

## BOOK REVIEW

*On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues: Volume 2.* By MICHAEL P. FOLEY. New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2019. Pp. xlii + 184. Paperback, \$18.00. ISBN: 978-0-300-23858-7.

Michael Foley has embarked on an ambitious project to translate the entirety of Augustine's "Cassiciacum dialogues" (hereafter *CD*), the first four (or five) works completed and published by Augustine after his conversion to Christianity in his early thirties: *Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academics*), *De beata vita* (*On the Happy Life*), *De ordine* (*On Order*), *Soliloquia* (*Soliloquies*), and the sequel and complement to the *Soliloquies*, the *De immortalitate animae* (*On the Immortality of the Soul*). Augustine composed these works after having renounced his professorship of rhetoric in Milan, having broken off his marriage and, finally, having converted to Catholicism. The intellectual retreat he planned for himself at Cassiciacum (modern-day Cassago Briaza) in the fall/winter of 386/387 CE was to resemble the pagan *otium liberale*—a retirement devoted to reading, writing, study of the liberal arts and, most of all, philosophy. But Augustine envisioned his stay at Cassiciacum as preparatory in nature, too, for the new life he envisioned for himself: a sort of Christian *otium* (a "*Christianae vitae otium*" in *Retract.* 1.1.1) before his baptism by Ambrose in April 387.

Each volume in the series contains a translation, a general introductory essay (which is the same regardless of the dialogue), an introduction unique to each dialogue, an extensive supplemental commentary, notes and an expansive bibliography. So far, the first two dialogues have appeared in print.

A well-conceived and exciting project, the completed Cassiciacum translation will be an impressive scholarly achievement and service to Augustinian studies, one which will contribute to the resurrection of interest in these fascinating dialogues early in Augustine's career.

For critical notes on the "General Introduction" to Foley's editions of the *CD*, please consult my review of the first volume of the *CD* in *The Classical Journal*. They apply here, as the Preface, General Introduction and Translation Key are reproduced exactly as they are found in the first volume.

This second volume contains Foley's translation of the *De beata vita* (*On the Happy Life*), set at a birthday banquet for Augustine's 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday at a friend's country villa. It is pleasant, accurate and captures much of the "mirth and joy" of Augustine's Latin. I have no substantive critical comment on it, but rather look forward to its widespread use (owing to this inexpensive edition).

Accordingly, I turn now to Foley's introduction to and commentary on the *DBV*.

Augustine's *DBV* follows in the long tradition of ancient ethical texts on the nature of true happiness (*eudaimonia*) for human beings in this life. Broadly, it follows in the eudaimonistic tradition initiated by Socrates and Plato, continued by Aristotle, especially in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and carried on through Hellenistic philosophy. The major Hellenistic philosophical schools—the Epicureans, Stoics, Peripatetics and Skeptics—all assured their followers that *their* prescriptive philosophical program resulted in emotional balance, intellectual contentment and security and, generally, an abiding bliss. More immediately, Augustine's *DBV* shows heavy influence from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*.

Foley's introduction to the *DBV* is well-researched and informative. In it, Foley aptly traces the complicated story of Augustine's philosophical and religious sources in the *DBV*, where the quasi-Stoicism of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and the Neoplatonic intellectualism of Plotinus intermingle with Ambrose's Christian Stoicism in *On Jacob and the Happy Life* and the promises of a future, everlasting happiness contained in the New Testament.

One of the foundational difficulties for Augustine's account for a distinctively *Christian* happiness is whether happiness (for Augustine, *beatitudo*) is attainable in *this* life (owing to Christian eschatology). Augustine himself in *Retractiones* 1.2/4 worries that he admitted the possibility of happiness in this life in the *DBV* and *Soliloquia*, an admission in tension with Christian teaching regarding the afterlife.

Foley, rather, reads the young Augustine more charitably, arguing that Augustine adapts Neoplatonist notions of intellectual perfection and completion to the wisdom attained in heaven. Foley summarizes Augustine's Christian eudaimonism thus: "For Augustine [in the *DBV*], the fact *that* happiness is attainable by the grace of God is of far greater importance than *when* it is attained" (14). This temporal aspect of the achievement of happiness is important for making sense of Augustine's approach in the *DBV* and is a helpful contribution by Foley. And it

foreshadows Augustine's fascination with the illusion of human temporal experience generally speaking, on which he later devoted considerable energies (*Conf.* 11.17–41).

I conclude with a few critical notes.

First, there is a curious omission from the Translation Key contained at the beginning of this volume. Latin terms used in the *DBV* for “happy” and “happiness” (*beatus, beatitudo*) are not included. Discussion of these terms is included in the introduction, but it is strange to leave out such crucial terms from a translation key prefacing the *DBV*.

This leads to my second note. The first 42 pages (including Translation Key), 22-page bibliography and 13-page timeline and glossary of names are identical for each volume. This is unfortunate. In particular, for a series of translations, it would be helpful to have a translation key unique to each volume. In addition, as Foley's intent is for his translations of the *CD* to be teaching documents first and foremost, it would be beneficial for students to have a thematic bibliography specific to each volume for further reading, in addition to a 13-page general, alphabetical one.

Despite these criticisms, I heartily recommend this new edition of Augustine's “Cassiciacum dialogues” for classroom use and scholarly consideration. They will continue to shine light on the intellectual work of Augustine's early career in particular and the fascinating intellectual situation of Late Antiquity more broadly.

EVAN DUTMER

*Culver Academics*, [evan.dutmer@culver.org](mailto:evan.dutmer@culver.org)