opted for a twofold movement in his commentary: a movement backwards in Antiquity, where the great master of Western thinking obtained his philosophizing tools, which he in turn adapted to working tools at the service of his newly won insights. This movement backwards the author repeated when he sought connection with Augustine's earlier works, and after that a movement forwards to the later works, which confirm or alter what until then Augustine had claimed. This movement forwards the author implements beyond the limits of Augustine, finding himself in the history of ideas, in which some intuitions of this Church father are fruitfully continued or altered. Needless to say that the author has to be widely-read in the subject matter in order to be able to present such a study, of which the results could be termed impressive. Brachtendorf clearly did not have the intention to render a very specialized analysis of the texts, but he certainly has succeeded in making more manifest the purpose of this classic.

Bernard BRUNING

Annemaré KOTZÉ, *Augustine's Confessions. Communicative Purpose and Audience*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004 (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 71)

It is now generally agreed among scholars that characterizing *Confessiones* as an autobiography, hinders rather than facilitates the understanding of this high point in literary history. Annemaré Kotzé manages to underpin this insight in an exciting and interesting study,