
*FRATER CORDIS MEI: FRIENDSHIP
IN AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS*¹

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ABSTRACT

In Augustine's *Confessions*, friendship not only has two forms, an individual and a communitarian one, but it also has two faces, a positive and a negative one. On the one hand, we find philosophical friendship which loves *gratis* (i.e. without thinking about any profit) and shares the common effort in search for wisdom. As Augustine puts it, such a friendship is based on a community of souls ascending to God. In his eyes, to love one's friend 'in God' is even a necessary element of a true friendship. Besides an individual form of friendship, we also meet a broader community of friends in Augustine's *Confessions* who even plan a common life devoted to philosophical leisure and later to religious service.

On the other hand, both individual and communitarian forms of friendship also have their negative sides. Friendship is not necessarily a common search for wisdom, it can also become a substitute for such an effort. Even more harmful is the impact of what Augustine calls the 'unfriendly friendship' which makes 'shame not to be shameless'. We meet this behaviour in a group, even in a mob, several times in *Confessions* and find Augustine playing the role of both the seduced and the seducer.

Keywords:

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Friendship is to want good things for someone, just because we love him, while he or she wants the same for us.² In his collection

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² Cicero, *De inv.* II,55,166: ... *amicitia voluntas erga aliquem rerum bonarum, illius ipsius causa quem diligit cum eius pari voluntate.*

of *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Augustine copied down this quote from Cicero, since it seemed to provide an apt description of his own idea of friendship as mutual goodwill which is motivated by nothing but only love for the friend.⁵

Since the ancient Pythagoreans, Plato's *Lysis*, and especially Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books 8–9), friendship was a part of philosophical reflections, not only as a topic but also as a setting of philosophical discussions.⁴ Both these aspects of friendship were known to Augustine, most immediately from Cicero, whose philosophical dialogues served as a model for Augustine's early works shaped as discussions with his friends (e.g. the Cassiciacum dialogues *Against Academicians*, *On the Happy Life*, *On Order*, and, later on, *On the Greatness of the Soul* and *On Free Choice of the Will*).

Augustine's *Confessions*, too – even though this work is open to many different interpretations – is to be considered one of the most important books on friendship in European literature. What Augustine is saying here about his friends is, primarily, a statement about himself and a testimony to God's influence in his own life and theirs. In this paper, I will follow the idea of friendship in the course of the *Confessions*. It is presented here as being based on Augustine's life experience rather than as an ideal or a doctrine.

1. *Seducebamur et seducebamur* (The Pernicious Influence of Friends)

The first thing we learn about Augustine's friends is the detrimental influence they had on him when he was sixteen. At this age, together they committed theft of pears from someone's tree – a rather innocent story which, nevertheless, serves Augustine not only as an illustration of 'evil for its own sake'⁵ but, at the same time, as evidence of 'an unfriendly friendship' (*inimica amicitia*) and 'a shame not to

⁵ Augustine, *De div. quaest. LXXXIII*, 31,3 (CCL 44A, 44); see further *ibid.* 71,5–6 (CCL 44A, 205f).

⁴ While for Plato or Cicero, the dialogue of friends seems to be the very setting of philosophy, Aristotle just mentions the philosophical debate as one of the possibilities for how friends spend their time together (*EN IX,12*, 1172a1–8); but for him, too, the common life of human beings is based on the exchange of words and thoughts (*EN IX,9*, 1170b11–13).

⁵ *Conf. II,4,9* (CCL 27, 22): ... *ut essem gratis malus et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi malitia.*

be shameless' to which a group of friends can seduce one. Augustine would never commit such a prank alone; it only delighted him in a group of friends.⁶

Roughly in the same period, Augustine experienced erotic desire and in this field, too, the society of friends proved pernicious. Again, they tempted him into committing 'disgraceful acts' which he, under their influence, was not just not ashamed to commit but would even be ashamed not to commit. Augustine imitated his friends, 'not for the pleasure's sake only, but for the praise' (*non solum libidine facti verum etiam laudis*).⁷ His desire 'to love and be beloved' (*amare et amari*) became, under the detrimental influence of his companions (*comites*),⁸ 'the darkness of lust', rather than a friendship 'of one soul to another'.⁹ He thus 'defiled the spring of friendship (*venam amicitiae*) with the filth of concupiscence and beclouded its brightness with the hell of lustfulness'.¹⁰ When Augustine avoided the misconduct of his companions in some respects – he especially withdrew from bullying younger pupils in the school – then, on the one hand, he dreaded their behaviour but, on the other, he fretted in 'shameless shame' (*puore impudenti*) not to be like them.¹¹

In the society of his coevals, Augustine was not only a victim, but also corrupted others. As 'seduced he seduced', and being 'deceived he deceived others' (*seducebamur et seducebamus falsi atque fallentes*).¹² So at least he describes this social mechanism while remembering how he, from the age of nineteen up to twenty-eight, used to teach rhetoric and frequent a community of Manicheans as a catechumen (*auditor*). From his later point of view, both were the propagation of deceit and destruction.

2. *Dimidium animae meae* (The Nameless Friend of Augustine's Youth)

From among Augustine's school companions, who seem to create an anonymous crowd in his memories, there rises up a figure of his

⁶ *Conf.* II,9,17 (CCL 27, 26).

⁷ *Conf.* II,5,7 (CCL 27, 21).

⁸ *Conf.* II,5,8 (CCL 27, 21).

⁹ *Conf.* II,2,2 (CCL 27, 18).

¹⁰ *Conf.* III,1,1 (CCL 27, 27).

¹¹ *Conf.* III,3,6 (CCL 27, 29).

¹² *Conf.* IV,1,1 (CCL 27, 40).

close friend to whom Augustine was later – as he was already starting to teach – connected even by a very personal and quite exclusive relationship. Nevertheless, this friend, too, remains anonymous.¹⁵

When writing his *Confessions* many years later, Augustine does not dare to call this relationship a true friendship (*vera amicitia*), since there is no real friendship in his eyes, except that in which God Himself ‘links together those who cleave to Him by that love which has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit’.¹⁴ Augustine, on the contrary, turned his friend away from Christianity and recruited him for Manicheism,¹⁵ and during his fatal illness, Augustine mocked the baptism accorded to him.¹⁶

His friend’s subsequent death affected Augustine terribly. He could not even bear to see things which reminded him of his friend and ‘became a riddle to himself’,¹⁷ ‘a hapless spot, where he could neither stay, nor escape from thence’.¹⁸ Augustine dreaded death, which took his friend away from him, but, at the same time, he hated his lonely life. Nevertheless, he was not quite sure that he would be able to die for his friend, as the inseparable friends of ancient tragedy Orestes and Pylades were. His own ‘poor life’ was still ‘dearer’ to him ‘than his dead friend’.¹⁹ At the same time, Augustine could not imagine his life without his friend, as he, with Horatius, considered him to be ‘half of his soul’ (*dimidium animae suae*) and himself, with Cicero, ‘the other self of his friend’ (*ille alter eram*). They were, as Ovidius puts it, ‘only one soul in two bodies’ (*unam fuisse animam in duobus corporibus*), and Augustine

¹⁵ *Conf.* IV,4,7 (CCL 27, 43).

¹⁴ *Conf.* IV,4,7 (CCL 27, 43). Cf. Rom 5,5. See further *C. Faust.* XXII,78 (CSEL 25/1, 678); *Ser.* 336,2,2 (PL 38, 1472); *Ep.* 258,4 (CSEL 57, 608f.). Cf. J. T. Lienhard, ‘Friendship with God, Friendship in God: Traces in St. Augustine,’ in *Augustine Mystic and Mystagogue: Collectanea Augustiniana*, ed. Frederick van Fleteren et alii (New York: Lang, 1994), 207–229.

¹⁵ *Conf.* IV,4,7 (CCL 27, 43).

¹⁶ *Conf.* IV,4,8 (CCL 27, 43f.).

¹⁷ *Conf.* IV,4,9 (CCL 27, 44): *Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio.*

¹⁸ *Conf.* IV,7,12 (CCL 27, 46): ... *et ego mihi remanseram infelix locus, ubi nec esse possem nec inde recedere.* In Augustine’s grief, some interpreters see Freudian melancholy or narcissism. Cf. Richard B. Miller, ‘Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine’s *Confessions*,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011): 387–409, here 393–395.

¹⁹ *Conf.* IV,6,11 (CCL 27, 45). According to Euripides’ version (*Iphig. Taur.* 598–608 and 674–686), Orestes offers his life for Pylades, who does not wish to live without him either. The lost drama of Marcus Pacuvius on this topic (probably *Chryses*) is quoted by Cicero, *De amic.* 7,24; *De fin.* II,79; V,63; and Ambrose of Milan, *De off.* I,41,207 (CCL 15, 77).

was not willing to live just half of a life. Perhaps he dreaded his own death to prevent his friend from dying completely.²⁰

In his *Retractions* later on, Augustine calls this exposition exaggerated and inept.²¹ Not even in the *Confessions* is its sense quite positive; Augustine rather wants to illustrate how pernicious it can be to cling to a mortal friend 'as if he would never die' (*quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram*),²² and thus 'pour out one's soul upon the sand'.²³ These comments by the author of *Confessions* are not intended to be cynical but they should prepare another notion of friendship, as Augustine came to it in the meantime, i.e. friendship as a community of souls in God, a relationship which cannot be finished by physical death.

3. *Animos unum facere* (Comfort from Philosophical Discussions)

For the time being, it was not eternity but time which healed Augustine's painful loss of his friend – the time that 'loses no time, nor does it roll idly through our senses but works marvellous operations on the mind'.²⁴ What particularly helped Augustine to forget was the consolation of other friends (*aliorum amicorum solacia*), their common Manichean beliefs, their philosophical discussions, and their common readings.²⁵ He can remember discussing the topic of beauty with them and writing down his first work, entitled *De pulchro et apto*.²⁶

Speaking about this community of friends, Augustine again uses the Ciceronian metaphor of many friends becoming only 'one soul' (*ex pluribus unum facere [animum]*).²⁷ However, not even this friendship based on mutual love seems to be a real one in his eyes, as the prerequisite of a common love of the Christian God was missing. 'Blessed who love You, and his friend in You (*in te*), and his enemy for You (*propter te*).

²⁰ *Conf.* IV,6,11 (CCL 27, 45f). Cf. Horatius, *Carm.* I,5,8; Cicero, *De amic.* 21,80; *Ad fam.* 7,5; Ovidius, *Tristia*, IV,4,72. The idea of a friend as 'another self' (ἄλλος αὐτός) was already known to Aristotle: *EN* IX,4, 1166a31–32; see also *EN* IX,9, 1169b6–7; 1170b6–7 (ἕτερος αὐτός), and *EN* IX,8, 1168b7 (μία ψυχή).

²¹ *Retr.* II,6,2 (CCL 57, 94).

²² *Conf.* IV,6,11 (CCL 27, 45).

²³ *Conf.* IV,8,13 (CCL 27, 47): ... *fuderam in harenam animam meam diligendo moriturum acsi non moriturum.*

²⁴ *Conf.* IV,8,13 (CCL 27, 46).

²⁵ *Conf.* IV,8,13 (CCL 27, 47).

²⁶ *Conf.* IV,13,20 (CCL 27, 51).

²⁷ *Conf.* IV,8,13 (CCL 27, 47). Cf. Cicero, *De amic.* 25,92; *De off.* I,56.

For he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost.²⁸ But this kind of love was still unknown to Augustine and his friends.

4. *Amabam ex hominum iudicio* (The Love of Hierius Based on His Fame)

Augustine dedicated his writing *De pulchro et apto* to a famous Roman rhetorician of Syrian origin, Hierius, whom he loved, not knowing him by his face (*amatur absens*),²⁹ only because others judged him worthy of love (*amabam ... ex hominum iudicio*).³⁰ Augustine observes that his admiration for this famous rhetorician differs from the success of popular actors, gladiators, or charioteers, because it includes his desire to equal this man or at least to be praised by him and attract his attention.³¹

Augustine's relationship to Hierius, whom he 'loved for the fame of his teaching' (*amaveram ex doctrinae fama*),³² surely cannot be considered a real friendship. But it presents a very interesting supplement to the above-mentioned influence exercised by his coevals. Even admiration and love can be caused by the opinion of others or, more precisely, can be brought about by the supposed sincerity of their feelings.

5. *Benigne ac paterne monuit* (The Paternal Friendship of Vindicianus)

A much more personal relationship than that to Hierius connected Augustine to a famous physician, Vindicianus, who, as a proconsul, decorated him with a winner's wreath in a competition of poets. Augustine describes him as an old man who encouraged him 'very kindly and in a fatherly manner' (*benigne ac paterne monuit*).³³ His speech was not decorated with rhetorical skills but rather with a serious and lively character. Probably that was why Augustine liked to listen to him and

²⁸ *Conf.* IV,9,14 (CCL 27, 47).

²⁹ *Conf.* IV,14,21 (CCL 27, 51).

³⁰ *Conf.* IV,14,22 (CCL 27, 51).

³¹ *Conf.* IV,14,22–23 (CCL 27, 51f.).

³² *Conf.* IV,14,21 (CCL 27, 51).

³³ *Conf.* IV,3,5 (CCL 27, 42).

even became 'familiar' with him.⁵⁴ In spite of his authority, Vindicianus was not successful, at least not immediately, in turning Augustine away from the confidence he had at that time in astrological predictions.⁵⁵ A much more important role in this issue was played, unknowingly, by Augustine's friend Firminus, remembered in the *Confessions* almost exclusively because of this merit, without being much estimated as a friend after the passage of the years.⁵⁶

Augustine also had a relationship of veneration and admiration with Ambrose, the bishop of Milan and a very famous man. Like Vindicianus, Ambrose also showed a very kind and fatherly interest in Augustine's spiritual development, and the young man liked to listen to him, in this case thanks to the rhetorical perfection of Ambrose's homilies, rather than to their content, which Augustine only came to esteem later.⁵⁷ As some interpreters surmise, Ambrose might have kept his distance from his catechumen because of Augustine's Manichean past, a suspicion of careerism, or the very different characters of both men.⁵⁸ According to the third book of his treatise *De officiis*, Ambrose drew his idea of friendship from Cicero and that is why it also comes very close to Augustine's. In addition, the bishop of Milan supplemented his exposition with a number of biblical testimonies on friendship.⁵⁹

Another paternal figure in Augustine's early life – particularly when he lost his own father Patricius – was an esteemed citizen of Thagaste and perhaps Augustine's relative, Romanianus, who also became his patron.⁴⁰ In his African years and later on, Augustine found in Romanianus a fatherly and, according to one of his letters,

⁵⁴ *Conf.* IV,3,5 (CCL 27, 42); VII,6,8 (CCL 27, 97).

⁵⁵ *Conf.* IV,3,5–6 (CCL 27, 42f.).

⁵⁶ *Conf.* VII,6,8–9 (CCL 27, 97–99).

⁵⁷ *Conf.* V,13,23 (CCL 27, 70).

⁵⁸ See Marie A. McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine* (Fribourg: Univ. Press, 1958), 68–77; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 81–87; Dagmar Kiesel, *Lieben im Irdischen. Freundschaft, Frauen und Familie bei Augustin* (Freiburg – München: Alber, 2008), 203f.

⁵⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *De off.* III,21,125–22,138 (CCL 15, 200–206). See Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 111–128; Luigi Pizzolato, *L'idea di amicizia nel mondo antico classico e cristiano* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1993), 269–275; David Konstan, 'Problems in the History of Christian Friendship,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 87–113, here 106–113.

⁴⁰ *C. Acad.* II,2,3 (CCL 29, 19f.). On Romanianus, see McNamara, *Friendship*, 78–83; André Mandouze, *Prosopographie de l'Afrique Chrétienne (303–533)*, I (Paris: CNRS, 1982), 994–997.

very close friend (*familiariter amicissimus*).⁴¹ However, it seems to have been Augustine who influenced Romanianus, rather than the other way round. At first, he converted his patron to Manicheism,⁴² and later on he also tried to attract his attention to philosophy⁴³ and to involve him in his philosophical plans. He was almost successful in the case of Romanianus' sponsoring a philosophical community in Milan⁴⁴ but probably less so in his conversion to Christianity, as far as we know.

Last but not least, a very important personality in Augustine's story was the Manichean bishop Faustus. Augustine expected a great deal from the arrival of this famous man in Carthage in 382, because he hoped to obtain answers to his philosophical and astronomical questions from him. The discussion with the eloquent but not very speculative and rather practically oriented, and in theoretical questions even sceptical Faustus disappointed the young adept of Manicheism. Nevertheless, this man with a reputation for holiness and with a good deal of personal charm and modest comportment left a powerful impression on Augustine.⁴⁵ Faustus did not strengthen Augustine's Manichean belief but might have converted him to scepticism for some time.⁴⁶ Their common reading of classical authors, for which Faustus asked Augustine,⁴⁷ and his supposed help in Augustine's looking for Manichean contacts in Rome⁴⁸ attest to, if not friendship, then surely mutual trust and respect between both men. Given the persecution of Manicheans in Africa, Augustine, even in his anti-Manichean polemics written later, never attacked Faustus directly during his lifetime. The thirty-three books *Against Faustus*, refuting the doctrinal treatise *Capitula* of the Manichean bishop, were only published after Faustus' death.⁴⁹

⁴¹ *Ep.* 27,4 (CSEL 34/1, 99).

⁴² *C. Acad.* I,1,3 (CCL 29,5).

⁴³ *C. Acad.* I,1,1 (CCL 29, 3); II,2,3 (CCL 29, 19).

⁴⁴ *Conf.* VI,14,24 (CCL 27, 89).

⁴⁵ *Conf.* V,6,10–7,12 (CCL 27, 61–63).

⁴⁶ *Conf.* V,6,10 (CCL 27, 62,15–17). Augustine recalls his sceptical period in *Conf.* V,10,19 (CCL 27, 68).

⁴⁷ *Conf.* V,7,13 (CCL 27, 63).

⁴⁸ *Conf.* V,8,14 (CCL 27, 64).

⁴⁹ Cf. Jason D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, I: Conversion and Apostasy, 373–388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 106–134.

6. *Gratis amare* (Philosophical Friendship with Alypius and Nebridius)

Augustine's closest friends in his Italian years were his African compatriots Alypius and Nebridius. Even though Augustine does not say so directly, it might have been these two young men who helped him to overcome his pain caused by the loss of his nameless young friend. And it might also have been them with whom Augustine thought about beauty. In any case, Augustine remembers having discussed with them 'on the ends of good and evil' (*de finibus bonorum et malorum*), probably having read Cicero's writing of the same name. Their preference then inclined to the Epicurean good found in pleasure, excepting the circumstance that there is no place for the immortality of the soul and no possible reward for human merits after death in Epicurean philosophy.⁵⁰

Augustine could have learned Epicurean ideas especially from Cicero, as he also learned from him the ideal of friendship which loves and is beloved for its own sake (*amicitia per se et propter se expetita*).⁵¹ Augustine called such a friendship *gratis diligere*,⁵² i.e. 'to love for free', 'selflessly', or 'for nothing' (probably alluding to the biblical line Job 1:9).⁵³

But as he also remembers, he appreciated the pleasure he had when involved in discussion with his friends, although he did not know its source and was not thinking of the inner light of 'beauty which deserves to be embraced for its own sake (*gratis amplectendae pulchritudinis*)'. Nor could he appreciate the role played by friendship in the happiness he was searching for.⁵⁴ It was very probably the aspect of a gratuity which escaped Augustine as his search for happiness was quite aim-oriented. He imagined a happy life in a 'corporeal way', as he also says in this context.

He was connected to his friends Alypius and Nebridius by the same desire for a happy life and the same helplessness as to how to search for it.⁵⁵ 'Thus we were like three indigent mouths, sighing out their

⁵⁰ *Conf.* VI,16,26 (CCL 27, 90).

⁵¹ Cicero, *De amic.* 21,80. See also *De amic.* 27,100 ; *De leg.* I,18,49.

⁵² *Conf.* VI,16,26 (CCL 27, 91).

⁵³ *Enarr. Ps.* 55,20 (CSEL 94/1, 218f.); *De cat.* 27,55,12 (CCL 46, 177,64–66).

⁵⁴ *Conf.* VI,16,26 (CCL 27, 90).

⁵⁵ *Conf.* VI,10,17 (CCL 27, 85).

wants and *looking to You to give us our food at the proper time,* as he remembers.⁵⁶

7. *Nebridius, dulcis amicus meus*

The attention Augustine pays to Alypius and Nebridius in the *Confessions* is not equal, and nor was the time he was allowed to spend with one or the other. For Augustine, the prematurely deceased Nebridius, this young man of moral integrity, who was extremely intelligent and meditative,⁵⁷ remained connected to the search for happiness in his early years, to the Neo-Platonising period of his thinking, and to the ideal of philosophical friendship they shared then. So we can surmise from the passages Augustine dedicated to Nebridius in his *Confessions*, as well as the correspondence he maintained with him until Nebridius' death, which includes twelve letters of predominantly philosophical content.⁵⁸

On the day Augustine and Alypius converted to an ascetic life in the Milanese garden, Nebridius was absent – 'I do not remember why,' admits Augustine.⁵⁹ He did not join his friends in their becoming catechumens and being baptised in Milan but received baptism later on, under circumstances not specified by Augustine in his narrative.⁶⁰ Neither did Nebridius share their decision to embark on an ascetic life – being moderate by his very nature⁶¹ – or their later ecclesiastical careers. That is why he remained a tireless seeker and inquirer in Augustine's memory, a friend from a time when both of them had

⁵⁶ *Conf.* VI,10,17 (CCL 27, 85): *Et erant ora trium egentium et inopiam suam sibimet invicem anhelantium et ad te expectantium, ut dares eis 'escam in tempore opportuno.'* Cf. Ps 103(104),27.

⁵⁷ *Conf.* IV,3,6 (CCL 27, 45); VI,10,17 (CCL 27, 85). On Nebridius, see Marie de Gonzague, 'Un correspondant de Saint Augustin: Nebridius,' in *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international augustinienn, Paris, 21-24 sept. 1954*, I (Paris: Études augustiniennes 1954), 95–99; McNamara, *Friendship*, 46–52; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 774–776.

⁵⁸ *Ep.* 3–14 (CSEL 34/1, 4–35). On Augustine's correspondence with Nebridius, see Georges Folliet, 'La correspondance entre Augustin et Nébridius,' in *L'opera letteraria di Agostino tra Cassiciacum e Milano. Agostino nelle terre di Ambrogio*, ed. Giovanni Reale et alii (Palermo: Augustinus, 1987), 191–215; Emmanuel Bermon, 'Lettres 3 à 14: Introduction,' in Augustin, *Lettres 1–30, BA 40/A* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 2011), 213–228, here 213–219.

⁵⁹ *Conf.* VIII,6,14 (CCL 27, 121).

⁶⁰ *Conf.* IX,3,6 (CCL 27, 85).

⁶¹ *Conf.* IX,3,6 (CCL 27, 136).

leisure for their questions: *ab otioso quaerebat otiosus*, as Augustine puts it later.⁶²

His 'sweet friend Nebridius' (*dulcis amicus meus*), as Augustine calls him,⁶³ tried to shake Augustine's confidence in astrology⁶⁴ – like Vindicianus before him – and he also wanted to turn Augustine away from his belief in Manichean ideas about God being menaced by the reign of darkness.⁶⁵ In Milan, Nebridius became an assistant to the grammarian Verecundus, who wished to have one of Augustine's friends in this position.⁶⁶ Probably because of his duties as an assistant – or his individualism – Nebridius did not partake in the shared holidays (*otium*) at Verecundus' farm at Cassiciacum in 386,⁶⁷ from where Augustine addressed his first surviving letters to him.⁶⁸ Although in this correspondence Augustine clearly plays the role of the teacher – Nebridius even takes his words as a representation of 'Christ, Plato or Plotinus'⁶⁹ – he does not hesitate to consult his pupil in matters of Latin grammar.⁷⁰

On all the above-mentioned occasions Nebridius proved to be an independent young man in his thinking, one who did not succumb to the fashions and moods that dominated his companions, and was rather a loner even in relation to his friends. In his moral integrity, Nebridius is introduced in the *Confessions* as the very opposite to Augustine, with his turbulent life, though Nebridius' intellectual search was no less persistent than Augustine's, and he was not immune to theological errors either, specifically to Docetism.⁷¹

During Nebridius' serious illness, when Augustine was not able (or not willing to find time) to visit his friend in his loneliness,⁷² he at least sent Nebridius a consolatory letter explaining the community of souls which ascended to God:

⁶² *Ep.* 98,8 (*CSEL* 34/2, 529f.).

⁶³ *Conf.* IX,3,6 (*CCL* 27, 136).

⁶⁴ *Conf.* IV,3,6 (*CCL* 27, 43); VII,6,8 (*CCL* 27, 97).

⁶⁵ *Conf.* VII,2,3 (*CCL* 27, 95).

⁶⁶ *Conf.* VIII,6,13 (*CCL* 27, 121).

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 4,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 10).

⁶⁸ *Conf.* IX,4,7 (*CCL* 27, 136). Cf. *Ep.* 3,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 5); *Ep.* 4,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 9 n.); see Bermon, 'Lettres 3 à 14', *BA* 40/A, 220–222.

⁶⁹ *Ep.* 6,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 12,1f.).

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 3,5 (*CSEL* 34/1, 9,7–16).

⁷¹ *Conf.* IX,3,6 (*CCL* 27, 135f.).

⁷² *Ep.* 10,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 23); 11,1 (*CSEL* 34/1, 25). See Kiesel, *Lieben im Irdischen*, 107.

Retire into your soul and lift it up to God as far as you can. There you will surely find us, not by means of corporeal images such as our memory is obliged to use, but by that power of thought by which you understand that we are connected but not in a place (*non loco esse nos simul*).⁷⁵

This community of souls in God is perhaps a Christianised version of the Neoplatonic idea of a community of souls in the Intellect as pre-supposed by Plotinus⁷⁴ or in the ‘whole soul’ known to Porphyry.⁷⁵ As Augustine wrote to Nebridius, so did Porphyry to his wife Marcella; if she ‘ascends to herself’ (εἰς σεαυτὴν ἀναβαίνειν), she will also find him as ‘present and connected to her’ (τῆς συνουσίας καὶ μηδὲ χωρισθῆναι οἷοι τε ὄντος), even though his ‘shadow and appearing image’ might be absent from her.⁷⁶

After Nebridius’ death (probably 388–390), Augustine imagines his friend living in ‘Abraham’s bosom’ (cf. Luke 16,22), and their friendship continuing as God Himself keeps them both in His memory (*nostri sis memor*).⁷⁷

8. *Alypius, frater cordis mei* (‘Alypius, the Brother of my Heart’)

Unlike Nebridius, Alypius is far from appearing as an idealised figure in Augustine’s narrative. In spite of his firm character in some respects,⁷⁸ he is presented much more as a victim of the pernicious influence his friends (including Augustine) had on him and of his own weakness. Augustine promised to tell Alypius’ story in a letter addressed to Paulinus of Nola; subsequently, he introduced him in the *Confessions* as his closest friend, perhaps using this previous narrative.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Ep.* 9,1 (CSEL 34/1, 20): *Confer te ad tuum animum, et illum in Deum leva, quantum potes. Ibi enim certius habes et nos, non per corporeas imagines, quibus nunc in nostra recordatione uti necesse est; sed per illam cogitationem, qua intellegis non loco esse nos simul.*

⁷⁴ Plotinus, *Enn.* VI,4(22),14,1–22; VI,5(23),7,1–11. On the community of souls, see also *Enn.* IV,9(8).

⁷⁵ Porphyry, *Sent.* 37,1–12 (Brisson 354–356).

⁷⁶ Porphyry, *Ad Marc.* 10 (des Places 111,5–11).

⁷⁷ *Conf.* IX,3,6 (CCL 27, 136). Cf. Ps 135(136),23.

⁷⁸ *Conf.* VI,10,16 (CCL 27, 84f.).

⁷⁹ *Ep.* 27,5 (CSEL 34/1, 100f.). Cf. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Boccard, 1968), 29–31; Aimé Solignac, ‘Introduction aux Confessions,’ in *BA* 13 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), 7–270, here 27f.; Colin Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I–IX* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1990), 154.

Alypius was born in the same town as Augustine, i.e. Thagaste, into a family of the highest rank. He became Augustine's student, first at Thagaste, and afterwards at Carthage. Augustine esteemed him for his 'innate love of virtue' but regretted his weakness for the 'madness' of gladiatorial games, these 'frivolous spectacles so hotly followed' in Carthage.⁸⁰ Augustine remembers having turned Alypius away from this unhappy pastime by an occasional note during a lecture and attracting him again as his listener in spite of resistance in Alypius' family.⁸¹ Before Augustine, Alypius left Africa for Rome to study law, and here again he succumbed to the detrimental influence of his friends persuading him to visit the bloody amphitheatres. They took him there with the use of violence and in spite of closing his eyes, he was pulled down into the vertex of his previous passion by just hearing the roar of the crowd incited by the fall of a gladiator.

Nor was he now the same as when he came in, but was one of the throngs he came unto, and a true companion (*socius*) of those who had brought him thither. Why need I say more? He looked, shouted, was excited, and carried away with him the madness which would stimulate him to return, not only with those who first enticed him, but also before them, yea, and to draw in others.⁸²

This scene seems to be the pinnacle of the pernicious influence friends may have, as Augustine presents it in the *Confessions*. But even Augustine himself influenced his younger friend in a way which was far from unambiguous. On the one hand, he turned him away from the 'madness' of the arena; but on the other, he temped him into becoming ensnared by the sensual passion which then captured Augustine himself. In his innocence, poor Alypius was eager to learn what was so

⁸⁰ *Conf.* VI,7,11 (CCL 27, 80f.). On Alypius see Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, 'Happiness and Friendship,' in: *Cambridge Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Tarmo Toom (Cambridge: University Press, 2020), 138–155, here 150–152; Eadem, 'Alypius, l'ami sceptique d'Augustin?', in *Augustin philosophe et prédicateur: Hommage à Goulven Madec (Actes du colloque international organisé à Paris les 8 et 9 septembre 2011)*, ed. Isabelle Bochet (Paris: Institut d'Études augustiniennes, 2012), 295–314, here 302–314.

⁸¹ *Conf.* VI,7,12 (CCL 27, 81f.).

⁸² *Conf.* VI,8,13 (CCL 27, 85): *Et non erat iam ille, qui venerat, sed unus de turba, ad quam venerat, et verus eorum socius, a quibus adductus erat. Quid plura? Spectavit, clamavit, ecarsit, abstulit inde secum insaniam, qua stimularetur redire non tantum cum illis, a quibus prius abstractus est, sed etiam prae illis et alios trahens.*

important for his admired teacher, and he was thus captured by Augustine's captivity: 'For his mind, free from that chain, was astounded at my slavery, and through that astonishment was going on to a desire to try it...'⁸⁵

This discussion, in which Augustine became a seducer of Alypius rather than his trustworthy teacher, was motivated by the idea of a common life devoted to philosophy (*simul in amore sapientiae vivere*), such as both friends longed for for a long time.⁸⁴ It was the very reason why both Alypius and Nebridius joined Augustine at Milan;⁸⁵ but his planned marriage, imposed upon Augustine by his mother,⁸⁶ seemed to jeopardise their intention. Augustine tried to dispel such fears, pointing out the examples of those who, as married men, had loved wisdom and kept up faithfully with their friends.⁸⁷ However, their plan of a commune of ten philosophers, including the very rich Romanianus, who would pool their possessions together and create a communal household, finally fell through because of this very circumstance: 'But when we began to reflect on whether the wives which some of us had already, and others hoped to have, would permit this, all that plan, which was being so well framed, broke to pieces in our hands, and was utterly wrecked and cast aside.'⁸⁸

To be able to put his dreamed-of commune of seekers for wisdom into practice, Augustine first had to opt for an ascetic life, which seemed to be a much more difficult decision than to return to the Christian religion of his pious mother. It was this conversion to an ascetic life which Augustine depicted in such masterly style in the scene of the Milanese garden and in which he was accompanied and followed by Alypius. Together with Alypius, as Augustine tells us,⁸⁹ he received a visit from Ponticianus, and they listened to his stories of Christian conversions to 'friendship with God',⁹⁰ which caused real confusion in their souls and a struggle to follow these examples. Both friends shared all their

⁸⁵ *Conf.* VI,12,22 (*CCL* 27, 88).

⁸⁴ *Conf.* VI,12,21 (*CCL* 27, 87).

⁸⁵ *Conf.* VI,10,16–17 (*CCL* 27, 84f.).

⁸⁶ *Conf.* VI,13,23 (*CCL* 27, 89).

⁸⁷ *Conf.* VI,12,21 (*CCL* 27, 87f.).

⁸⁸ *Conf.* VI,14,24 (*CCL* 27, 89): *Sed posteaquam coepit cogitari, utrum hoc mulierculae sinerent, quas et alii nostrum iam habebant et nos habere volebamus, totum illud placitum, quod bene formabamus, dissiluit in manibus atque confractum et abiectum est.*

⁸⁹ *Conf.* VIII,6,14–15 (*CCL* 27, 121–123).

⁹⁰ *Conf.* VIII,6,15 (*CCL* 27, 123).

secrets,⁹¹ and thus they also shared this inner struggle. Alypius ‘followed me step for step (*pedem post pedem*)’,⁹² as Augustine remembers, not only in a literal but also in a metaphorical sense; he remained ‘sitting close by my side’ (*Alypius affixus lateri meo*).⁹³ Together they read the apostle Paul’s invitation to live honestly (Rom 13,13 – 14,1), even if each of the two friends applied another passage to his own life.⁹⁴ Together with Alypius, Augustine became a catechumen⁹⁵ and received baptism in Milan;⁹⁶ and later on, both friends established ascetic communities at Thagaste and Hippo, and shared ecclesiastical careers as bishops in Africa, heavily involved in the theological and political struggles of their time.⁹⁷ As Alypius participated in the anti-Pelagian campaign at the imperial court, he was even called ‘a slave of Augustine’s sins’ (*vernula peccatorum eius*) by the Pelagian bishop Julian of Aeclanum.⁹⁸

Augustine understood his younger friend Alypius not only as his pupil but also as a ‘brother of his heart’ (*frater cordis mei*),⁹⁹ since, according to his words in *Soliloquies*, he knew him as well or as little as his own heart.¹⁰⁰

9. *Simul habitaturi placito sancto* (A Philosophical Community)

The philosophical commune, dreamed about with Alypius and Nebridius, and planned unsuccessfully with Romanianus and other Milanese friends, was finally realised by Augustine at Verecundius’ estate at Cassiciacum during the autumn school holidays in 386. Besides Alypius, Augustine’s mother Monnica, his son Adeodatus, his brother Navigius and two cousins of his, Lartidianus and Rusticus, as well as Romanianus’ son Licentius and another young man from

⁹¹ *Conf.* VIII,8,19 (CCL 27, 125).

⁹² *Conf.* VIII,8,19 (CCL 27, 125).

⁹³ *Conf.* VIII,11,27 (CCL 27, 130).

⁹⁴ *Conf.* VIII,12,29–30 (CCL 27, 131f.).

⁹⁵ *Conf.* IX,4,8 (CCL 27, 137).

⁹⁶ *Conf.* IX,6,14 (CCL 27, 140f.).

⁹⁷ In 394, Alypius became the bishop in his native Thagaste; see McNamara, *Friendship*, 109–112; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 53–65.

⁹⁸ *C. Iul. imp.* I,7 (CSEL 85/1, 9). Julian accused Alypius of bribing the officials of the imperial court with eighty horses coming from Africa; cf. *ibid.* I,42 (CSEL 85/1, 30); III,35 (CSEL 85/1, 375).

⁹⁹ *Conf.* IX,4,7 (CCL 27, 137).

¹⁰⁰ *Sol.* I,3,8 (CSEL 89, 14).

Thagaste named Trygetius, also shared this society.¹⁰¹ Augustine captured this leisure (*otium*) devoted to searching for wisdom in his early dialogues with his friends *Against Academicians*, *On the Happy Life*, and *On Order* and also in the *Soliloquies*, where he entered into discussion with the personified Ratio. In this last work, Augustine explains why he loves to be surrounded by friends: ‘In order that we may together inquire into our own souls and search for God.’¹⁰²

Later on, in Milan, Augustine’s philosophical community was joined by Evodius, also originating from Thagaste, who had already received baptism and abandoned his secular career.¹⁰³ ‘We were together, and together we were about to dwell with a holy purpose (*simul habitaturi placito sancto*).’¹⁰⁴ Looking for a place appropriate to their service to God, the friends decided to return together to Africa.

When they were waiting for a ship in Ostia, Augustine’s mother Monnica died. In her, their community lost its ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ at the same time,¹⁰⁵ and Augustine’s own life ‘rent asunder as it were, which, of hers and mine together, had been made but one’, as he puts it in the *Confessions*.¹⁰⁶

After returning to Africa in 388, Augustine established a ‘monastery of philosophers’¹⁰⁷ in the house at Thagaste where he was born. He was accompanied, among others, by Alypius, Evodius, and his son Adeodatus until the latter’s premature death in 388–390. This very talented young man received baptism together with Augustine and Alypius in Milan, and he also participated in their philosophical debates. When he was fifteen, Augustine discussed with him the topic of speech, and wrote down their dialogue *On the Teacher*,¹⁰⁸ in the same way as he had previously discussed with Evodius and written down their dialogues *On the Greatness of the Soul* and *On Free Choice of the Will*. The debates

¹⁰¹ *De b. vita* 1,6 (CCL 29, 68).

¹⁰² *Sol.* I,12,20 (CSEL 89, 31): *Ut animas nostras et deum simul concorditer inquiramus.*

¹⁰³ *Conf.* IX,8,17 (CCL 27, 143). On Evodius, later the bishop in Uzali in Africa, and a collaborator of Augustine, see McNamara, *Friendship*, 112–117; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 366–373.

¹⁰⁴ *Conf.* IX,8,17 (CCL 27, 143).

¹⁰⁵ *Conf.* IX,9,22 (CCL 27, 147).

¹⁰⁶ *Conf.* IX,12,30 (CCL 27, 150): ... *quasi dilaniabatur vita, quae una facta erat ex mea et illius.*

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Bocard 1958), 167. On the community at Thagaste see further George P. Lawless, ‘Augustine’s First Monastery: Thagaste or Hippo?’, *Augustinianum* 25 (1985): 65–78.

¹⁰⁸ *Conf.* IX,6,14 (CCL 27, 141).

in Thagaste also motivated Augustine's above-mentioned collection of *Eighty-Three Different Questions*.¹⁰⁹

Another member of the community in Thagaste was Possidius, later the biographer of Augustine, linked to him by a friendship of almost forty years, as Possidius tells us.¹¹⁰ From his hand, we also have an account of this community, as well as of another monastery established by Augustine in Hippo Regius later on, when he became a priest and bishop of this town.¹¹¹ For these communities of educated laymen and priests respectively, Augustine probably wrote down his monastic rule or rules (one of them sometimes being ascribed to Alypius),¹¹² where the experience of the philosophical friendships of his early years can be traced.¹¹⁵ The ancient idea of friendship might also have played a role in Augustine's theological concept of Christian love (*caritas*) loving *gratis*, as elaborated later on.¹¹⁴

10. Philosophical Inspirations

As we have seen, in meditating on friendship Augustine often used quotes from Latin classical authors, especially the very popular metaphor of only one soul which links friends to each other and makes one a second self for the other. A very important role was played by the Ciceronian ideal of friendship which loves for its own sake without any side interest.¹¹⁵ We also found an allusion to the legendary friends

¹⁰⁹ Cf. above, n. 3. On the genesis of this collection, see *Retr.* I,26 (*CCL* 57, 74).

¹¹⁰ Possidius, *Vita Aug.* 31,9 (Geerlings 106). On Possidius, see McNamara, *Friendship*, 121–124.

¹¹¹ Possidius, *Vita Aug.* 3,1–2 (Geerlings 32); 5,1 (Geerlings 34); 11,1–4 (Geerlings 42–44). Augustine mentions the monastery at Hippo Regius in *Ser.* 355,1,2 (*PL* 39, 1569f.), and *Ser.* 356 (*PL* 39, 1574–1581). He probably established two monasteries in this town, the first of them as a priest for a community of laymen, the other as a bishop for clerics. On Augustine's 'philosophical cenobitism', see Paul Monceau, 'Saint Augustin et saint Antoine. Contribution à l'histoire du monachisme,' *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, 2 (1931): 61–89.

¹¹² Cf. Luc Verheijen, *La Règle de saint Augustin*, II (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1967), 164.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Luc Verheijen, 'Eléments d'un commentaire de la Règle de saint Augustin, VI,' *Agustiniana* 22 (1972): 469–510, here 484–507; White, *Christian Friendship*, 211–217.

¹¹⁴ Cf. McNamara, *Friendship*, 220–223; John F. Monagle, 'Friendship in St. Augustine's Biography: Classical Notion of Friendship,' *Agustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 81–92, here 92; Eoin Cassidy, 'The Recovery of the Classical Ideal of Friendship in Augustine's Portrayal of Caritas,' in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 127–140.

¹¹⁵ See above, n. 20 and 51.

Orestes and Pylades, probably known to Augustine from Marcus Pacuvius and Cicero (or Ambrose?).¹¹⁶

When reading Augustine's remarks on friendship against the background of Cicero's writing on the same issue (*Laelius de amicitia*), we can observe, besides the similarities mentioned above, some differences.¹¹⁷ Unlike Augustine, Cicero endorses the idea that we sometimes love our friends more than ourselves, as for the sake of friends, Cicero argues, we are often willing to do what we would never do in our own interest.¹¹⁸ In the same vein as Augustine, Cicero believes that true friendship must be based on the 'agreement in all things, divine and human, together with favour and love',¹¹⁹ or 'an agreement of wills, efforts, and opinions',¹²⁰ especially an effort for what is good, i.e. virtue.¹²¹ However, he does not specify as clearly as Augustine does what the shared religion of friends should be like.¹²² Although Cicero mentions a friendship which survives death,¹²⁵ he seems to have the memories of living friends in mind,¹²⁴ rather than a community of souls in God.

In a quote from Terence, an author loved by Augustine, too, we meet a false friendship and its negative influence, as presented by Cicero: 'He says "nay," and "nay" say I; he says "yea," and "yea" say I; in fine, I bade myself agree with him in everything.'¹²⁵ With these words, put in the

¹¹⁶ See above, n. 19.

¹¹⁷ On Augustine's inspiration through Cicero, see Tarcisius J. van Bavel, 'The Influence of Cicero's Ideal of Friendship on Augustine,' in: *Augustiniana Traiectina*, ed. Jan den Boeft and Johannes van Oort (Paris 1987: Études augustiniennes), 59–72; on several differences between both authors, see Luigi F. Pizzolato, 'L'amicizia in sant'Agostino e il *Laelius* di Cicerone,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974): 203–215.

¹¹⁸ Cicero, *De amic.* 16,56–59. Cf. White, *Christian Friendship*, 190f.

¹¹⁹ *De amic.* 6,20 (Combès 14): *Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio*. On this definition of friendship in Augustine see Bouton-Touboullic, 'Alypius,' 295 and 29–300.

¹²⁰ *De amic.* 4,15 (Combès 11): ... *in quo est omnis vis amicitiae, voluntatum, studiorum, sententiarum summa consensio*.

¹²¹ *De amic.* 6,20.

¹²² On Augustine's idea of true friendship anchored in God, which replaces friendship based on virtue according to Cicero, see Vincent Zarini, 'Brèves remarques sur l'amitié chrétienne,' in: *La société des amis à Rome et dans la littérature médiévale et humaniste*, ed. Perrine Galand-Hallyn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 113–119, here 117f.; Stefan Rebenich, 'Augustine on Friendship and Orthodoxy,' in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 365–374, here 369f.

¹²³ *De amic.* 7,23.

¹²⁴ *De amic.* 27,104.

¹²⁵ *De amic.* 25,93 (Combès 56) = Terence, *Eunuchus*, 252f. (Marouzeau I, 239): *Negat quis: nego; ait: aio; postremo imperavi egomet mihi/ Omnia adsentari*. English

mouth of the 'parasite' Gnathon in 'The Eunuch' by Terence, Cicero does not illustrate the force of imitating a bad example in a group, so important in Augustine's narrative, but the danger of a flatterer who is not a real friend.¹²⁶

Besides an intimate relationship of two or a few persons,¹²⁷ Cicero also knows a broader friendship. Unlike Augustine, however, he does not have a religious community in his mind but a community (*societas*) of a family, of a city, or of the entire human race.¹²⁸

In Augustine's plan of friends living together in a philosophical commune, interpreters recognise a Pythagorean inspiration¹²⁹ or the influence of similar Manichean communities,¹³⁰ or compare it to Plotinus' project for Platonopolis.¹³¹ In any case, the ideal of both a private philosophical friendship and a common life devoted to searching for wisdom was rooted in several schools of ancient philosophy, including, among others, Epicureanism, which was so attractive for Augustine in his early years.¹³² In the Cassiciacum period of Augustine's life, the most important version of these ideas seemed to be Pythagoreanism. So we can surmise from his dialogue *On Order*, where, together with Alypius, he claims this inspiration, and he also states that the knowledge of Pythagorean doctrines has been transmitted to him by Varro.¹³³ Cicero, too, declares the ideal of friendship as a common effort for the good, and the connection of souls into one, to be Pythagorean.¹³⁴ According

translation William A. Falconer, Cicero: *De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione* (London – New York: Putnam, 1923), 201.

¹²⁶ *De amic.* 25,94–95.

¹²⁷ *De amic.* 5,20. Similarly Aristotle, *EN IX*, 10, 1170b20–1171a20.

¹²⁸ *De amic.* 5,19.

¹²⁹ Pierre Courcelle, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire: Antécédents et postérité* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1963), 22–26; William H. C. Frend, 'Pythagoreanism and Hermetism in Augustine's "Hidden Years,"' in: *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989): 252–254.

¹³⁰ Courcelle, *Recherches*, 178f.; Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Études augustiniennes 21973), 140; James McEvoy, 'Anima una et cor unum: Friendship and Spiritual Unity in Augustine,' *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 53 (1986): 40–92, here 61.

¹³¹ Courcelle, *Recherches*, 179f.; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 115f.; McEvoy, 'Anima una,' 62. On Platonopolis, cf. Porphyry, *Vita Plot.* 12.

¹³² On friendship in ancient philosophical schools, see Ludovic Dugas, *L'amitié antique* (Paris: Alcan, ²1914); Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia. La notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique* (Paris: Vrin, 1974); Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Gary M. (eds.), *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship* (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 2014).

¹³³ *De ord.* II,20,53–54 (*BA* 4/2, 322–324).

¹³⁴ Cicero, *De off.* I,56.

to Iamblichus, Pythagorean religious philosophy greatly appreciated friendship (the term *φιλία* is believed to have been coined by Pythagoras),¹⁵⁵ and sought its sense in ‘the union with God (*πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἔνωσιν*), the communion with intellect (*τὴν τοῦ νοῦ κοινωνίαν*) and with the divine soul’.¹⁵⁶ The more advanced adepts of Pythagoreanism (called *mathematikoi*, as opposed to the mere *akusmatikoi*) lived in a commune of shared property and philosophical discussion.¹⁵⁷ The Pythagorean principle ‘For friends all is shared’ (*κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων*),¹⁵⁸ understood either literally or metaphorically, became a basic characteristic of friendship in ancient philosophy.¹⁵⁹

Augustine conserved for us a testimony about a very similar religious community of Manicheans¹⁴⁰ whose beliefs he shared for a long time, as did Alypius and Romanianus too. A note about a ‘communism’ of early Christians, probably inspired by the Greco-Roman idea of friendship, can even be found in the New Testament, cf. Acts 4:32: ‘All the believers were one in heart and mind (*V: cor et anima una*). No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.’¹⁴¹ Thus, Augustine’s dream about a commune of philosophers might have been inspired by Manicheism at first and gradually adapted to Pythagorean philosophy and finally Christianity or could have been woven from all these sources of inspiration from the very beginning.

Conclusion

The picture of friendship in Augustine’s *Confessions* is far from being unambiguous. On the one hand, we find philosophical friendship which loves *gratis* (i.e. without thinking about any profit) and shares

¹⁵⁵ Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 16,70.

¹⁵⁶ Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 33,240. On the Pythagorean concept of friendship, see the whole passage *Vita Pyth.* 33,229–240. Cf. Gregor Staab, G.: *Pythagoras in der Spätantike: Studien zu De vita Pythagorica des Iamblichos von Chalkis* (München – Leipzig: Saur 2002), 426–434.

¹⁵⁷ Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 37; Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 18,81.

¹⁵⁸ Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 35,2; Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 6,32; 19,92.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Euripides, *Orest.* 735; *Phoen.* 243; Plato, *Phdr.* 279c6–7; *Lys.* 207c10; Aristotle, *EN* VIII,11, 1159b31; *EN* IX,8, 1168b7–8; Terence, *Adelphes* 804; Cicero, *De off.* I,51. Cf. Dugas, *L’amitié*, 24–34.

¹⁴⁰ *C. Faust.* V,5 (*CSEL* 25/1, 277f.); see *De mor.* II,20,74 (*CSEL* 90, 154–156).

¹⁴¹ See also Acts 2,44f. Cf. Alan C. Mitchell, ‘The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 255–272.

the common effort in the search for wisdom. As Augustine puts it in a letter to his friend Nebridius, such a friendship is based on a community of souls ascending to God. That is why their friendship even survives the death of both friends, since God, who 'keeps us in his memory', does not allow the friends to forget each other, as Augustine says about the prematurely deceased Nebridius in his *Confessions*. In Augustine's eyes, to love one's friend 'in God' is even a necessary element of a true friendship in which we love our friend for his or her sake (*gratis*), but not as if he or she should never leave this life (it is the lesson Augustine gained from the death of his nameless young friend).

Besides an individual form of friendship, represented by Nebridius, in Augustine's *Confessions* we also meet a broader community of friends who even plan a common life devoted to philosophical leisure and later to religious service. On behalf of such a community, Alypius discourages Augustine from marriage. He also faithfully accompanies his friend in his conversion to an ascetic life in the Milanese garden and later on in Christian service as monks and bishops in Africa. Augustine later attributes 'one soul' not only to his individual friends but also to this broader community, be it a monastic community (he explains the term *monachos* as a monk living in a community which has just one soul)¹⁴² or even the whole body of Christ, i.e. the church.¹⁴³

On the other hand, both individual and communitarian forms of friendship also have their negative sides in Augustine's *Confessions*. Friendship is not necessarily a common search for wisdom; it can also become a substitute for such an effort. Augustine's love for his nameless young friend is presented as an exaggerated relationship, where friends cling to each other as if they will never die and which is limited to the horizon of this life. Since their friendship was not anchored in the community of souls in God, as the relationship with Nebridius later was, it was broken off by death and left a desperate Augustine robbed of half of his own being. Although, when reading Augustine's *Confessions*, we probably cannot but take a liking to the sincerity of this youthful friendship, Augustine tries to show it as an example of what a true friendship should not be like.

What is more convincingly harmful is the impact of what he calls an 'unfriendly friendship' which makes 'shame not to be shameless'.

¹⁴² *Enarr. Ps.* 152,6 (*CSEL* 95/3, 327). Cf. McEvoy, 'Anima una,' 85f.

¹⁴³ See, e.g. *Ep.* 243,4 (*CSEL* 57, 571f.). Cf. Cassidy, 'The Recovery.'

We meet this behaviour in a group, even in a mob, several times in *Confessions* and find Augustine playing the role of both the seduced and the seducer. The clearest example of this unfriendly mechanism is the influence of Alypius' Roman friends who facilitate his giving in to his passion for the arena. Brought there by his friends, this young man of otherwise firm character is reduced to a powerless part of a screaming mob. To describe this mechanism, it is probably not enough to say with Aristotle that 'wicked men seek people with whom to spend their days, and shun themselves' since 'when they are with others they forget their own grievous deed'.¹⁴⁴ Augustine's young friends are not just a way of forgetting a grievous deed or the cherished goal instead of being companions on the way to wisdom, but their society incites him to an evil which he would never have committed without them. Theological interpreters can recognise the social effect of 'hereditary sin' here;¹⁴⁵ philosophers might be reminded of the unfortunate mechanism of the indefinite 'they' (das 'Man') as analysed by Heidegger.¹⁴⁶ In any case, here we meet the dark side of human nature and its effect on the human community, to which Augustine, as the author of *Confessions* and the theologian of hereditary sin, was very sensitive.

In Augustine's *Confessions*, friendship not only has two forms, an individual and a communitarian one, but it also has two faces, a positive and a negative one. In both directions, in the search for the good or falling victim to evil impulses, friends strengthen one's effort: 'Good friends help very much in the good, as bad friends do in the evil,' as Augustine puts it later.¹⁴⁷ In his experience, friendship is both an important comfort and a danger in human life.¹⁴⁸

His closest friend Alypius shared with Augustine both good and evil, friendship as a consolation and comfort and friendship as a seduction. They experienced both friendship as individuals and friendship

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, *EN* 1166b13–17: ζητοῦσι τε οἱ μοχθηροὶ μεθ' ὧν συνημερεύουσιν, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ φεύγουσιν· ... πολλῶν καὶ δυσχερῶν ... μεθ' ἑτέρων δ' ὄντες ἐπιλανθάνονται. T. Nawar applies this passage to the negative experience Augustine had with his friends; see Tamer Nawar, 'Adiutrix Virtutum? Augustine on Friendship and Virtue,' in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, ed. Stern-Gillet and Gurtler, 197–225, here 209.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Gerald W. Schlabach, 'Friendship as Adultery: Social Reality and Sexual Metaphor in Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin,' *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 125–147, here 130.

¹⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 191979), §§ 25–27.

¹⁴⁷ *Ser.* 87,10,12 (*PL* 38, 537): *Multum valent et boni amici ad bonum, et mali amici ad malum.*

¹⁴⁸ *Enarr. Ps.* 131,6 (*CSEL* 95/3, 296). Cf. Nolte, *Augustins Freundschaftsideal*, 28.

in a broader community of young philosophical friends and African monks and bishops. Not only in the famous scene of the Milanese garden but in all these situations, Alypius 'stood by his side' and 'followed him step by step'. He thus became for Augustine 'a brother of his heart' and a real substitute for the nameless friend lost in Augustine's youth. This time, however, it was a 'true friendship' in Augustine's eyes, anchored in God and surpassing death. To Jerome in 394/395, Augustine can write on Alypius' address: 'If he could see you, then I did, only through his eyes. He and I are not two by the soul but only by the body, as anyone who knows us will confirm.'¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁹ *Ep. 28,1,1 (CSEL 34/1, 104): ... cum te ille ibi videbat, ego videbam sed oculis eius. Non enim animo me atque illum sed corpore duos, qui noverit, dixerit.*