

## AUGUSTINE ON THE DANGERS OF FRIENDSHIP

The philosophers of antiquity had much to say about the place of friendship in the good life and its role in helping us live virtuously. Augustine is unusual in giving substantial attention to the dangers of friendship and its potential to serve as an obstacle (rather than an aid) to virtue. Despite the originality of Augustine's thought on this topic, this area of his thinking has received little attention. This paper will show how Augustine, especially in the early books of the *Confessiones*, carefully examines the potential of friendship to lead us astray. In particular, friendships may prove an impediment to virtue by: derailing our practical reasoning (rather than aiding it); fostering vices (rather than virtues); and misdirecting our love. Augustine's investigation of the murky depths of friendship shows an original philosopher and keen observer of the human condition at work.

### I

The philosophers of classical antiquity, and the classical tradition at large, gave substantial attention to friendship and its role in the good life and the good city.<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle, friendship 'is virtue of a sort, or involves virtue; further, it is most necessary for life' (ἔστι γὰρ ἀρετὴ τις ἢ μετ' ἀρετῆς, ἔτι δ' ἀναγκαϊότατον εἰς τὸν βίον, *Eth. Nic.* 1155a3-5), and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he goes on to give friendship greater attention than any of the cardinal virtues. Friendship is presented primarily as either a constitutive part of virtue or else as an aid to its attainment and we are told that it is φιλία, over and above everything else (including justice), that legislators are concerned with instituting in a city (1155a22-4). On Aristotle's view, the good person seems to need friends to lead a good life (1097b16-22). A friend helps a person attain things or pursue activities that they could not attain or pursue on their own (1169b6-7); the good person derives pleasure from the virtuous activity of his or her friends (1169b30-1170a4); friends help each other deliberate and attain understanding (1112b8-11, 1155a14-16, 1172a1-8); and since the good person's friend is another self (1170b5-7), awareness of a friend's good activities (somehow) seems to help a person attain self-knowledge (1169b33-1170a1; cf. *Mag. mor.* 1213a10-26).

<sup>1</sup> The pseudo-Platonic *Definitions* define φιλία as 'agreeing about what is admirable and just; deciding on the same way of life; having the same views about moral decision and moral conduct; agreeing on a way of life; sharing on the basis of benevolence; sharing in rendering and accepting favours' (413a10-b2). Plato himself raises many of the questions which would become staples of later philosophical reflection. He explores: the relation between ἐρως and φιλία (especially throughout the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus*); friendship and frankness (throughout the *Phaedrus*, though also touching upon it elsewhere, e.g. *Grg.* 486e6-487a3); and the tension between the putative self-sufficiency of the good person and the necessity of friendship for a good life (e.g. *Lysis* 214e2-215c2).

While some writers indicated the potential for friendships to lead us astray,<sup>2</sup> most philosophers followed Aristotle's lead in focussing on the benefits of friendship and its place in the virtuous life.<sup>3</sup> This seems to have been true (as far as we can tell) of both the Epicureans and the Stoics,<sup>4</sup> and the most influential Roman treatment of friendship—that of Cicero—also followed suit. In his mature (but seemingly rushed) *De Amicitia*, Cicero defines *amicitia* as agreement on human and divine affairs accompanied by *benevolentia* and *caritas*, and takes friendship (alongside wisdom) to be the greatest of the gifts of the gods (*Amic.* 20). Like Aristotle, Cicero emphasizes the important role of friendship in the virtuous life and friendship's basis in our natural sociability (*Amic.* 18–21, 52–4, 86–8). While even false friendships seem to bring benefits and ethical improvement (*Amic.* 26), Cicero emphasizes that virtue is the root and source of friendship (*Amic.* 20, 27–8, 100) and that (true) friendship may obtain only among the good (*Amic.* 18, 36–7, 65–6). Friends share common purpose and activity (*Amic.* 61), advise each other (*Amic.* 44) and support each other (*Amic.* 21, 59). Their virtues are presented as mutually reinforcing and, as Cicero makes clear throughout, friendship was given by nature as an aid to virtue, not as a companion of vice (*uirtutum amicitia adiutrix a natura data est, non uitiorum comes, Amic.* 83).<sup>5</sup>

## II

Friendship receives relatively little attention in the Christian scriptures.<sup>6</sup> It first appears as a significant theme among Latin Christian thinkers in the late fourth century in Augustine himself and in his contemporaries: Ambrose of Milan and Paulinus of

<sup>2</sup> This theme seems to have attained greatest prominence among writers of the Hellenistic age concerned with the potential for kings to be misled by flattery. See D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997), 98–103; J.T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Friendship, Flattery, & Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (Leiden, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> In a brief aside Aristotle does say that friendship among the bad is a vice (*Eth. Nic.* 1172a8–10) but does not give the matter much attention. Further, to some influential commentators (e.g. J. Cooper, 'Friendship and the good in Aristotle', *PhR* 86 [1977], 290–315) it has seemed that friendship among those who are less than good makes the friends better.

<sup>4</sup> Epicurus stressed the necessity of friendship (e.g. Cic. *Fin.* 1.65–70; Lucr. 5.1011–27 = LS 23K) and saw it as a virtue (e.g. *Sent. Vat.* 23 = LS 22F1). The Stoics thought friendship existed only among the virtuous (Diog. Laert. 7.124); how the friend might be said by the Stoics to be choice-worthy for his own sake is briefly discussed by Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 11.22–6 = LS 60G). 'LS' refers to A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> In a nod to Roman practice, Cicero gives substantial attention to the possible tension between the demands of friendship and the common weal (*Amic.* 36–44). Thus he notes that sometimes a friend's desires may not be just through and through but that *amicitia* admits (and indeed may demand) minor peccadilloes in defence of a friend's life or reputation. Such acts are permissible so long as they do not distance us too greatly from the virtuous path (*Amic.* 61).

<sup>6</sup> One struggles to find examples of friendship in the Old Testament beyond that of Jonathan and David in the Books of Samuel. Similarly, friendship does not appear to be a prominent theme in the New Testament. While the term φίλος (*amicus*) does appear a number of times, sometimes with positive connotations (most notably at John 15:13–14), φιλία (*amicitia*) in fact only appears explicitly once and does so in a negative context, where what it spoken of is friendship of this world which is hostile to God: *amicitia huius mundi inimica est Dei* (James 4:4). Where those attributes associated closely by the classical tradition with friendship are sometimes invoked in scripture, they are not typically couched in the language of friendship. Thus, for instance, it is the multitude of believers (*multitudo credentium*) who are said to share one heart and one soul and who hold all things in common (Acts 4:32; cf. Acts 2:44). The believers are not there described as friends, nor is the relation that obtains between them described as one of friendship. For further discussion, see the essays in Fitzgerald (n. 2).

Nola.<sup>7</sup> Ambrose sought to appropriate classical (especially Ciceronian) views of friendship. Like Aristotle and Cicero (and unlike earlier Christians), he explicitly names friendship a virtue (*uirtus est enim amicitia*, *Off.* 3.134) and extols its splendours (*nil est in rebus humanis pulchrius*, *Off.* 3.132).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Paulinus seems to have found no significant role for *amicitia* in the Christian life and preferred to use the language of kinship rather than that of *amicitia* to describe the relation that should obtain among Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Augustine wrote no treatise on friendship but discusses the nature of *amicitia* in a number of his works.<sup>10</sup> In his earliest surviving work, *Contra Academicos* (probably completed by 387), Augustine was happy to quote the Ciceronian definition of friendship and give it his stamp of approval (*siquidem amicitia rectissime atque sanctissime definita est, rerum humanarum et diuinarum cum beneuolentia et caritate consensio*, *c. Acad.* 3.6.13; cf. *Cic. Amic.* 20). Shortly thereafter, in his treatment of virtue in his *De Diuersis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus* (written between 388 and 395), Augustine also follows the early Ciceronian account of *De Inuentione* (2.166) incredibly closely (often copying Cicero word for word) and focusses on the positive ethical role of *amicitia*.<sup>11</sup> However, by the time Augustine came to write an epistle to his acquaintance Marcianus (*Ep.* 258, probably written around 395),<sup>12</sup> he seems to have had the chance to give further thought to the place of *amicitia* in the Christian life and goes beyond parrotting Cicero.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the broader historical context, see D. Konstan, 'Problems in the history of Christian friendship', *J ECS* 4 (1996), 87–113.

<sup>8</sup> In the final chapter of his *De Officiis*, Ambrose closely follows Cicero's *De Amicitia*. While his ability to supply biblical examples of *amicitia* is curtailed by the relative absence of the theme in scripture, he can muster a considerable number of biblical examples when called to (e.g. *Off.* 2.36–7, 3.80). Ambrose praises the faithful friend as a *medicamentum uitae* (*Off.* 3.129) and thinks friendship acts as a remedy against arrogance (*Off.* 3.138).

<sup>9</sup> Paulinus says that God's call has separated him from 'friendship of flesh and blood' (*amicitia carnis et sanguinis*, *Ep.* 4.4; cf. *Ep.* 11.3) and seems to reserve the term *amicitia* primarily (though not exclusively) for worldly friendships, which he criticizes as being deficient and characterized by flattery (e.g. *Ep.* 40.2). Whereas Ambrose most often uses *caritas* and *amicitia* interchangeably, for Paulinus it is *caritas* (and not *amicitia*) that joins the members of the body of Christ together (e.g. *Ep.* 4.1, 11.2). Unlike *amicitia*, *caritas* does not seem to arise so much out of spontaneous human sympathy, or similitude in character, or regard for virtue, but rather by means of divine will (*Ep.* 13). For Paulinus' denigration of *amicitia* see P. Fabre, *Saint Paulin de Nole et l'amitié chrétienne* (Paris, 1949), 142–52. C. White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), 158–9 observes that Fabre overstates the case somewhat; however, Fabre's general analysis is, I think, sound. For agreement, see Konstan (n. 2), 157–60; id. (n. 7), 97–101.

<sup>10</sup> The most substantial study on friendship in Augustine is M. McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* (New York, 1958). However, a better guide to current views on the subject is J.T. Lienhard, 'Friendship, friends', in A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages* (Michigan, 1999), 372–3. The helpful entry of Lienhard lists the significant passages discussing *amicitia* as follows: *Sol.* 1.2.7–1.12.22; *Div. Qu.* 71.5–7; *F. Invis.* 2.3–5.8; *Cat. Rud.* passim; *Trin.* 9.6.11; *Ep. Jo.* 8.5; *C. Ep. Pel.* 1.1; *Civ. Dei* 19.8; *Ep.* 73, 130.4.13–14, 192, 258. To these one might add the following: *Vera Rel.* 47.91; *S.* 336.2; and *Div. Qu.* 31. Abbreviations follow the conventions of Fitzgerald (n. 10).

<sup>11</sup> Like Cicero, Augustine notes that goodwill (*gratia*), seemingly an aspect or element of justice, requires keeping in mind friendships and a desire to repay good deeds rendered (*Div. Qu.* 31.1). Friendship (*amicitia*) is then named among a number of things that might be sought as much on account of their value or standing (*dignitas*) as because of their enjoyment (*fructus*) (*Div. Qu.* 31.3).

<sup>12</sup> For the date, see A. Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire I: Afrique (303–533)* (Paris, 1982), 691–2. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography – New Edition with an Epilogue* (Berkeley, 2000), 60 identifies this Marcianus as the future prefect of Rome. Both the date and the identity of Augustine's correspondent (beyond his name) are not entirely certain.

<sup>13</sup> As demonstrated by H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Goteborg, 1967), Augustine's citation of the Latin classics and his view of their worth diminished sharply after his

In this letter to Marcianus, which is Augustine's most detailed discussion of *amicitia* outside of the *Confessiones*, Augustine emphasizes that Cicero's definition of friendship was incomplete and that, in order for true friendship to obtain, the relevant *consensio* must be based 'in Jesus Christ our Lord and our true peace' (*Ep.* 258.4; cf. *Conf.* 4.4.7). Augustine reminds Marcianus that they were not *true* friends before their conversions because those who are not Christians cannot be true friends (*Ep.* 258.1–2), and he notes that, in wishing well for him by worldly lights, Marcianus in fact wished ill for him (*Ep.* 258.2–3). Even though Augustine strongly invokes the language of *amicitia* through classical quotations and tells Marcianus that they are now friends in a genuine way (*Ep.* 258.2),<sup>14</sup> this letter does not discuss the nature or ethical role of *amicitia* in any detail nor does it offer us a clear vision of Christian friendship.<sup>15</sup>

In investigating Augustine's conception of friendship in his various other works (especially in his other letters), scholars have brought attention to the importance of mutual correction and rebuke in Augustine's conception of *uera amicitia*,<sup>16</sup> and also to the complex developments in his thinking concerning the ideal balance between love of neighbour and love of God.<sup>17</sup> However, setting aside for now the *Confessiones*, what is perhaps most striking about the image of *amicitia* that emerges from Augustine's writings is the attention drawn to friendship's precariousness in this earthly life. Augustine often emphasizes that professions of friendship, like much else, must be taken on trust (for example, *Vtil. Cred.* 8.20, 10.24, 11.26; *F. Invis.* 1.2–2.4; *Civ. Dei* 11.3) and argues that, while one can directly perceive the (putative) friend's acts, one cannot directly perceive their character or will (*uoluntas*; for instance,

Pauline turn and his ordination as a bishop. See also M. Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron* (Paris, 1958).

<sup>14</sup> Lucan (7.62–3), Cicero (*Amic.* 20), Terence (*An.* 189) and Virgil (*Ecl.* 4.13–14) are all cited in this short letter.

<sup>15</sup> The relationship that Augustine sees as obtaining between himself and Marcianus is one that does not seem to go beyond the bounds of *germanitas* and *caritas* shared by all Christians in virtue of their being Christian. Tellingly, in a crucial part of the letter Augustine appeals to one of the great commandments, *diliges proximum tuum tamquam te ipsum* (*Ep.* 258.4), invoking not the friend (to whom perhaps preferential duties are owed) but the neighbour. He also signs off the letter by referring to Marcianus no longer as his friend but as his *frater* (*Ep.* 258.5).

<sup>16</sup> In his correspondence, Augustine deploys the language of *amicitia* to a number of ends, from asking favours of imperial authorities (e.g. *Ep.* 133.3) to rebuking and correcting acquaintances (e.g. *Ep.* 259.3). J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (Oxford and New York, 2012) proposes some unifying themes: that Augustine developed a view of Christian *amicitia* as being characterized by mutual correction and rebuke; that this was similar to Paulinus' conception of *amicitia Christiana*; and that (public) rebuke and correction, interwoven with the language of *amicitia*, were distinctive elements of Augustine's letters. Ebbeler's insights are valuable; however, some caution must be exercised here. The Christian scriptures say little positive about friendship (see n. 6 above); they speak, above all, of *fraternal* correction and the relation that obtains among all Christians in virtue of their being Christian (*amor* or *caritas*, not *amicitia*). Paulinus follows suit in that he does *not* seem to conceive of the relation that obtains (or should obtain) between Christians (and which involves the mutual correction Ebbeler correctly draws attention to) as *amicitia* but rather as *societas* or *germanitas* (see n. 9 above). Matters are more difficult with regard to Augustine but a substantial number of the letters that Ebbeler draws attention to involving correction and rebuke (e.g. *Ep.* 23, 25, 28, 44, 109, 110) most often invoke the language of *germanitas* rather than that of *amicitia*. As scholars have observed, Augustine's employment of the language of *amicitia* seems to recede after the *Confessiones* (see, for instance, Lienhard [n. 10], 373; Konstan [n. 2], 161; id. [n. 7], 103), and Augustine seems to move away from talk of *amicitia* and towards talk of *caritas*, *amor*, *germanitas*, *societas* and the like.

<sup>17</sup> See O. O'Donovan, 'Usus and fruitio in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I', *JThS* 33 (1982), 361–97; White (n. 9), 196–217; R. Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven, 1993).

*F. Invis.* 1.2–2.3). Thus one cannot—Augustine thinks—strictly speaking *know* whether true friendship obtains between oneself and another. It is in light of these considerations that Augustine typically emphasizes the fragility of friendship. Actions intended for the good of another may be misunderstood and characters are prone to change. We cannot be fully confident even of what we ourselves will be like on the morrow, let alone another (*Ep.* 130.4).

The late-antique epistolary context is important here and informs the worries Augustine often displays about misunderstandings (for example, *Ep.* 95.4) and his anxiety over absent friends (for instance, *Civ. Dei* 19.8).<sup>18</sup> No doubt his concerns about the volatility of friendship were also influenced by the estrangements he observed between even very eminent Christians, such as Jerome and Rufinus (for example, *Ep.* 73.6),<sup>19</sup> as well as his own experiences of broken friendships.<sup>20</sup> While Augustine praises friendship as offering consolation in times of hardship and grief (for instance, *Ep.* 73.10), the uncertainties of friendship seem to have preyed heavily upon his mind; even when praising the solace offered by friends in times of trouble, he typically laments (in the same breath) the anxieties that such friendships produce (for example, *Civ. Dei* 19.8).

The volatile nature of friendship thus emerges as a consistent theme in Augustine's thought. However, in the *Confessiones*, which contains Augustine's most detailed—and most philosophically and theologically sophisticated—treatment of friendship, Augustine gives substantial attention to a slightly different topic, namely the capacity for friendship to make us worse and the manner in which friendship both manifests and fosters various vices. This important but neglected topic is my focus here. It is treated in most detail in the early books of the *Confessiones* (particularly Books 2 to 4), where Augustine carefully examines the various ways in which friendship may prove an obstacle, rather than an aid, to virtue and happiness. In what follows I shall first show how Augustine examines the ways in which friendship may exacerbate weakness of will by impeding practical reasoning and fostering pride (section III). I will then (sections IV and V) show how Augustine thinks that friendship may act not as a locus for *caritas*, but rather for *cupiditas* which prevents us from loving God as we ought. Finally (section VI), I will show how Augustine draws a connection between love of self, love of another and desire for immortality (in a manner which finds parallel in Plato's *Symposium*), and how this grounds his view that friendship may distract us from love of God.

<sup>18</sup> Much writing about *amicitia* in this period was conducted by means of letters and was even often about friendships cultivated purely through letters. Friends were often separated by significant distances, delays in communication, lost correspondence, misunderstandings and deep uncertainty. See R. Morello and A. Morrison (ed.), *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford, 2007); J. Ebbeler, 'Tradition, innovation, and epistolary mores in Late Antiquity', in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2009), 270–84. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing that the epistolary context merited discussion.

<sup>19</sup> On this broken friendship, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London, 1975). For Jerome's 'bitter, suspicious attitude towards friendship', see White (n. 9), 140–5. For a clear discussion of Jerome's correspondence, with special attention to the language of *amicitia*, see B. Conring, *Hieronymus als Briefschreiber: ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Epistolographie* (Tübingen, 2001), 5–36, 71–82.

<sup>20</sup> In *Ep.* 259, Augustine writes to Cornelius (whom he addresses as his *frater*). Cornelius had asked Augustine for consolation upon the death of his wife (*Ep.* 259.1) but Augustine instead harangues him, adverting to his earlier history (*Ep.* 259.2–3) and warning him to stay away from other women. While Augustine advertises his friendly intent (e.g. *Ep.* 259.2), the tone is anything but and is testament to a friendship of his youth which had turned less than friendly. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this letter to my attention.

## III

The *Confessiones* is a unique work: part autobiography, part prayer, part exegesis and part philosophical-and-theological investigation. The first nine books chart Augustine's *exitus* from and *reditus* to God over a period of 33 years, but Augustine's reflection upon his life is interwoven with philosophical and theological investigation (the two cannot be disentangled).<sup>21</sup> It is in the early books of the *Confessiones*, when discussing his wayward youth and puzzling about the nature and origin of evil, that *amicitia* receives the greatest attention from Augustine.<sup>22</sup> As quickly becomes clear, the capacity for friendship to lead us astray is an important (yet neglected) theme in Augustine's examination of the origins of evil and sinful action.

Friendship first comes to the fore at the beginning of the second book (*Conf.* 2.1.1–2.2):<sup>23</sup>

exarsi enim aliquando satiari inferis in adulescentia, et siluescere ausus sum uariis et umbris amoribus, et contabuit species mea, et computrui coram oculis tuis placens mihi et placere cupiens oculis hominum. et quid erat quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari? sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usque ad animum quatenus est luminosus limes amicitiae, sed exhalabantur nebulae de limosa concupiscentia carnis et scatebra pubertatis, et obnubilabant atque obfuscabant cor meum, ut non discerneret serenitas dilectionis a caligine libidinis.

This passage is significant in marking the first mention of *concupiscentia carnis* in the *Confessiones*. For Augustine, the three lusts detailed in 1 John 2:16—*concupiscentia carnis*, *concupiscentia oculorum* and *superbia uitae* (most often *ambitio saeculi* in Augustine)—are the main sources of wickedness (*Conf.* 3.8.16; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.3.6, 3.5.9). In his subsequent discussion Augustine gives careful attention to how human friendships may depart from the *luminosus limes amicitiae*,<sup>24</sup> and it quickly becomes clear that these lusts are intertwined in earthly *amicitia*. In particular, Augustine reflects over the theft of the pears, a *seemingly* slight misdemeanour of his younger days, and uses the episode to raise important questions concerning the origins of evil and sin. The allusions to the Fall are clear and the question that preoccupies Augustine here is how and why such sins should occur (*Conf.* 2.9.17):

cur ergo eo me delectabat quo id non faciebam solus? [...] solus non facerem furtum illud, in quo me non libebat id quod furabar sed quia furabar: quod me solum facere prorsus non liberet, nec facerem. o nimis inimica amicitia, seductio mentis inuestigabilis, ex ludo et ioco nocendi auditas et alieni damni appetitus nulla lucri mei, nulla ulciscendi libidine! sed cum dicitur, 'eamus, faciamus', et pudet non esse impudentem.

<sup>21</sup> One should reject the (old) notion that the first nine books are autobiographical and the latter four philosophical or theological. The two genres are intertwined throughout and autobiography is not pursued for its own sake. Augustine's own fall and redemption are a microcosm for that of humanity and he discusses his own life primarily with an eye towards pursuing his theological aims. For further (recent) discussion of the structure and genre of the *Confessiones* by an authority, see J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, 2005), 63–86.

<sup>22</sup> The noun *amicitia* appears seventeen times in the thirteen books of the *Confessiones*, eleven of these occurrences being in the first four books. The occurrences are at *Conf.* 1.13.21, 1.20.31, 2.2.2, 2.5.10, 2.9.17, 3.1.1, 3.2.3, 3.3.6, 4.4.7 (twice), 4.6.11, 5.10.19, 6.7.11, 6.14.24, 8.3.8, 8.6.13, 9.3.6. These results come from a word search of an electronic version of the text and were checked against results from the *Library of Latin Texts* (<http://clt.brepolis.net/llta>, henceforth the *LLT*).

<sup>23</sup> The first use of the term *amicitia* in the *Confessiones* is also telling: *amicitia enim mundi huius fornicatio est abs te* (*Conf.* 1.13.21; cf. James 4:4; Psalms 72:27).

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of this phrase, see G. O'Daly, 'Friendship and transgression: *luminosus limes amicitiae* (Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2.2) and the themes of *Confessions* 2', in S. Stern-Gillet (ed.), *Reading Ancient Texts Volume II: Aristotle and Neoplatonism* (Leiden and Boston, 2007), 211–23.



In this brief passage, Augustine stresses that had he been alone he would not have committed the sin and that friendship played an important role in bringing about the sinful act. More concretely, he raises three important points: (i) that he loved the theft for its own sake; (ii) that friendship acted as an 'inscrutable seduction of the mind'; and, the closely related point, (iii) that seemingly spontaneously evil can come about from friendly activities.

As regards (i), what deserves attention about Augustine's own case is that he opted to steal the pears even though he recognized that the pears held no attraction for him *and* that this was wrong. That is to say, the pears were not the object of his desire *and* there was no reason to take them.<sup>25</sup> This, Augustine rightly thinks, renders his action deeply mysterious. No one, not even Catiline, commits a crime (or any other action) without a cause (*Conf.* 2.5.11). Even in cases of sin, the relevant goal of action is considered under the guise of some good; one pursues something that one has reason to pursue (and this is the cause of one's action). Thus, for instance, adultery might be pursued under the guise of attaining pleasure and theft under the guise of acquiring wealth. However, in stealing the pears, Augustine did not, he tells us, love the putative good which he acquired, but the theft itself—an act he knew to be wrong—for *its own sake*. We are presented with an account of loving sin *qua* sin (*Conf.* 2.4.9)—of performing a wrongful action purely because it is wrong (and not even because one takes pleasure in the relevant activity). This seems deeply odd—a bit like someone believing something purely because they think it is false. In so far as the agent acted with no reason for action, Augustine is faced with a conundrum. Seeking to explain an intentional action without a reason is like seeking to explain an effect without a cause.<sup>26</sup>

While Augustine does not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion concerning the causes of such cases of sin, he does provide a diagnosis which sheds some light on what has gone wrong on such occasions. Crucially, he emphasizes that friendship was a necessary condition of the sin taking place,<sup>27</sup> and in (ii) he indicates that the sin was occasioned by friendship in some way: that he was seduced by peer pressure into wrongful action (cf. *Conf.* 2.8.16). The invocation of friendship in order to explain the sin and the offering of friendship as a necessary condition for this sort of sin find parallel in Augustine's discussion of Alypius later in the *Confessiones* (6.8.13) and in his analyses of the sin of Adam in later works. Thus, for instance, in *De Ciuitate Dei*, Augustine tells us that in his effort to corrupt humanity, Lucifer began with Eve: *non existimans uirum facile credulum nec errando posse decipi, sed dum alieno cedit errori. sicut enim Aaron erranti populo ad idolum fabricandum non consensit inductus, sed cessit obstrictus* (*Civ. Dei* 14.11).<sup>28</sup>

Augustine perceives that in the case of Adam and also that of Aaron, just as in Augustine's own, the agent's freedom and judgement were somehow constricted or

<sup>25</sup> In speaking of reasons and desires for action, Augustine often couches his discussion in terms of *pulchritudo*, *delectatio*, *decorum* and *species*. Thus, for instance: *quid ego miser in te amaui, o furtum meum[?][...] quaero quid me in furto delectauerit, et ecce species nulla est* (*Conf.* 2.6.12).

<sup>26</sup> Sometimes Augustine is attracted to the thought that sins like those of Adam or Lucifer have no cause (*Lib. Arb.* 2.54; *Civ. Dei* 12.6-9). However, this does *not* seem to be his considered view. He thinks that all events, including sins, have causes (e.g. *Ord.* 1.11-15) and that is precisely why he seeks to explain the sins of (e.g.) Adam and Lucifer (if the events had no cause, no explanation would be possible and searching for one would be pointless).

<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on this point is sustained: *at ego illud solus non facerem, non facerem omnino solus* (*Conf.* 2.9.17).

<sup>28</sup> A similar treatment of the sin of Adam (and of Solomon) occurs in Augustine's more sustained exegesis of Genesis in *De Genesi ad Litteram*. There Adam's sin is credited to *amicali quadam beneuolentia*: a fear that he might lose his *amicitia* with Eve (*Gen. Litt.* 11.42.59).

curtailed owing to the presence of his friends. In these cases the agent perceives the sin *qua* sin (he is not taken in) and yet does it anyway. Just as Aaron did not consent to making the idol because he was convinced but rather yielded to compulsion, so too Adam sinned *not* because he was deceived ‘but because of the bond of fellowship’ (*sed sociali necessitudine*, *Civ. Dei* 14.11; cf. *Gn. Litt.* 11.42.59).

On Augustine’s view, friendship somehow constricts our freedom; it overrides conscience and practical reasoning and leads us to sin. The mechanism of friendship’s *seductio* is not entirely perspicuous, but Augustine probes slightly further into its nature in (iii): ‘from games and jokes arises an appetite for hurting another without even personal benefit or a desire for revenge; it is enough when someone says: “come on, let’s do it” for one to feel shame at not being shameless’ (*Conf.* 2.9.17). This element provokes puzzlement (*quis exaperit istam tortuosissimam et implicatissimam nodositatem?* *Conf.* 2.10.18), but Augustine proposes that the relevant sinful acts are most plausibly seen as manifestations of the vice of *superbia* (*Conf.* 2.6.14).<sup>29</sup> To understand why, one should recall that a prominent theme of these early books is how friendships wrongly cultivate our sense of pride and shame and that Augustine began this second book of the *Confessiones* with a discussion of how a desire for the approval of his friends led him astray (*Conf.* 2.1.1–2.2). Before investigating the origins of sin in the theft of the pears, Augustine had dwelt upon how his desire for praise by his friends led him to evil acts (and the pretence of evil acts) so that he might be accepted by them (*Conf.* 2.3.7). Subsequently, he established a link between *honor temporalis* (which can give rise to *uindictae auditas*) and *amicitia hominum*. It is, Augustine says, ‘on account of all these [*honor, auditas, amicitia*], and the like, that sin is committed’ (*propter uniuersa haec atque huius modi peccatum admittitur*, *Conf.* 2.5.10). Augustine does not give great attention to explicating the relation between *honor, auditas* and *amicitia*, or which might ground the other, but it does seem that certain activities that manifest pride, such as boasting, are facilitated by one’s friends being present and that Augustine is concerned by how friendships otherwise encourage and sustain the vice of *superbia*.<sup>30</sup>

On the account we are presented with here, a person’s concern for the opinion of others (particularly their friends) does not restrain them from immoral behaviour, but instead fosters their *superbia* and seems to make them commit greater evils than they would normally. Here the contrast between Augustine and his classical predecessors is especially noticeable. Whereas Aristotle (for example) focussed on the contribution of friendship to *aiding* our practical reasoning or sustaining and developing our virtues (see above), Augustine unveils—in a novel and penetrating manner—how friendship may *impede* our deliberation and encourage our vices, how friendship constrains an agent’s freedom in deliberation and occasions sin. Further, friendships may misdirect

<sup>29</sup> With regard to the theft, Augustine considers a number of possible vices from which the sinful act might have arisen (*Conf.* 2.6.13). These include: *superbia, ambitio, saeuitia, curiositas, ignorantia, ignauia, luxuria, auaritia, inuidentia* and *ira*. He favours that vice which would later preoccupy his attention the most: a perverse desire to imitate God, which is (in turn) an essential component of *superbia* (*Conf.* 2.6.14; cf. *Civ. Dei* 12.1). Augustine often takes the primal sin to be pride (e.g. *Conf.* 2.6.14) and sometimes even claims, echoing Sir 10:13, that the beginning of every sin is pride (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 12.6; *Trin.* 12.14).

<sup>30</sup> Many of the activities that friends regularly engage in, such as paying each other compliments, might be seen (from Augustine’s perspective) to exacerbate pride. Even in *Ep.* 258, which does not dwell upon the ills of friendship, Augustine had drawn attention to how friendships inflated his pride (*Ep.* 258.1).



our sense of shame (peer pressure makes one too ashamed to refrain from sinful actions) and inflate that dangerous vice: pride. This is the closest Augustine comes to untangling the knot. It is the psychologist's rather than the philosopher's mode of explanation but it is none the worse for that. Even though the answer Augustine provides is not complete or systematic, the insight is sharp.

#### IV

In the fourth book of the *Confessiones*, Augustine dwells on his Manichaean period and the dangers of false religion.<sup>31</sup> He also moves from discussing a circle of friends to offering a detailed discussion of a close friendship between himself and one dear friend: the sort of friendship particularly prized by the classical tradition (cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1171a14-15). The friendship depicted in the fourth book of the *Confessiones* was intimate and warm (and it has struck many modern readers sympathetically). Accordingly, one might think to find in this discussion an account of how friendship might serve as an impetus to virtue or at least a depiction of a robust concern for the other for his own sake. However, this would, I think, be mistaken. Instead, in recounting this friendship with his unnamed friend, Augustine subtly shows how a close friendship (of the sort usually deemed praiseworthy in antiquity) may lack *caritas* and further distance the friends from the virtuous path.

In discussing this close friendship, Augustine makes one think that both *concupiscentia carnis* and *concupiscentia oculorum* were involved when he tells us that this friendship had been especially sweet (*suavi mihi super omnes suavitates illius uitae meae, Conf. 4.4.7*).<sup>32</sup> However, what deserves special attention is that the friendship, not yet a year long, was a shallow one and an instance of misdirected love. Looking back, Augustine realizes that it was not true friendship, as it was not bound by the *caritas* of the Holy Spirit (*Conf. 4.4.7*). This friendship had its origin not in a shared regard for virtue or love of God, but simply in shared hobbies (*Conf. 4.4.7*), and Augustine strongly emphasizes his role in distancing his friend from orthodoxy and bringing him into the fold of Manichaean heresy (for example, *Conf. 4.4.7*). That this friendship (and by extension, such friendships) manifested and fostered blameworthy vices becomes especially clear in Augustine's subtle account of his friend as 'another self'.

Talking of friends as 'other selves' was an established literary topos.<sup>33</sup> In its common use, 'another self' and cognate phrases are used to indicate a friend for whom one has a robust concern, namely a concern for the friend *for his own sake*—even to the extent that one cares for the friend as much as one cares for oneself. Augustine does not here use the phrase *alter ego* or *alter idem*, but does employ cognate locutions which are part of

<sup>31</sup> For recent discussion of the anti-Manichaean context with attention to how it shapes the *Confessiones*, see J.D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma; Volume 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373–388* (Philadelphia, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> That many of the celebrated friendships of antiquity had an erotic aspect is fairly clear. For judicious remarks on Augustine's friendship in this regard, see J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine Confessions Volume 2: Commentary Books 1–7* (Oxford, 1992), 108–10. It should be emphasized, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, that it is the *erotic* (rather than the homoerotic or homosexual) aspect of the friendship that Augustine finds problematic.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase 'another self' finds its origin, at least in philosophical discourse, in Aristotle (e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 1166a31-2; cf. *Mag. mor.* 1213a12).

the tradition.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Augustine writes: *mirabar enim ceteros mortales uiuere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat, et me magis, quia ille alter eram, uiuere illo mortuo mirabar* (*Conf.* 4.6.11; cf. *Arist. Mag. mor.* 1213a12);<sup>35</sup> he goes on to speak of his friend as half his soul (*dimidium animae*) or of himself and his friend as one soul in two bodies: *ego sensi animam meam et animam illius unam fuisse animam in duobus corporibus* (*Conf.* 4.6.11; cf. *Arist. Mag. mor.* 1211a32-3).<sup>36</sup> However, while Augustine evokes these notions, it does not seem that he could be said to have treated his friend as another self in the manner that the ordinary sense would have it, that is by showing the same level of concern for his friend as he did for himself, or by caring for the friend for his own sake.<sup>37</sup> Instead, we find that when his friend lay dying, Augustine rejected his friend's desire to return to Christianity; further, he tells us of his hope that his friend would recover so that he 'could do with him what he willed' (*distuli omnes motus meos, ut conualesceret prius essetque idoneus uiribus uoletudinis, cum quo agere possem quod vellem*, *Conf.* 4.4.8). Similarly, when telling us how he had turned his friend away from Christianity (*Conf.* 4.7.7), we find Augustine saying that he had then hoped that his 'friend's soul would retain what it had received' from Augustine (*baptizatus est nesciens, me non curante et praesumente id retinere potius animam eius quod a me acceperat*, *Conf.* 4.4.8).

Concern for another for their own sake requires desiring what is good for that person and seems to require recognizing the other person as another person: one with their own desires, goals and, crucially, as an agent within their own right. However, in the account we are offered in the *Confessiones*, Augustine offers us a clear view of how, despite the appearance of a close friendship, one may fall short in this respect and view one's friend as a *possession*. When the friend, after having been baptized while unconscious, takes issue with Augustine's derision, he acts for the first time as his own person. It is this which shocked Augustine (he tells us he was *stupefactus* at his friend's *mirabilis et repentina libertas*, *Conf.* 4.4.8), and this show of independence immediately prior to the friend's death freed the friend from Augustine's bond. It also seems to have marked the end of their friendship.

Following the friend's passing, Augustine's concern for his friend is further revealed as lacking in *caritas*. While the unnamed friend's death greatly grieved Augustine (*quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum ...*, *Conf.* 4.4.9), such grief should not be considered as evidence for a robust concern for his friend. Augustine focusses solely on

<sup>34</sup> Augustine does use the phrase *alter ego* on one occasion (*Ep.* 38.1) but the phrase is in fact rare both in Augustine and in Classical Latin literature. The one significant instance I have found through a search of the *LLT* is in Ovid (*Am.* 1.7.31). The closest one can find in Cicero's writings are the following: *quicum ego cum loquor nihil fingam* (*Att.* 1.18.1); *me enim ipsum multo magis accuso, deinde te quasi me alterum et simul meae culpa socium quaero* (*Att.* 3.15.4); *ego tecum tamquam mecum loquor* (*Att.* 8.14.2). However, Cicero does use *alter idem* (e.g. *Amic.* 80).

<sup>35</sup> Notice that 'other self' is often used in English translations here. Thus, 'for he was my "other self"' (H. Chadwick, *Augustine: The Confessions* [Oxford, 1991], 59), 'I his other self living still' (F. Sheed, *Augustine: The Confessions, Second Edition* [Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2006], 61), 'for I was his second self' (R.S. Pine-Coffin, *Augustine: The Confessions* [London, 1961], 77).

<sup>36</sup> These expressions echo Horace (*Carm.* 1.3.8, 1.17.5) and Ovid (*Tr.* 4.4.72). However, the most relevant treatment is Cic. *Amic.* 80-1, which makes clearest how such talk of other selves, one soul in two bodies, and the like is to be connected to loving another for their own sake.

<sup>37</sup> In other works, whether things are to be enjoyed or loved for their own sake is discussed in terms of whether *fruitio* or *usus* is appropriate to the object of one's love (e.g. *Doc. Chr.* 1.22.20). However, such terms seem to be absent from the *Confessiones* and for this reason my account does not invoke them. For discussion, see O'Donovan (n. 17); Canning (n. 17), 79-115.

his own pain in a profoundly selfish manner and he notes that he would *not* have given his life for his friend in the manner of Orestes and Pylades (*Conf.* 4.6.11). Instead, wallowing in his sadness, he tells us that his life of misery was dearer to him than his friend: *Solus fletus erat dulcis mihi et successerat amico me in deliciis animi mei* (*Conf.* 4.4.9; cf. 4.6.11). Recalling Augustine's earlier account of how he was happy to be sad at the stories of Virgil (*Conf.* 1.13.21, cf. 3.2.2-4), it becomes evident that, now dead, his friend served as an occasion for grief, just as he had earlier served Augustine as an occasion for other affectations and enthusiasms. In this way then, Augustine reveals the potential for even (seemingly) close friendships to be lacking in *caritas* or virtuous inclinations.

## V

In the first book of the *Confessiones*, Augustine remarked that the instincts implanted in him by God were good; his interior sense(s) pushed him towards truth and self-preservation (*Conf.* 1.20.31). However, this comes with an admonitory remark: *hoc enim peccabam, quod non in ipso sed in creaturis eius me atque ceteris uoluptates, sublimitates, ueritates quaerebam* (*Conf.* 1.20.31). Despite our natural desires being good, we are—Augustine thinks—liable to mistake their object(s) or to weigh them inappropriately, for instance by loving God's creatures in place of their creator. It turns out that, like Manichaeism (the overt focus of the fourth book), friendship may act as a kind of false religion, an inferior substitute for seeking and loving God as we ought.

For Augustine, the desire to know and love God is grounded in the human desire for happiness. Augustine takes it to be a fact of human psychology that humans seek to possess happiness eternally and, since possessing happiness eternally requires eternal life, humans desire eternal life.<sup>38</sup> This desire for eternal life finds itself coupled with an aversion of prospective extinction: fear of death (*C. Faust.* 21.3-7; *Lib. Arb.* 3.7.20-8.23). These two together may be seen as a primary (two-part) motivational force in so far as (Augustine thinks) they are crucial to explaining many of our actions.<sup>39</sup> On this account, humans are deficient and have a fundamental lack within themselves; being conscious of this and that we are unable to secure eternal happiness we are meant to search for a means to do so. Realizing that we cannot do so through our own efforts, we are meant to come to the Church and to God. On such an account, fear of death and perceiving of our own inadequacy are crucial indicators to man that he should seek God. The *Confessiones* begins, famously, by describing this: *et laudare te uult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae, et homo circumferens mortalitatem suam ... tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te* (*Conf.* 1.1.1).

<sup>38</sup> While the eudaemonist tradition at large took it as a given of human psychology that we all aim at happiness (e.g. *Euthydemus* 278e3-6, 280b5-6, 282a1-2; *Symp.* 204e1-205d9; *Arist. Rh.* 1360b4-7), that we seek to possess *eternal happiness* might seem distinctively Platonic (e.g. *Symp.* 206a). That humans seek eternal happiness is most often made by Augustine as a psychological claim addressing what agents do—rather than a normative claim addressing what agents *should* do—and is a perpetual theme in Augustine from early works, such as *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (e.g. 1.3.4-11.19) and *De Beata Vita* (e.g. 2.11), to later works, such as *De Civitate Dei* (e.g. 14.4) and *De Trinitate* (e.g. 13.7.10).

<sup>39</sup> Augustine perceives even in one who commits suicide a desire for continued existence albeit by means of fame and renown (*Lib. Arb.* 3.8.22-3).

What becomes clear in the early books of the *Confessiones* is the manner in which these notions inform Augustine's views on the dangers of friendship. Augustine makes the connection between loving to be loved, as was his habit in his friendships, and the inner lack that humans feel at the beginning of the third book of the *Confessiones* (3.1.1):

nondum amabam, et amare amabam, et secretiore indigentia oderam me minus indigentem. quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare, et oderam securitatem et uiam sine muscipulis, quoniam fames mihi erat intus ab interiore cibo, te ipso, deus meus.

This more hidden lack (*secretiora indigentia*)—a hunger for inner food—was in fact (as Augustine sees while writing) a desire for eternal happiness, an eternal life of knowing and loving God. As Augustine shows throughout these early books, he felt the hunger but mistook its object. He sought delight in the *suauitas* of his friend rather than that of God (in whom Augustine should have delighted, *Conf.* 4.3.4). Taking the object of his natural desires to be other than it was, he focussed his attention not on God but rather on human friendships and sought to fill the void within him with human *amicitia*. This is one way then in which *amicitia* can mislead. Feeling a lack within ourselves, we focus our delight on human friendships and do not seek God, as we should (*Conf.* 2.5.10, 4.7.12-8.13). Augustine seems to think that *amicitia* deserves special attention (over and above an undue interest in career or wealth) in this regard in so far as it seems especially adept at alleviating the symptoms of the human predicament (which are meant to point a person towards God) while distracting a person from the seriousness of their condition. *Amicitia* provides a distinctive delight and has the potential to act as a substitute for the love and worship of God.<sup>40</sup>

It is in recounting his unnamed friend's death that Augustine remarks on the errors of misplacing love. He notes the misery caused by having a mortal thing as the object of one's delight: *Miser eram, et miser est omnis animus uinctus amicitia rerum mortalium, et dilaniatur cum eas amittit, et tunc sentit miseriam qua miser est et antequam amittat eas* (*Conf.* 4.6.11; cf. 4.8.13). To love mortal things in such a way is, Augustine observes, to be pierced by sorrows (*ad dolores figitur*, *Conf.* 4.10.15):

laudet te ex illis anima mea, deus, creator omnium, sed non in eis figatur glutine amore per sensus corporis. eunt enim quo ibant, ut non sint, et conscindunt eam desiderii pestilentiosis, quoniam ipsa esse uult et requiescere amat in eis quae amat. in illis autem non est ubi, quia non stant: fugiunt.

Augustine takes the lesson to be drawn here to be clear. Such love and delight should not take as its object something mortal but rather something eternal, which cannot be so lost: God (*nam unde me facillime et in intima dolor ille penetrauerat, nisi quia fuderam in harenam animam meam diligendo moriturum ac si non moriturum?* *Conf.* 4.8.13). In focussing on the beauty of the creator's creatures, Augustine forgot to seek the beauty of the creator that such beauty was meant to point him towards (*Conf.* 4.10.15).<sup>41</sup> Thus *amicitia* may alleviate our spiritual hunger but it provides no nourishment. Human

<sup>40</sup> In this way it serves as a better distraction from God than the Manichaean religion which, it is clear, never entirely satisfied Augustine.

<sup>41</sup> See also *Conf.* 10.6.9-8.12. Augustine's remarks on this issue seem to parallel the discussion of the *scala amoris* that we find in the *Symposium* (210a6-c6). Note however that Augustine explicitly remarks that we should *not* become too attached to mortal things, as this seems to impede our ascent (*Conf.* 4.10.15).

friendships may distract us from the poor state of our souls (which we would realize were we alone) and this leads to a failure of self-knowledge. Friendships lead us to (mistakenly) ignore our inner hunger and to believe that we are fine as we are; thus we do not seek God, as we should.

## VI

A careful reading of the friend's death also reveals another aspect of Augustine's thought concerning the dangers of friendship. The death of his close friend marks Augustine's first true confrontation with death in the *Confessiones*.<sup>42</sup> As a result of the friend's death, Augustine tells us he saw death everywhere (*quidquid aspiciebam mors erat, Conf. 4.4.9*) and was consumed with a fear of death (*sed in me nescio quis affectus nimis huic contrarius ortus erat et taedium uiuendi erat in me grauissimum et moriendi metus, Conf. 4.6.11*). Augustine notes that he should have placed his trust and hope in God (*Conf. 4.5.9*); however, he once again sought out earthly friendships to fill the void in his life (*Conf. 4.8.13*). Talking, making jokes, reading books, and debating with friends (*Conf. 4.8.13*) all serve to distract humans from their wretched condition (cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1166b13-17).<sup>43</sup> However, it is what Augustine goes on to say next that is especially interesting. From discussing how friendship may have acted as a distraction from the condition of one's soul, Augustine goes on to draw connections between concern for self, concern for another, and desire for happiness and immortality. He begins by considering the nature of parts, wholes and identity over time (*Conf. 4.10.15*):

cum oriuntur et tendunt esse, quo magis celeriter crescunt ut sint, eo magis festinant ut non sint: sic est modus eorum. tantum dedisti eis, quia partes sunt rerum, quae non sunt omnes simul, sed decedendo ac succedendo agunt omnes uniuersum, cuius partes sunt.

A whole is thus constituted of temporal parts. These parts are transient (*in illis autem non est ubi, quia non stant: fugiunt, Conf. 4.10.15*). As time flows, each part is successively replaced but the parts are linked together to form a (diachronic) whole by a thread of continuity (Augustine provides the helpful example of the syllables of a word spoken aloud). Being creatures of time, Augustine observes that we are limited to only being able to perceive the parts and not the whole at a time (*Conf. 4.11.17*; cf. *Conf. 11.15.20*).

One may find puzzling the inclusion of a discussion of diachronic identity and temporal parts within a discussion of friendship. However, there is a neglected but illuminating parallel (whether or not Augustine was aware of it) to be found, namely that of Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* and the connection proposed there between concern for oneself and another.<sup>44</sup> A brief consideration of the thoughts expressed there does, I

<sup>42</sup> The death of Augustine's father in the previous book was used only as a chronological marker and received a mere five words (*iam defuncto patre ante biennium, Conf. 3.4.7*).

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle notes that 'wicked men seek for people with whom to spend their days, and shun themselves; for they remember many a grievous deed, and anticipate others like them, when they are by themselves, but when they are with others they forget' (*Eth. Nic.* 1166b13-17). The translation here (and below) is that of W.D. Ross, revised by J.O. Urmson, found in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume Two* (Princeton, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> In Augustine's remarks on the nature of beauty and its value (*Conf. 4.13.20*), A. Solignac, *Les Confessions (Livres I-VII) (Bibliothèque Augustinienne 13)* (Paris, 1962), 671 finds parallels to Plotinus (*Enn.* 1.6) but also to passages in Plato: *Symp.* 211d, *Phdr.* 249d, 264c and *Hp. mai.*

propose, reveal a further dimension of Augustine's thought as to why (and how) friendship may distract us from becoming closer to God.

In the *Symposium*, we are told that mortal things do not maintain (qualitative) identity with themselves across time; rather, they are always changing (*Symp.* 207d4–208a3).<sup>45</sup> What persistence mortal things have is attained by means of propagation or reproduction (γέννησις): by an individual leaving behind things that resemble themselves (208a7–b2; cf. *Arist. Pol.* 1252a26–30). 'Mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction' (207c9–d3).<sup>46</sup> The appeal to flux and worries about identity over time are raised in the context of discussing our love for others: how concern for others is connected to concern for our future selves. On Diotima's view, humans (often, it seems, subconsciously) seek immortality or some suitable substitute; it is for this reason that they seek honour and fame: they seek to live on in the memories of others (208c1–e1). Some are pregnant in body and seek to produce children (208e1–5); others are pregnant in soul and seek to produce legislation, poems and the like (209a1–8).

In each case, it seems, the product has something of its producer in it and this form of propagation or reproduction is, we are told, 'what mortals have in place of immortality' (206e7–8). Within this context, φιλία seems desirable because it presents a way of filling a lack within human beings: a lack owing to their mortality. This account finds echoes elsewhere in Plato,<sup>47</sup> and in later philosophical discussions (notably in Aristotle and Cicero),<sup>48</sup> and also finds parallel in Latin literature.<sup>49</sup> On such an account, humans desire immortality but the best they can do is to live on either in their handiwork (for example, *Arist. Eth. Nic.* 1168a5–8), or in the memory of others (notably their friends), or indeed in others (*Cic. Amic.* 22–3).<sup>50</sup>

It seems a similar sentiment may be found in Augustine. Noticing this also casts further light on how the meditation on death and transience in the *Confessiones* is connected to the discussion of friendship (and its dangers). We have seen above how Augustine takes fear of death and a desire for continued existence to be primary

290a–296e. However, as far as I am aware, the parallels I draw attention to between Augustine's discussion and what we find in the *Symposium* have not been discussed.

<sup>45</sup> For reasons I shall not discuss here, Plato seems to take this lack of qualitative identity to threaten an individual's diachronic (numerical) identity.

<sup>46</sup> Translations of the *Symposium* passages are those of A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, found in J.M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: The Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> The *Laws* (721b6–d6) discusses how desire for immortality fuels love of honour and procreation and the *Phaedrus* (276e4–277a4) finds immortality in the sowing of seeds that is the planting of ideas in another's mind. Both offer partial reflections of the thoughts in the *Symposium*.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle remarks that parents 'love their children as themselves (for their issue are by virtue of their separate existence a sort of other selves)' (*Eth. Nic.* 1161b28–9; cf. *Pol.* 1252a26–30). One's child is, as it were, a part of oneself (1134b8–11, 1161b18) in a manner not dissimilar from how one's hair or teeth are a part of oneself (1161b22–4). The parent loves his child as himself, for his child is another self (1161b27–9) in the same way that a friend is another self (1166a31–2, 1170b11–12), and Aristotle remarks upon fathers begetting children and poets begetting poems as follows: 'existence is to all men a thing to be chosen and loved, and that we exist by virtue of activity (i.e. by living and acting), and that the handiwork is, in a sense, the producer in activity; he loves his handiwork, therefore, because he loves his own existence' (1168a5–8). For discussion, see A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford), 1990.

<sup>49</sup> D. Konstan, 'The grieving self: reflections on Lucian's *On mourning* and the consolatory tradition', in H. Baltussen (ed.), *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife* (Swansea, 2013), 139–51, at 143–4 usefully draws attention to this notion of extended self in Lucian and Quintilian.

<sup>50</sup> Cicero says that the friend is a copy (*exemplar*) of oneself (*Cic. Amic.* 23).



motivators of human behaviour. We have also seen that it was the death of his close friend, a part of him (*Conf.* 4.6.11), that occasioned Augustine's fear of death and also how Augustine's friendships distracted him from fear of death. Further, we find that Augustine thinks that it is the 'making of one out of many that we love in friends' (... *quasi fomitibus conflare animos et ex pluribus unum facere. hoc est quod diligitur in amicis*, *Conf.* 4.8.13-9.14; cf. Cic. *Amic.* 92). Out of disparate elements, friendship establishes some sort of unity and such a unity is what we desire. *Amicitia quoque hominum caro nodo dulcis est propter unitatem de multis animis* (*Conf.* 2.5.10; cf. *Ord.* 2.18.48; Cic. *Amic.* 92). This desire for unity may, in part, be explained aesthetically—as a desire for beauty (*Conf.* 2.5.10); however, it is also (as Augustine tells us in another work) a manifestation of the desire for continued existence (*Lib. Arb.* 3.23.70):<sup>51</sup>

nulla enim res est earum quae nec dolorem nec uoluptatem sentiunt, quae non aliqua unitate decus proprii generis assequitur, uel omnino naturae suae qualemcumque stabilitatem. nulla item res est earum quae uel doloris molestias, uel blanditias sentiunt uoluptatis, quae non eo ipso quo dolorem fugiunt, uoluptatemque appetunt, diremptionem se fugere, unitatemque appetere, fatentur.

Drawing the strands so far identified helps us, I think, make sense of Augustine's discussion. Like those artisans seeking to live on in their products and those who seek to live on in copies of themselves, Augustine's account shows a man attempting to leave some trace of himself in his friend (thus he talks of hoping his friend 'retaining what he had received from me', *Conf.* 4.4.8; see above) in a manner similar to that in which the *Phaedrus* talks of the lover 'moulding' the beloved (*Phdr.* 252d5-e1, 276e4–277a4) and later accounts talk of shaping a friend or beloved (Cic. *Amic.* 23; Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6.9).<sup>52</sup> It seems that Augustine, somewhat conscious of his own mortality and insufficiency, but not yet conscious that he should turn to God to remedy these conditions, was driven by fear of death to seek immortality by other means and that he sought to do so by making his friend over in his own image. It was only at the death of his friend that the finality of death and the poverty of this sort of immortality by proxy became clear. Accordingly, Augustine's discussion warns us that friendship offers a mirage of the sort of unity and permanence we are naturally oriented towards. While some of Augustine's classical forebears seemed content with the sort of survival offered by living on in another's memory (for instance, Cic. *Amic.* 22–3), Augustine manages to subtly show what a poor substitute this sort of immortality is for the real thing (which is to be attained only within the Christian God's embrace).

<sup>51</sup> The relation between the desire for unity and that for continued existence is not entirely perspicuous but the two might be connected in so far as unity of one's parts is a necessary condition for one's continued existence.

<sup>52</sup> 'Everyone chooses his love after his own fashion from among those who are beautiful, and then treats the boy like his very own god, building him up and adorning him as an image to honour and worship' (τόν τε οὖν Ἐρώτα τῶν καλῶν πρὸς τρόπον ἐκλέγεται ἕκαστος, καὶ ὡς θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον ὄντα ἑαυτῷ οἶον ἀγαλμα τεκταίνεται τε καὶ κατακοσμεῖ, ὡς τιμήσων τε καὶ ὀργιάσων, *Phdr.* 252d5-e1; cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1172a11-14).

## VII

While Augustine envisioned a positive role for *amicitia* within the Christian life (see section II above),<sup>53</sup> he often emphasized the obscurity of the human heart and the fragility of friendship. In the early books of the *Confessiones* he goes beyond discussing friendship's fragility and instead gives significant attention to a topic neglected by his philosophical predecessors, namely the potential for friendship to make us *worse* and to distance us from happiness. Augustine's account shows not only how *amicitia* may manifest various vices but also how it may foster and encourage them. Friendships can act as a *seductio* of the mind, constricting our practical reasoning and spurring that most dangerous of vices: *superbia*. Further, Augustine indicates how even a close *seemingly* benign friendship (such as that between Augustine and his unnamed friend) may be lacking in *caritas* (and instead dominated by *concupiscentia*). Further, while friendship may assuage some of the symptoms of our fallen condition, it does so in such a way that we no longer seek God as we ought. Finally, I suggested, Augustine's discussion of the dangers of friendship is intertwined with issues of self-concern and self-identity over time and his discussion subtly shows how those who think we may attain some sort of immortality by means of close friendships are deluded. While Augustine is far from forbidding friendship (for example, *Ep.* 130.13), straight is the gate and narrow is the way. Augustine's careful attention to the potential for the love of friendship to breach the *luminosus limes amicitiae* and to lead us astray brings into relief, in a novel fashion, the dangers of friendship.

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<sup>53</sup> In the later part of the *Confessiones*, Augustine discusses his friendship with Alypius and offers a vignette of some of the benefits friendship may bring. For instance, the role of mutual correction in friendship—noted by other readers (see n. 16 above)—is evident and through Augustine's intervention Alypius gives up his damaging addiction to the games (*Conf.* 6.7.12). However, Augustine points out that even once set upon the right path, the dangers of friendship are none the less present. Alypius was still often led astray by his friendships, in particular by being drawn to the degrading spectacles of the circus by his friends (*Conf.* 6.7.11). Like Augustine, Alypius would not have committed the sin had it not been for his friends (*Conf.* 6.8.13). Further, Augustine emphasizes that *even when* he did bring some moral benefit to Alypius, this occurred fortuitously through God's intervention (the well-being of Alypius was not even at the forefront of Augustine's mind when he uttered those words which Alypius would take as a rebuke, *Conf.* 6.7.12). For discussion of these aspects, see my 'Adiutrix virtutum: Augustine on friendship and virtue', in S. Stern-Gillet and G.M. Gurtler (edd.), *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship* (Albany, forthcoming).