

# Confessions Book 1

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Subject

Philosophy/ Religion

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## Background: Things to Remember

- Some important things to remember about Augustine as you read are:
  - He was from Northern Africa in the area that is now called Algeria.
  - Even though he was in Northern Africa, he was still VERY Roman.
    - Rome was not centered in Europe, but instead around the Mediterranean.
  - Augustine lived in a very tumultuous time in the Church:
    - When he was born Christianity was still being heavily persecuted.
    - By the time of his death, Christianity was growing rapidly and so was its wealth.
  - Augustine was very unusual in that he straddled two worlds:
    - His father was a pagan until he was baptized on his deathbed, but his mother Monica was a staunch and loyal Christian.
    - He received his schooling in pagan schools and ideas but was taught the rudimentaries of the faith at home by his mother.
    - His search for Truth led him to Manicheism where he spent almost a decade among them.
  - Augustine was not primarily a writer. He was instead a teacher, especially of rhetoric, and a Bishop. Much of his writing was pastoral.
- The Confessions, though considered the first Western Autobiography, should not be thought of in exactly these same terms.
  - The Confessions, though autobiographical, are not an autobiography as we read today.
    - It is not like a daily or even weekly diary of day to day or even year to year events.
    - It is the writings of a middle-aged man reflecting on his life from that point to his birth.

- Intertwined with the events of his life is prayer and conversation with God. One can read the Confessions as a listener overhearing a conversation between Augustine and God.
- It is a work that documents the search for Truth. It is the Everyman story of someone's conversion from sin to redemption, ignorance to knowledge, paganism to Christianity.

## Resources

Name	Type	Notes
<a href="#">Book 1</a>	Textbook	
<a href="#">Genesis 1</a>	Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important throughout the Confessions</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Major Heresies</a>	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of Heresies</li> </ul>
<a href="#">CCC 465</a>	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCC mention of some of the first heresies</li> </ul>

## Key terms and *concepts*

Term	Definition
Neoplatonic Ideas and Christianity	Neoplatonism, a philosophical system that emerged in the 3rd century CE, significantly influenced early Christian thought but also presented tensions with key Christian doctrines. It taught a hierarchical view of reality where all things emanate from a transcendent "One," emphasizing the soul's ascent towards union with this ultimate source. While early Christian theologians found some Neoplatonic concepts useful for explaining Christian beliefs like the nature of the soul, others, particularly the

Term	Definition
	devaluation of the material world and the concept of salvation through knowledge (gnosis), clashed with core Christian tenets such as the goodness of creation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in his atoning work.
Orientation toward self	
Education Vs. Indoctrination	
Classical Greek Culture vs. Christianity	
Nature of God/ The Nature of Created World	
Importance of Language	

## Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why is the book called the Confessions?	
What is the purpose of these confessions?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What is so important about the famous line “ You stir us so that praying you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.”?	
What questions does Augustine ask about God, himself and confession?	
How do you view education? What do you think the point of education is? What is Augustine’s view of education? What does he feel that education is supposed to do?	
In I.19.30, Augustine states that little “harmless” sins snowballed into something greater. Do you agree with this? Why?	
Are there any similarities or differences in Augustine’s life so far between your own? Are you surprised by this, or not?	
So far, why as Catholics do we care about Augustine’s Confessions?	

## Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 2	Not started	
Highlight the opening questions to each of the	Not started	

Task	Status	Notes
paragraphs starting with the second paragraph.		
Summarize the main question that Augustine is asking.	Not started	

# Confessions Book 2

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Subject

Philosophy/ Religion

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## Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 365-370 AD
- Book I explored the impact of his parents and his teachers on Augustine's young life. Book II continues these themes and adds the importance of friendship.
- Augustine is critical of the education given to him as a youth and adolescent by his parents.
  - Patricius did not direct any teaching toward Augustine's moral improvement.
    - When realizing his son was now in adolescence, he encouraged the thought of grandchildren, possibly for selfish reasons rather than the betterment of Augustine.
  - Monica did attempt some level of moral teaching, but she was still influenced greatly by the idea of education and advancement.
- Augustine reflects on his youth and the friends he spent time with.
  - The quality of the friendships he had were based off of a desire for approval and respect, even if the means to attain it were cruel or empty (see Book II.3.7-8)
  - Augustine questions friendship and how it shapes us. He begins to shape the idea that we become the people that we are through the habits that we acquire imitating others.
- The stealing of the pears becomes a pivotal moment in Augustine's young life. His story harkens back to Man's Fall in Genesis, and gives us a glimpse of what Augustine the teenager was like:
  - Searching for acceptance
  - A desire for autonomy and desire for no consequences
  - Self-absorption

# Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 2	Book	
<a href="#">Bible</a>	Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romans 7 regarding the idea of how humans respond to Law</li> <li>• Genesis 3, especially verse 5: Adam and Eve striving to be like God</li> </ul>
“Creation in the Confessions” by Jared Ortiz	Book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This reading is one of the critical essays at the back of your book</li> <li>• Pages 475 to 480 end at Coming to Terms with Creation</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Project Gutenberg Cicero's On Friendship and Old Age</a>	Optional Readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platonic view of Friendship that Augustine baked some of his own views on</li> </ul>
<a href="#">CCC 465</a>	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCC mention of some of the first heresies</li> </ul>

# Key terms and concepts

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Neoplatonic Ideas and Christianity	Neoplatonism, a philosophical system that emerged in the 3rd century CE, significantly influenced early Christian thought but also presented tensions with key Christian doctrines. It taught a hierarchical view of reality where all things emanate from a transcendent "One," emphasizing the soul's ascent towards union with this ultimate source. While early Christian theologians found some Neoplatonic concepts useful for explaining Christian beliefs like the nature of the soul, others, particularly the devaluation of the material world and the concept of salvation through knowledge (gnosis), clashed with core Christian tenets such as the goodness of creation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in his atoning work.	
Definition of Good and Evil		
Orientation toward self		
Education Vs. Indoctrination/ Miseducation		
Classical Greek Culture vs. Christianity		
Nature of God/ The Nature of Created World		



Term	Definition	Notes
Importance of Language		
The Nature of Friendship	Platonic Views, some based on Cicero: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A friend should be a good person</li> <li>• Must bring you from plurality to unity</li> <li>• They must be trustworthy</li> </ul>	

## Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
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“...for when I turned away from you, the one God, and pursued a multitude of things, I went to pieces” (II.1.1). Has this ever been true for you?

How does Patricius respond to Augustine’s burgeoning puberty? How do his parent’s reactions to his adolescence differ? Why is Augustine critical of them?

Have you ever done anything wrong, even though you knew it was wrong? Why do you think you did it anyway? How does this relate to Augustine’s narrative?

In Book II.3.7, Augustine mentions that his mother, Monica, was the voice of God to him. Who has been the voice of God in your own life so far? Why?

Why exactly does Augustine steal the pears?

If we only had the pear tree story to learn about Augustine, what kind of person do you think he is? Why do you think he included this story?

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How does the Biblical story of Adam and Eve parallel Augustine's story of stealing the pears? What does Augustine say about friendship, and its influence on his life in his youth? What does it have to do with the pear stealing?

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So far, do you see a correlation between the story of Augustine's life and the Biblical story of Man's Creation and Fall? If you do, where is it? Why do you think Augustine paralleled them? What does that mean for us?

## Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 3	Not started	

# Confessions Book 3

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Subject

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## Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 371-373AD
- At this time Augustine moves to Carthage to study.
  - Carthage at this time was one of the most important cities in the North African Roman Empire.
  - Augustine was attending school in a large prestigious area of the Roman Empire
- Augustine acquired a great love of theater.
- The education of Augustine continues:
  - He finds a great model in the works of Cicero, especially *Hortensius* (of which we no longer have a copy of the text)
  - Cicero moves him toward “right education”
    - Ironical since he found what he was looking for in a pagan book, not Scripture.
    - Through Cicero, he begins his search for “Wisdom.”
  - It is through his search for Wisdom that his proper education grows, but his sins are still very present with him
  - In searching for Wisdom, he still follows the wrong path (Manichaeism), but at least now he has an idea of what he is looking for.
  - Because of Monica’s Christianity, Augustine attempts to seek out Wisdom in Scripture.
    - Though enamored with Cicero and other pagan philosophers, when Augustine picks up and attempts to read Scripture, he is unimpressed.
    - Augustine’s training was for stylistic beauty, which Cicero had, but the Latin translation of Scripture that Augustine had lacked.
      - Since Augustine could see no beauty in Scripture, he deferred reading it until a later time.

- We see the impatience of Augustine's youth in him wanting all of the answers immediately such as the nature and origins of evil, the nature of God, and the morality of past peoples compared to the morality of the current day (polygamy and animal sacrifices).
- One of the biggest concepts that Augustine wrote about and that occupied much of his writing is the Nature of Evil.
  - It was Augustine's search for the definition of Good and Evil that brought him to the Manichees (see Key Terms and Concepts below).
  - Manichaeism provided a clear cut answer for the idea of good and evil, as well as a good excuse for his own behavior.
    - Material=evil
    - Spiritual=good
  - Manichaeism also had the added perk of being rather exclusive.
    - While being open to anyone, there was a hierarchy of practitioners with more "secretive" knowledge.
    - It appealed to those, like Augustine, who at the time was really looking for advancement and wanting to be at the highest rungs of whatever group he was in.
    - Orthodox Christianity, however, had no such elite or secret information. It is open to all regardless of status or education.
  - Manichaeism was considered heretical because of dualist ideas such as:
    - The God in Hebrew Scripture created the material world is not a good God because material things are evil
    - Jesus was not flesh and blood, but in fact spirit, since Jesus is good and good is spirit and not material
    - The Crucifixion was not what it appeared because Jesus is spirit, and material nails cannot hurt spirit.
  - Augustine spent nine (9) years with the Manichees but ultimately left because he could not intellectually defend its ideas.

# Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 3	Book	
<a href="#">CCC 465</a>	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>CCC mention of some of the first heresies</li></ul>

## Key terms and concepts

Term	Definition	Notes
Neoplatonic Ideas and Christianity	Neoplatonism, a philosophical system that emerged in the 3rd century CE, significantly influenced early Christian thought but also presented tensions with key Christian doctrines. It taught a hierarchical view of reality where all things emanate from a transcendent "One," emphasizing the soul's ascent towards union with this ultimate source. While early Christian theologians found some Neoplatonic concepts useful for explaining Christian beliefs like the nature of the soul, others, particularly the devaluation of the material world and the concept of salvation through knowledge (gnosis), clashed with core Christian tenets such as the goodness of creation, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in his atoning work.	
Manichaeism	A Gnostic religious sect. Manichaeism, founded by a Persian mystic named Mani in the latter half of the third century, relies upon a notion of cosmic dualism whereby all of reality is attributable to an eternal	

Term	Definition	Notes
	<p>battle between a good god and an equally powerful malicious god. Manichaeism thus seamlessly answers the question why evil exists and excuses Augustine's sinful behavior as an inescapable part of human reality. Study guides pgs. 18-19</p>	
Definition of Good and Evil		
Orientation toward self/ Selfishness		
Education Vs. Indoctrination/ Miseducation		
Classical Greek Culture vs. Christianity		
Nature of God/ The Nature of Created World		
Importance of Language		
The Nature of Friendship	<p>Platonic Views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A friend should be a good person</li> <li>• Must bring you from plurality to unity</li> <li>• They must be trustworthy</li> </ul>	

# Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Do you agree with Augustine about the appeal of tragedies? Why or why not?	
Can “confession” be a performative act? If so, how? Would this be a good thing or bad thing?	
How was Augustine affected by reading Cicero?	
Do you think that non-Christian works can lead you to God? Why or why not?	
Why do we enjoy feeling sad when we all seek happiness? Do you feel this is true? Name some examples.	
Did it surprise you to know that the young Augustine had a hard time reading Scripture? Do you relate to this? Have you been able to overcome this hesitation? How so?	
Augustine found himself among the Manicheans. Do you think it was easy for Augustine to be led astray in his time? Do you think it is easy for us to be led astray now? Why or why not?	
How important is it to ask questions about your own education? How can you go about doing that now?	
How does the Eternal Law that Augustine describes in note 31 on page 65 explain the discrepancies of God’s allowance of certain behaviors in Scripture versus what is considered moral and righteous today?	
Do you agree with Ambrose when he refused to speak with Augustine at Monica’s request (pg. 72)?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Have you ever found yourself in that situation? How did you respond and what was the result?	
How can we prepare ourselves for the long journey to find genuine wisdom?	

# Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 4	Not started	