Religion and the Good Life: Introduction

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“Good is the distant source of light, it is the unimaginable object of our desire. Our fallen nature knows only its name and its perfection.” Max, in Iris Murdoch’s *The Unicorn*, makes this claim. His conversation partner reacts: “This sounds like a mystery religion.” Max’s words evoke the two issues on which this volume concentrates: religious forms of the good life focused on God (“the distant source of light”), and the question whether this focus (“the unimaginable object of our desire”) can be expressed in language. And if so, in what language?

Within the Christian faith, the good life always has an eschatological dimension. Given this eschatological dimension, and given the fact that religious views of the good life are God-directed, the question arises of what kind of language we can use to talk about it. Can we use evocative language only, or can we use conceptual language as well? The language of representation (*Vorstellung*) is that of the community of believers; conceptual language is used by theologians and philosophers of religion to clarify the imaginative language of believers so that its meaning becomes accessible to all. Before entering into a discussion of religion and the good life, we shall first say something about the relation between concept (*Begriff*) and representation in general.

In their prayers, liturgies, and other activities in which they express their faith in some way or other, religious believers entertain representations of God. Philosophy of religion attempts to understand these representations at a reflective level. Thus, at the root of the very activity of philosophy of religion there is a potential tension between reflective understanding and specific representation. The extent to which this potential tension becomes actual depends on the extent to which one considers a philosophical understanding of religion to be possible. In early philosophy of religion, philosophers like Spinoza, Toland, Tindal, Reimarus, Lessing and Kant entertained a philosophical

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1 Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (Harmondsworth 1963), 100.
concept of religion. According to them, religion in a strict sense belongs to the domain of reason: positive religion, with its religious representations, is subordinate to it. In the thought of these rationalist philosophers of religion, the tension between concept and representation was virtually absent, because concepts (philosophical religion) were judged to supersede representations (positive religion). Among those, Lessing was the one who left the widest scope for religious representations. That was because he had rejected the a-historical view of religion, according to which a timelessly immutable, rational religion “as old as the creation” (Tindal) had existed from primal times. In Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts (1780), Lessing provides a sketch of the gradual development of religion. He starts from a representational stage (that of the Bible with its stories and legends), and ends with a conceptual stage (that of the Eternal Gospel, in which the stories and legends are translated into concepts and truths of reason). Representations had their use during a certain period, but have now been superseded by a truth accessible to reason. In this way Lessing anticipates the relationship between representation and concepts as developed by Hegel.

According to Hegel, religion has truth in the form of a representation that mediates “the immediate presence of revelation.” In philosophy, truth has a conceptual form. In the seventh Chapter of Die Phänomenologie des Geistes (1807), religious representations seem, just as in Lessing, to be abolished by philosophy. In the late Hegel, however, religious representations acquire permanent importance. This is underlined in Ricoeur’s interpretation, when he argues for a hermeneutic of religious representations that does not eliminate the tension between concept and representation. He explains that, in the late Hegel, concepts—the so-called “absolute knowledge” of philosophy—do not constitute a separate form of knowledge. Absolute knowledge is, rather, the recapitulation of a whole process of growing understanding. The earlier stages that eventually led to this type of knowledge are

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2 Strictly speaking, not all of these thinkers can be considered philosophers of religion. Philosophy of Religion as a separate discipline is a typically modern invention; see, e.g., Konrad Feieris, Die Umwplung der natürlichen Theologie in Religionsphilosophie: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts (Leipzig 1965). Once philosophy of religion had come into existence as a separate discipline, however, it could claim a long pre-history, and as a result, earlier thinkers like Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas and Benedict Spinoza are sometimes also counted as philosophers of religion. See, e.g., Thomas Brose, ed., Religionsphilosophie: Europäische Denker zwischen philosophischer Theologie und Religionskritik (Würzburg 1998).
neither rendered superfluous, nor abolished by this recapitulation. There can be no absolute knowledge without remembering the representations. Absolute knowledge is like the "conceptual light" that illuminates every culturally determined expression, every religious representation. "Absolute knowledge, therefore, designates the conceivable and conceived character of the representation."3

The authors of this volume represent different positions with respect to the tension between concept and representation. At the one extreme of the spectrum, Peter Jonkers, in the trail of Hegel, conceives of philosophy of religion as a metaphysical analysis of religion in conceptual language. At the other extreme, Renée van Riessen argues for speaking about God in a language "beyond representation and concept." The other authors defend positions somewhere in-between these extremes. In connection with religious representations of the good life, they either defend interference between representation and concept (Van den Brink), or a hermeneutical approach to religious representations (Jansen, Stoker, Vedder and Vroom). In these approaches the relation between representation and concept is no longer, as in earlier philosophy of religion, discussed in the light of a philosophical concept of religion. They focus, rather, on the distinguishing characteristics of religious language. We would like to venture the comment that it could be argued that it is precisely as a result of reflection on the distinguishing characteristics of religious language that the philosophical concept of God, and reflection about God at a conceptual level, have become problematic. This development can be traced in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Just like the other early philosophers of religion mentioned above, Kant defended a philosophical concept of religion: religion within the bounds of reason. The difference is that, according to Kant, there is no place for religion within the bounds of theoretical reason, but only within the bounds of practical reason. We cannot know the Ultimate, God, but God's reality is disclosed to us in our moral experience. Thus, reality is wider than the reality we can know according to the Critique of Pure Reason. Conceptual language, however, is bound to sensory perception. This leads to the question of what kind of language would fit the part of reality that transcends the domain of sensory

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perception. In connection with art, Kant shows that conceptual language must fail. Symbolic language is more suitable than conceptual language for expressing the immeasurable wealth of the artist. About the distinguishing characteristics of religious language, Kant has little to say. He does argue for using symbols in speaking about God, however: "indirect presentations modelled upon an analogy enabling the expression in question to contain, not the proper schema for the concept, but merely a symbol for reflection." In contemporary philosophy of religion, much attention is paid to the use of various forms of indirect language to speak about God in the domain between concept and reflection. In this volume, Kant's hint is developed in its application to religious representations of the good life. According to Jansen, Stoker, Vedder and Vroom, religious representations of the good life can be referred to only in the indirect language of symbol, metaphor, myth, story, or the formale Anzeige. Is the ideal of the good life a religious ideal? Atheists would deny that, and argue for a radically secular view of the good life. Some religious believers, on the other hand, would argue that secular views about the good life are misleading, and fail to grasp what the good life is. There are also those who take a middle position, and see religious and secular views of the good life as rival possibilities. But then one could still ask, as Dupré does, whether religion is a part of the good life, or the good life rather a part of religion.

This volume concentrates on religious views of the good life. Since "the good life" is not a religious expression, we need to say something about the way we will understand this expression in a religious context. The term "good" can be taken in a narrow or in a wide sense. Taken in its narrow sense, "good" is a moral category. A well-known statement of this view is that of Kant, when he says that "nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will." Kant does not mean the capacity of the will to achieve something, but rather the act

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5 For this term, see Vedder's contribution.

of willing as such, when prompted by the moral law. The moral view of the good life is widespread: philosophers from Plato to Murdoch and Ricoeur have argued for it. They admit, nevertheless, that morality alone does not suffice for the good life. For Kant, the good life does not consist in mere virtue, but rather in the unity of virtue and happiness. For Murdoch and Plato, the good is closely connected with the true. For Ricoeur, the "ethical self" is decisive: "aiming at 'the good life' with and for others, in just institutions." This view of the good life is inspired primarily by Aristotle's ideas about friendship.

In this volume, we take "good" in its wide sense. We come across this sense of "good," not only in religion, but also in philosophy. In Greek philosophy, the key terms for the good life are εὐδαιμονία and ἴδιοι. Eὐδαιμονία (happy) is he who lives according to his δαιμον, his "divine part." At birth, we receive a potential waiting to be actualised, abilities that need to be developed, a "bud" that must be brought into blossom. According to some interpreters, Aristotle views the development of our intellectual capacities as most important for εὐδαιμονία; the good life is the philosopher's life. For others, pleasure (ἵδιοι) is the highest good. Aristippus of Cyrene did not distinguish between different forms of pleasure (quantitative hedonism), whereas Epicurus viewed spiritual pleasure as the highest good. We should reduce our needs and desires, banish disharmony and try to achieve the happiness that is given in ἀταραξία or tranquility.

In the contemporary philosophical reflection on the good life, we also come across this wider view of the good life. According to Sarot "a life is good if and only if it is worthwhile (i.e. worth living)." On this understanding, "good life" becomes more or less synonymous with meaningful life as defined by, e.g., Susan Wolf: "When we want our lives to be meaningful ... it is the same as wanting our lives to be worthwhile, as wanting there to be (or to have been) a reason for

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8 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another (Chicago 1992), 172.
11 Sarot, Living a Good Life, 87–93.
12 Sarot, Living a Good Life, 59–60.
13 Sarot, Living a Good Life, 61–62
14 Sarot, Living a Good Life, 16.
Religious views of the good life also adopt this broad interpretation of “good.” Loose shows that even Kant shares this view, because he has a wider view of religion than his description of it as “the recognition of all duties as divine commands” would seem to suggest. In the quotation from The Unicorn given above, it is suggested that “our fallen nature” merely knows the name and the perfection of the good. This is confirmed by religion if, as Van den Brink claims, we can enjoy the good life only by living in an atoned relationship with God. For the good life is primarily a meaningful life, and moral goodness does not suffice for that. Morality is an important aspect of the good life, but does not exhaust it. According to the religious view of the good life, a good life is a life in harmony with oneself, with one’s fellow human beings, with nature and with God.

We conclude with a survey of the contributions. The authors are all philosophers of religion who participate in NOSTER, the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. As the reader will note, they come from various philosophical traditions, such as metaphysics, analytical philosophy, phenomenology and the hermeneutic tradition. As a result, the various contributions to this volume reflect this variety of traditions and approaches.

The first part of this volume introduces the relationship between representation and concept, and its bearing on the nature of philosophy of religion.

Jonkers investigates the change in the relationship between religion and philosophy in the early Hegel. According to the Fragment of a

16 Wessel Stoker, Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God? (Amsterdam 1996).
17 Herman de Dijn, Hoe overleven wij de vrijheid? (Kampen 1993), 40.
System (1800) religion is about a unity of life, which cannot be further translated into concepts. The concepts of philosophy disrupt this living unity by its conflicting qualifications. Only half a year later, however, Hegel defends a completely different position. In the so-called Difference-essay (1801), it is precisely the task of philosophy—and not of religion—to elevate man to the knowledge of God. One reason for Hegel’s change of opinion is that religion has lost its unifying force in modern civilisation. An era of discord needs a way of thinking that can overcome antitheses and reunite them in a synthesis.

Religion and philosophy share their content, namely the absolute. Religion presents this content in the form of a purely internal vision of, and a subjective longing for an unattainable beyond. This form is inadequate. Here, the problematic relationship between representation (a positive religion with images and rituals) and concept (philosophy as conceptual knowledge) is posed.

As said, religion and philosophy share their content, namely the absolute. But can philosophy indicate the necessary coherence in reality at all? When we understand philosophy of religion in terms of the adage *credo ut intelligam*, this is not possible. On that view, philosophy of religion understands its task as a pious interpretation of religious convictions (hermeneutics), and as a purging of spontaneous beliefs (critique). The price for such a position is that the truth claims of religion lose their place in the public realm. Following Wittgenstein and Heidegger, one surrenders to the modern gap between faith and reason. With Hegel, Jonkers opts for a metaphysical approach to philosophy of religion, aimed at a reflection on the truth of religion that transcends specific communities of faith and takes up the challenge posed by the conception of truth that is dominant in our modern culture.

Van Riessen defends a wholly different view of philosophy of religion, which is influenced by Heidegger, and even more by Levinas. She rejects Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of religious representation, which asks for conceptual thinking, because God can be captured neither in representations nor in concepts. Heidegger critically labels metaphysical thinking about God “ontotheology.” God must be thought differently from being. Heidegger, however, is not radical enough in his departure from representational thinking. According to Levinas, language itself is drenched with metaphysics. God cannot be represented in thought or imagination. His traces can only be perceived in the language of witnesses and prophets. The testimony of witnesses is a pure saying in
which nothing is said. As witness, the subject is enrolled in a plot, which does not correspond to her or his own experience. In this realm, nothing can be represented or reduced to a proposition. In discussion with Ricoeur, the author defends a view of philosophy of religion beyond representation or concept. Must not revelation be called an occurrence, which brings about an inwardness, due to a reaction to the words of an unknowable, transcendent Other?

The second part of this volume concerns the tension between representation and concept in relation to religion and the good life. Dupré demonstrates the importance of reflective thought for religion and the good life. We must, however, keep in mind the ambiguity of reason and religion. Knowledge and science do indeed tend to improve people’s circumstances of life, but they can also have disastrous effects. Religion can bring people nearer to the good life, but in practice it has often had the opposite effect, e.g., in religious wars. But abuse does not abolish use. Both adequate knowledge and understanding, and authentic religiosity are necessary. Knowledge and reflective thought cannot be viewed separately from experience and language, and so not from religion and the good life. These are cultural givens, which precede reflection and form its context. Reason must be cultivated in the interest of religiosity and well-being, which implies that it must respect the demands of conscience. Finally, the author provides a sketch of various possible relations between religion and the good life. He regards these possibilities as complementary.

Vedder shows that according to Heidegger, the good life is historical. Therefore, it is impossible to repeat the representation at a conceptual level. In order to demonstrate this, Heidegger concentrates on “the situation of understanding” of the philosopher. Philosophy both starts from the facticity of life, and returns to it, because factual life is a subject of philosophical inquiry. More fundamental than the theoretical relation with an object is the pre-theoretical relation which Heidegger calls “care.” It is the theoretical relation with an object in particular that renders a right understanding of the facticity of life impossible. Humans have relations within the facticity of life through seeing, feeling, smelling, loving etc. Within these relations humans have various “senses.” The problem is that we may speak of relations (Bezugsinn) and the contents thereof (Gehaltsinn), but that life in its actual existence (Volzugsinn) often remains hidden. Heidegger illustrates this in his discussion of the hand of Augustine’s De beata vita.
Augustine approaches the good life from the perspective of facticity. Yet, under the influence of Greek philosophy, he fails to do complete justice to life in its actual existence (*Volzugssehn*). That is because Augustine's understanding of life is to a certain extent a-historical. According to Heidegger, this is different in St Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, where life is actualised to its full historical potential. The "actualisation sense" is recognised on the basis of the Second Coming of Christ. Belief in the Parousia, however, is not belief in an occurrence that is expected to take place at a particular moment in history. It is, rather, an orientation of present life towards the future. Christians find themselves in the world "as if not" (St Paul). It is not about a representation of God or of the Second Coming of Christ. The essence of the Christian faith does not lie in a dogma or a theoretical vision. Philosophy can approach this in a non-theoretical way by means of the *formale Anzeige*. This is not a concept in the familiar sense of the word, but simply a pointer towards a phenomenon.

Jansen holds that concepts cannot do justice to the complexity of representations about the quality of life (the expression he uses to designate the good life). Therefore we must have recourse to imagination. Speaking of the quality of life cannot be reduced to the quantifiable conditions to which economists refer. Furthermore, much depends on the form and content of our imagination, since people imagine in different ways and thus imagination will have a bearing on views of the imagination as a moral force, and on the question of the attainability of the good life. To demonstrate this, he compares a novel by the nineteenth-century writer Charles Dickens to one by the contemporary writer Iris Murdoch. The former can be seen as falling generally within the Christian tradition, whereas the latter consciously rejects it. Dickens' *Hard Times* is a comedy that falls within the literary tradition of Old Comedy. The novel is about rebirth, renewal and social integration. Imagination turns out to be, not only a matter of aesthetics, but also of a moral view of life. The absence of morality, i.e., the inability to see from a point of view other than one's own, is connected with a lack of imagination. Only when one is able to imagine others' points of view can one perceive their needs. This is also the case for Murdoch in her novel *The Sea, The Sea*. The difference between Dickens and Murdoch is found in their view of life. In line with the general Christian vision, Dickens holds open the possibility of a world in which the conflicts of this present one are resolved (an eschatology). However, Murdoch, as an atheist, does not
allow for this possibility, holding instead that neither human beings nor
the world can be changed. She characterises human existence as “the
demon-ridden pilgrimage of human life” without any hope for a New
World.

*Van den Brink* argues that the Christian representation of the good
life must be located primarily in soteriology: living in a reconciled
relationship with God. He investigates the relationship between biblical
representations and stories of atonement on the one hand, and the
Christian doctrine of atonement of St Anselm on the other. On the one
hand, the author regards it an error to see the biblical images and stories as
of only secondary importance to systematic theology. On the other
hand, systematic theology should not be reduced to a mere retelling of
the story. Conceptual clarification of the Christian view of the good life
remains imperative, for the Christian faith purports to make universal
truth claims. These claims (or doctrines), however, should always be inter-
preted in the light of the narratives in order to understand their true
nature. The author illustrates this point by looking at Anselm’s doctrine
of atonement. As has been pointed out before, soteriology is narrative
in nature. The narrative starts with sin and ends with liberation. Passing
from one to the other is possible because of the Christ event. This
provides the basic structure of the narrative of the atonement. The
function of the doctrine is to show how contemporary human beings
can become participants in this story. Therefore the narrative structure
must be preserved in soteriology. Soteriology should provide a configura-
tional rather than a theoretical understanding of the atonement: it
should help us to understand its meaning by seeing its place in the
configuration or pattern of events to which it belongs. Van den Brink
discusses three characteristics of such a configurational understanding:

1. Meaningful patterns within narratives must somehow be linked to
   patterns we know from everyday life. Anselm speaks of a situation
   of everyday life, when he uses the image of a debt that must be paid.
2. Also, the particular and individual nature of each story must be
   preserved while at the same time its universal and general meaning
   must be addressed. The debt, paid by Christ, is a unique debt, but
   the fact that Christ pays it is important for all of us.
3. The relations between various episodes of a narrative are not
   characterized by necessity, but they must hang together in a
   coherent and fitting way. This is relevant for Anselm, when he
   speaks of *convenienta* and *inconvenienta*. The author attempts to show
that, in the light of these conditions, Anselm's doctrine of atonement is still relevant today.

Stoker maintains that narratives convey meanings that transcend the conceptual domain. He demonstrates this by means of myth as an indispensable vehicle for Christian representations of the good life. The use of ancient myths within today's religious tradition, however, can be problematic. For example, the framework of experience that is in the background of the ancient Greek myths differs strongly from our framework of experience. But myths can be transformed, as is shown by Ricoeur's explanation of myths of evil and liberation as "broken" myths. Myths can be "baptised," taken out of a foreign religion and adopted into the framework of one's own tradition. A myth can be described as a symbol in narrative form, which functions as an exemplary model. It has something to say about human beings in the world. The myth of Adam is a good example. According to Stoker, the genre of the myth is indispensable. As a symbol in narrative form it says something which can be expressed only as symbol. Stories, as products of poetic imagination, provide verbal form to what is beyond conceptual grasp. Therefore, religious representations of evil, for example, cannot be elevated to the conceptual level, as Hegel wished to do. Thus, the term "myth" can still be of good use for today's community of believers. The history of Jesus has a founding function for the salvation of humanity and is as such comparable to the arché of the original myth. Liturgies evoke and actualise this history in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper.

Vroom emphasises the symbolic meaning of religious representations in a study of hymns of praise that are used in Indian churches. In religious symbols, references to an unattainable transcendence and to the perfectly good life make a full clarification of religious texts impossible. Religious language is evocative. Vroom analyses some Indian Christian hymns in order to substantiate these claims. The words in which they are phrased are so general that many believers in various particular situations can recognise themselves in them. Because it can be interpreted in many ways, liturgical language can also be applied to many situations. Vroom illustrates the hermeneutical process of the living tradition by means of a Jesus-song. He shows that traces of the Hindu-tradition can be perceived. For example, in a mantra the Hindu-sound OM is used: the sound that symbolises the unity of all things in their origin. In the Jesus-song the word OM also appears; here, it colours the meaning of "Jesus." Indian liturgies conform to the
general rule in that there is a continual “baptism” of rituals and terms from foreign traditions. As the analysis of several songs show, an inculturated symbol is partly determined by tradition, and partly undetermined, which renders a truly individual appropriation possible. The conclusion is that reflection upon religious representations of the good life is possible, but that these representations never acquire the clarity of concepts. The elements of the good life can never be isolated from stories, dreams, visions and songs. For they concern a reality that is not at hand but can only be made present by evocation.

The third part of this volume focuses on various representations of the good life. Sarot provides a sketch of three models of the good life. In the first model, a good life is a satisfied life. What counts as a satisfied life is determined by subjective standards. Examples are found in the Stoa and in various forms of hedonism. In the second model, the good life is that in which the self fully actualises itself. Here, an objective standard is employed: one strives for something that is considered to be of worth. A pre-Christian example is that of Aristotle, who encourages the actualisation of one’s daimon or good potential. An example from the Christian tradition is the imitation of Christ. The third model is the fellowship model. On this model, one should apply intersubjective standards to the good life: it is our relations to others that make us fully human and that can make our life good. Friendship is an example of such a relationship: I identify with another—with the good potential in him or her—by considering her or his concerns mine. In this manner, two people promote each other’s daimon. Thus, friendship makes us better people. A theistic example of this model is provided by Augustine’s call to seek fellowship with God. Nothing in this world can make man happier than a relation of fellowship with God.

Loose investigates the highest good and the Kingdom of God in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The religiously good life is without doubt strongly morally charged, but is not confined to morals or politics. The highest good consists of two elements: virtue and happiness. According to the Stoa, the virtuous life is itself equal to happiness, while to the Epicureans happiness already constitutes complete virtue. Kant, however, states that virtue and happiness cannot be reduced to each other. It is the Christian representation of the Kingdom of God, which reveals their proper relationship. Kant uses this metaphor to show how the semantic fields of religion and ethics can interact closely without overlapping. The metaphor of the
Kingdom of God is also the point where the realms of nature and freedom meet, without being reduced to one another. This was the mistake that the Stoa and the Epicureans made. The *proprium* of religion does not allow for a reduction of the metaphor of the Kingdom of God to a political ideal or a moral duty. The hope that the highest good can be realised is provided by God. In *Religion within the Bounds of Reason*, the Kingdom of God gains an extra dimension because of the radical evil of humans. Since human nature is “crooked timber,” it is only by grace that human beings can enter the Kingdom of God.

*Kal* analyses Derrida’s conception of Messianity. If what is good lies beyond being (Levinas), then the good life carries a Messianic aspect. The concept of Messianity holds that in this world, the last word cannot be spoken, no matter what is at stake. This is illustrated by the way in which a judge applies the law. A law is a general norm, which is applied to a specific situation. This requires a creative interpretation that goes beyond the law itself, and must refer to something like “justice.” What justice is, however, is not laid down in a law. The judge refers to an institution that is beyond his grasp. The radical alterity that characterises justice is thus transferred to the concrete person who stands before the judge. He becomes the “other” in a radical sense. We cannot ourselves bring about the “new” or the “other,” since it is no longer new or other when it is brought about. Messianity is therefore alien to the activism that characterises modernity. The other is coming, and we cannot capture it. We can only receive it with an attitude of hospitality. Thus, Messianity differs from Messianism, in which we know what to expect. The act of Messianity takes place, when personal responsibility is assumed in the presence of a particular other; Derrida sees this as a universal human possibility. This does not presuppose that one is attached to a specific cultural or religious tradition, though it is not excluded either.

*Scott* argues that Wittgenstein has shown that genuine expression of doubt must be a secondary feature of language games in which no doubt is expressed. This also applies to doubt about the meaning of life: This cannot be taken as a general philosophical theory about the meaning of life. Instead, it should be construed as an attitude of an individual person towards his or her life.

*Brünnner* argues that, in a sense, being “rich” and “famous” are conditions for the good life. In this sense, one is rich when one realises one’s hidden potential, one’s true self, one’s daimon (Plato), and famous when one is appreciated by others. But does that bring ultimate
happiness? Ultimate happiness can never be finally realised in our human state of finitude. A well-known solution to this problem of finitude is to seek ultimate happiness in the enjoyment of the love of God, as St Augustine did. In a detailed analysis, Brümmer discusses various aspects of the love between people and compares them to the love relationship between God and humans. Only in a relation of fellowship with a God, who is free from human limitations, can we find ultimate happiness. The following reasons are given.

1. God’s will is the ultimate criterion of goodness. Our love of God includes our identification with God’s perfect will.
2. For God all hearts lie open. His love is “partial” to every one of us individually.
3. Most of all, his faithfulness is unchangeable.

How can we find ultimate happiness? In a sense, finding ultimate happiness is not something we can do, because we cannot force God to love us. The love of God is a gift that only God can freely bestow on us. This view of ultimate happiness, Brümmer finally shows, is reflected in the various stages of St Bernard of Clairvaux’s *via mystica*.

*Dekker* discusses the relation between the secular and the religious good life on the basis of the so-called natural desire for God. He starts from the Augustinian view of the good life as enjoying the love of God. But is human nature disposed to this? According to the Augustinian model this is the case: human nature has an essential finality aimed at supernatural grace. According to the divorce model of Cajetan, however, the finality of human nature is aimed at a natural, immanent fulfilment. Man is not essentially, but rather accidentally focused on God. Human reason is seen as a neutral power aiming at natural knowledge, while the supernatural can only be perceived by faith. The disadvantage of this model is that one can dispense with God. The author defends the Augustinian model, and argues that it is true in the sense that it corresponds to reality. He refutes the objection that the essential focus on God destroys human freedom. Finally, he explains the consequences that the choice for one model or the other has for one’s conception of philosophy of religion. In the first model, theology and philosophy are closely related. In the second, each has its own, separate realm.