

Confessions Book 1

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

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 rudiments 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
Book 1	Textbook	
Genesis 1	Bible	● Important throughout the Confessions
Major Heresies	Website	● List of Heresies
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

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 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	

Term	Definition	Notes
	behavior as an inescapable part of human reality. Study guides pgs. 18-19	
Definition of Good and Evil		
Orientation toward self/ Selfishness	Augustine, in looking back on his earlier life, sees an orientation toward selfishness in himself, as well as all humanity. It is, he argues, what often leads us to sin and bad habits.	
Education Vs. Indoctrination/ Miseducation	Augustine argues that education is only as good as how knowledgeable the teacher is. If the teacher is not teaching toward the higher good, and neither is the family, then how can know what is truly correct?	
Classical Greek Culture vs. Christianity	Augustine was born straddling both Roman and Christian culture. While the morals of Christianity eventually take root in the Roman Empire, Greek and Roman culture still influence Christianity as well. It is through Greek philosophy that Augustine finds his way to Christianity and to God.	
Nature of God/ The Nature of Created World	God is. He has no physical body, but yet encompasses everything wholly. He knows all, and creates only that which is good.	
Importance of Language	What is said and what is meant (surface versus substance) is very important. The	

Term	Definition	Notes
	surface language may be beautiful, but it may lack substance. The translation of Scripture that was available to Augustine was far less eloquent than translations of other writings, but one has to look beyond the surface to find deeper meaning, rather than rely solely on eloquence.	
The Nature of Friendship	Platonic Views: • A friend should be a good person • Must bring you from plurality to unity • They must be trustworthy	

Questions and discussion

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

Question	Notes/ Answers
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

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

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	
Bible	Bible	● Romans 7 regarding the idea of how humans respond to Law ● Genesis 3, especially verse 5: Adam and Eve striving to be like God
“Creation in the Confessions” by Jared Ortiz	Book	● This reading is one of the critical essays at the back of your book ● Pages 475 to 480 end at Coming to Terms with Creation
Project Gutenberg Cicero's On Friendship and Old Age	Optional Readings	● Platonic view of Friendship that Augustine baked some of his own views on
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
“...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?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
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?	
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

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 371-373AD
- 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	
Bible	Bible	•
File	Article	•
CCC 465	Website	• CCC mention of some of the first heresies

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?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
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)? Have you ever	

Question	Notes/ Answers
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	

Confessions Book 4

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 373-383AD
- In this book Augustine continues in his pursuit of Wisdom.
- Things are going very well for Augustine in this period.
 - He is now a teacher or oratory
 - At this time, this was a very important skill, and the government and many other forms of business relied on excellent oratory skills.
- Augustine at this time takes a mistress.
 - This was not as scandalous as it was in later times, even in Christian circles.
 - Augustine does state that he was faithful to her, but the relationship was done for the wrong reasons
 - Marriage is a bond that joyfully accepts children.
 - Concubinage is based on desire, and children are an afterthought, if they are desired at all.
- Augustine at this time becomes briefly interested in astrology
 - He may have studied this due to the Manichees
 - He also studied this as a way to try to understand life and as a continuation of his search for Wisdom.
 - Later, as bishop, Augustine will spend a lot of time refuting astrology
- We see that Augustine is still searching for true friendship

- The illness and death of a good friend causes Augustine grief, but not because of the death of the friend, but because he has lost someone he is close to.
- Augustine's attachment is to the death of his friend and not to the actual friend.
- He still sees his friendships in selfish terms-how can these friends help him and how do they make him feel.
- Augustine sees that friendship can be a good thing, but we must remember that friendship is not forever, only God is everlasting.
- Augustine, in his teaching, is also still oriented toward self. He is not trying to lead his pupils toward the greater good, but to what society and Augustine thinks is good.
- Augustine, in his search, still remains selfish. He sees God made in his image, rather than being made in God's image (pg. 96).
- Augustine continues to grow intellectually, but continues to fail to find anything in his pursuits that can help him get closer to the Truth.
 - Augustine read Aristotle's Ten Categories, and through it was able to classify things.
 - Augustine attempts to classify God, but realized how incorrect and impossible that was.
 - Aristotle did not become a great influence in theology until the 12th and 13th centuries.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 4	Book	
The Categories by Aristotle	Book	• Book Augustine read
CCC 465	Website	• CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
As this book opens, Augustine seems to be achieving what his family set out for him. Does he look back on this as a good thing? Why or why not?	
How does Augustine view marriage versus taking a mistress? Do you think that these ideas are still relevant today?	
Does Augustine get anything from his brief foray into astrology? If he does, what is it? If not, why doesn't he?	
What did Augustine tell his friend after he was baptized, and how did his friend react to him? Why do you think they both reacted the way they did?	
What are the reasons Augustine gives for criticizing his grief over his friend's death?	
Is there a relationship between friendship and place? How?	
Is there a disconnect between how Augustine is living now and his pursuit of wisdom?	
What does Augustine think of Aristotle, especially <i>Ten Categories</i> ?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 5	Not started	

Confessions Book 5

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 380-384AD
- In Carthage, Augustine finally meets Faustus (Faustus of Milevis (~340 to sometime after 385)) Manichean bishop.
 - Augustine was continually told by his Manichean friends that Faustus would have all the answers that Augustine is looking for.
 - Augustine finds him well-spoken but does not have the answers that Augustine is looking for.
 - In Augustine's study of philosophers and through astrology and more importantly astronomy (which were often linked in ancient times) he was able to see the inherent natural faults in the beliefs of Mani and Manicheanism.
 - At this time Augustine begins to realize that what he was looking for was the substance of truth and wisdom rather than the surface beauty of the explanation.
 - After meeting Faustus and realizing he did not have the answers Augustine was looking for, he abandoned the Manichees without attempting to rise higher in the sect.
- Augustine moved to Rome in search of better pay, more prestige, and more serious students.
 - Monica begs him not to go, so he lies to her, telling her that he is only waiting for a friend, and leaves for Rome without her knowledge.
 - Augustine grows very ill there but recovers his health.

- Augustine stays with the Manichean community
- He briefly entertains the ideas of the Academics (academic skepticism- argues that one should always strive to keep an open mind and never assent to anything that is not absolutely knowable and sure. Good life is full of rational inquiry and self-examination).
- Augustine mentions some Manichean beliefs:
 - Because Jesus is good, and all good is spirit, Jesus was never flesh and blood, he only appeared so.
 - The good god was the god of spirit, while the bad god created everything that was material such as the earth, human bodies, animals, etc.
 - Jesus could not have been born of a human mother, because that would be material in nature, therefore evil.
 - They claimed that New Testament writings were changed to include elements of Jewish law.
 - They took the Old Testament literally and thought of it as a historical fact.
- Augustine leaves Rome for Milan
 - Milan at this time was the city where the Emperor lived.
 - He went to get away from unruly students who tried to avoid paying him for his teaching.
 - Augustine also looks back and sees this move as a way to distance himself from the Manichees.
 - Augustine, by accepting the post in Milan, became the official imperial rhetor, or the emperor's speech writer and minister of propaganda. He has truly become powerful and successful.
- Augustine meets Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and a great orator is his own right.
 - Through Ambrose, Augustine finds someone he can speak to regarding the Church, and who he can admire for his own rhetorical skill.
 - Augustine begins to observe and listen to Ambrose, and through him learns to read Scripture properly.
 - Augustine begins to see the intellectual consistency and truth within the Church.

- We leave this book with Augustine still battling Manichean and Academic beliefs within his mind, but became a catechumen in the Catholic Church, since to his mind it was the closest option, he felt at the time.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 5	Book	
CCC 465	Website	• CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
At this point in Augustine's career, how good was he? Why do you say this?	
Do you think we are still influenced by "the persuasive sweetness of eloquence" rather than the substance of words? Has this happened to you? Why do you think this is or isn't still something we deal with?	
What is Augustine missing in his search for truth and wisdom? (hint: pg. 106)	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What did Augustine like about Faustus? How did meeting him affect Augustine's search?	
What insight does Augustine gain through his new realization regarding the surface meaning versus the substance of information? How might this help him move toward Scripture again?	
Do you think that Monica thought God was hearing her prayers? Did he? How patient are we when we ask God for something? Has he answered you?	
What was a major sticking point that kept Augustine from inquiring about the Church after breaking from the Manichees (hint: pg. 121).	
Have you ever realized that the Catholic faith is not what you thought it was? What did you think then, and what do you know now?	
Augustine reaches the pinnacle of what the career of a rhetorician should be. Do you think he is content? Why or why not?	
What did Augustine first see in Ambrose? What can we take from this and use as Catholics in the world?	
Is Ambrose a good rhetorician? Does Augustine learn anything from him?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What is Augustine's position on the Catholic Church at the end of book 5?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 6	Not started	

Confessions Book 6

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 384-385AD
- Augustine opens Book VI with Monica following him to Milan, even going so far as comforting the sailors that she accompanied on her trip to Milan that they would be safe on their voyage.
 - Monica's spiritual life begins to deepen as she also encounters Ambrose and his teachings.
- Ambrose is a role model to Augustine because he embodied the ideals that he was searching for: respect and power.
 - Ambrose's celibacy was still a stumbling block for Augustine.
 - Augustine did not realize that Ambrose struggled with his own temptations.
 - Everything Augustine says about Ambrose mirrors Augustine when he is bishop.
 - Shocking that Ambrose read Scripture silently rather than aloud
 - Augustine develops a better understanding of Christianity through Ambrose
 - Before, the only view point that Augustine had on Christianity and the Church was through the critics of the Church such as the Manicheans.
 - Augustine develops a new understanding and appreciation of Scripture, not in a literal sense, but the deeper meaning explained by Ambrose.
 - Augustine begins to trust and prefer Catholic teaching, but it becomes not a question of trusting teaching, but whose teachings to trust.

- The Drunken Beggar
 - Through this episode, Augustine realizes how much simpler the beggar's life is to his own.
 - Augustine sees the beggar as more joyous than he, without responsibility and anxiety, though Augustine at this point has achieved everything that he has wanted and studied for.
- Alypius (Ahh-lip-e-us)
 - From Thagaste, younger than Augustine and was one of Augustine's students in Thagaste and at Carthage.
 - Went to Rome to study law
 - Became addicted to Gladiatorial games, though at first he shunned them.
 - Alypius' soul hurt more than the gladiator being killed.
 - Gladiator loses only body, but Alypius is losing his soul.
 - Alypius' struggle is seen as a struggle between the body and the soul. This is reminiscent of Manichism and their thoughts on duality.
 - Alypius thought he could do it on his own
 - The idea that self-sufficiency is incompatible with Christian conversion. We can't do it by ourselves. We need God's grace and the prayers of others.
 - Can use Alypius' sin to speak about Augustine's sin.
 - The conversion of Alypius' mirrors Augustine's eventual conversion.
 - Friendship is a major part of the conversion experience-you can't do it on your own, and you often become like those that you are friends with.
- Nebridius
 - We met him in Book IV. Wealthy man from Carthage and was a student along with Augustine there.
 - Moved to Milan to live with Augustine and Alypius, all who had similar goals of trying to find truth and wisdom.

- Monica arranges a marriage with a young girl from upper society. Augustine agrees in hopes of satiating his own fleshly temptations, but the girl is too young to marry immediately so he agrees to wait.
 - Because of this, the woman that Augustine was cohabitating with was sent away back to Africa.
 - After she was sent away, he began living with another woman as a means of quieting his lusts until he could marry his betrothed.
- With the above friends, Augustine attempts to begin a small community, much like an early monastery, but their plans fall through.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 6	Book	
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
In Chapter 2, Monica discovers that a tradition that she has been practicing in Africa is forbidden in Milan. She relents upon hearing that the restriction comes	

Question	Notes/ Answers
from Ambrose. Have you ever found that you were practicing your faith in a way that was incompatible to Church teaching? Was it hard for you to stop this tradition or practice?	
How does access to Faustus of the Manicheans in Book V compare to access to Ambrose in Book VI Chapter 3 paragraph 3? How does Augustine's description of both differ and what can we glean from these descriptions?	
"... What I had barked against for so many years was not the Catholic faith but the figments of carnal imagination." pg. 135. What Catholic teachings do you "bark against" that you think you might need to study more to try and understand?	
What are the contrasts between Augustine and the beggar? Why are they important?	
How would you update the scene of the beggar for today? How would you contrast their lives with yours right now? Are they better off or are you?	
As Alypius received what he thought was correction for his love of the circus from Augustine and loved him for it, has anyone ever corrected you? Did you love them for it or get angry? Were they right? Have you corrected someone and they loved you for it?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why does Augustine tell us about Alypius' addiction to the violence of gladiatorial contests?	
What excuses do we make to ourselves and to others that help us avoid finding truth, wisdom, and ultimately unity with God? Why do you think we make these excuses?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 7	Not started	

Confessions Book 7

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 386AD
- Augustine decides to accept Christianity through Pagan philosophers. Here we begin Augustine's merging of intellectualism and spirituality.
- He is also still trying to grapple with his idea of God
 - He still imagines God with a corporeal body
 - He still thinks of God, especially in size, seeing the size of the object having the equal amount of God within it.
 - He no longer has the Manichean beliefs to explain the concepts of good, evil, and the nature of God.
 - Augustine realizes God is the creator of all good, both material and immaterial, something the Manichees refuted.
 - Because of this, though, Augustine is still at a loss for the explanation of evil.
 - He continues to ask how the Good God created him good, only for him to make bad decisions rather than good ones.
 - If God is good and created good angels, how did an angel twist its own will so much as to create evil?
- Augustine discovers the Neoplatonists pg. 175-176
 - Platonists give rational basis for what's in Scripture.
 - Natural revelation from God even to pagans

- But the Platonists are not sufficient for understanding everything pg. 176-
“but that” phrase
- Augustine and his renewed interest and understanding of Scripture
 - Augustine is like Jacob-came through pagan writers, not directly from Judaism. Like the story of Jacob and Esau, Esau lost his inheritance to his younger brother Jacob. Augustine likens his search for truth in this way because he came to the Faith through pagan writers, rather than Christian or even Jewish writers and tradition.
 - Paul as a guide for Augustine’s own salvation
 - Egyptian gold like platonic pagan writers-leave some things behind but good things enrich Christianity
 - This all helps Augustine re-tackle the Scriptures
- Nature of God and Evil
 - God isn’t a kind of thing. He just is.
 - Platonists helped Augustine get to this
 - Asking the wrong questions about God and who God is
 - Nature of Permanence and Impermanence
 - If evil is a created thing, but God created all things and they are good...?
 - Begins to view evil as the absence of being
 - Platonists- “Sacred Order”
 - Different grades of goodness but some closer to good
 - It’s about choosing
 - Use and enjoyment
 - All good things need to be used in the proper way
 - Evil is our refusal to see something for what it is and what it can do
 - Choosing the lowest things rather than higher things.
 - It’s not just want I know but what I choose that is important

- Knowing and choosing are not the same thing or lead to the same thing
- At first Augustine is trying to find out about what to know, now he is finding out how to choose.
- Paul talks about love but not Plotinus (the difference between Neoplatonism and Catholic doctrine)
 - There was something missing-a gap
 - Christianity without Christ
 - Christological parts not there
 - Platonists tell us what to do but not how to get there.
 - The person of Jesus is too humble for Augustine
 - Epic heroes vs. self-emptying Christ- it's hard for Augustine to grasp
 - Paul is primary help to Augustine in this problem
 - Pg. 191 can show you where to go, but can't show you how to get there- Platonists
 - Platonists can add but are not sufficient in themselves and given fullness in Christ.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 7	Book	
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

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 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	

Term	Definition	Notes
	behavior as an inescapable part of human reality. Study guides pgs. 18-19	
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	Platonic Views: ● A friend should be a good person ● Must bring you from plurality to unity ● They must be trustworthy	

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
God “wanted to show me first and foremost how to thwart the proud but give grace to the humble.” How does this relate to the Platonists?	
What is the difference between humility and pride? How would you describe Augustine’s journey so far? How does humility and pride relate to education and seeing God?	
What did Augustine discover that finally made him fully reject astrology?	
What are some similarities between Christianity and Platonism as Augustine mentions in his Confessions? What are the limitations of “pagan” literature in Augustine’s quest for Truth and Wisdom?	
What did Augustine need to learn from the Platonists? How does Augustine “find God” amongst the pagans?	
On page 180, Christ seems to say “ I am the food of the mature; grow then and you will eat me.” What does this mean to you? What implications does it have?	
What has Augustine corrected since book III regarding his vision of God and the problem of evil?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
How does a new way of reading Scripture and a new confidence in Scripture lead Augustine to find some answers to questions about the nature of God and evil? Is he done asking these questions?	
Why did it take so long for Augustine to find answers to this problem?	
How does Augustine imagine himself as the biblical Jacob?	
What is the importance and limitation of classical wisdom such as the Platonists for the Christian?	
At this point in Augustine's journey, what is the importance of Christ?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 8	Not started	

Confessions Book 8

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 386AD
- Herein we cover Augustine's conversion
- He knows enough now and he is no longer interested in fame and fortune, but he still has a mistress because lust, his chief sin, still has a deep hold on him and celibacy was still a difficult if not impossible idea for him.
- Augustine goes to Simplicianus for wisdom
 - Augustine relays his reading of the Platonists, and Simplicianus tells him about Victorinus, a rhetorician and Neoplatonic philosopher who translated Platonist writing
 - Victorinus accepts Christianity but fears upsetting his friends, so he does not give himself wholly
 - Eventually, fearing rejection from Christ because he was fearful of publicly professing his faith, he entered the catechumenate, was baptized, and chose to be baptized publicly.
 - This story causes Augustine to want to imitate Victorinus, but he is still caught by sin. He realizes that the only reason he has not taken the next step is because he has grown accustomed to his sin, and it has become an entrenched habit
 - Here again we see the idea of good and bad habits and how they can shape our lives and actions.
- Conversion of Paul

- A model for Augustine's conversion, he discovered Paul's writings and studied them intently
- Augustine now has a circle of friends that have recently converted (Alypius, Porticianus)
 - I can do it on my own leaves out God
 - Leaves out the community of believers of support and their own stories of conversion
 - Paul's conversion also makes others tell Augustine about their conversions
- Augustine's approach to Christianity has mostly been intellectual but it will broaden significantly at this point.
- Saint Antony of Egypt
 - Text (Scripture) totally changes his life and he decides to take up an ascetic way of life.
 - Connection of words and conduct
 - Example of good reading and living cannot be separated
 - This story is within the story of a different conversion
 - Hearing different conversion stories helps show Augustine where he might have a roadmap of where to go-different angles (Victorinus, Saint Antony of Egypt, Porticianus, etc.)
- Augustine's Garden Conversion
 - Upon hearing many of the conversion stories, Augustine begins to despair that he cannot seem to make the next step toward God. It seems a minor step but impossible, yet he was able to pack up and move to Italy and it was no great thing to him.
 - Augustine sees this as a fragmentation of his heart, of his will. He does not really want to give himself entirely to God.
 - The alienation from God is punishment for his own sin. Again we see that unity is unity with God, while everything that seeks or creates separation draws us farther from God.
 - Division, however, isn't the only source of distance from God. It is also the choices we make. Augustine argues that it is in choosing the lower good

over the higher good that we sin. And, as imperfect humans, we often choose the lower good over the higher.

- While contemplating and agonizing over why he cannot or will not convert, Augustine hears a voice in the garden telling him to “pick it up and read.” He picks up a scroll of Romans and reads 13:13-14 his doubt instantly disappears.
- Alypius who is with him also reads Romans 14:1 and is moved to full conversion at the same time.
- Monica rejoices that her prayers are finally answered.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 8	Book	
Bible	Bible	Romans 13:13-14, 14:1
CCC 465	Website	• CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
What are some of the most interesting conversion stories that Augustine learns	

Question	Notes/ Answers
about in this book as a lead-in to his own conversion?	
How is the conversion of Victorinus a model for Augustine's own conversion?	
How do Augustine's friends help in his conversion? Have you had friends help in your own conversion?	
How does Augustine describe the moment of his conversion? How important is it that events happened exactly the way that he said they did?	
What is the importance of Augustine's conversion in a garden, and of trees?	
Why is it important that Alypius is converted at the same time that Augustine is?	
What does "conversion" mean? How does Augustine define it?	
How often have you thought as Augustine did: "What I now longed for was not greater certainty about you, but a more steadfast abiding in you." Pg. 194	
How is Augustine's conversion similar to Saul of Tarsus' conversion? How is it different? Have you had a complete conversion in this way?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What were Augustine's obstacles to conversion and how were they finally removed?	
What is the purpose of all of these conversion stories in book VIII?	
Is Augustine right in saying "The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed; the mind commands itself, and meets with resistance"? What is the reason he gives for this (pgs. 216-217)	
What do you think of Monica's reaction to Augustine's conversion? Were her prayers answered?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 9	Not started	

Confessions Book 9

Subject Philosophy/ Religion

Background: Life of St Augustine

- Time period of about 386-387AD
- Baptism is the act of incorporation into Christ
 - Once you are Baptized, whatever is true for Christ is true for you.
 - It is symbolic of freedom, so Augustine has been set free through his Baptism.
 - This launches his new life. Like Christ, he is resurrected to new life.
- Death
 - Death, now that Augustine has been baptized, takes on a new meaning for him. He has a new perspective than he did previously.
- Adeodotus (Ah-day-ah-dot-us)
 - Son of Augustine and unnamed mistress.
 - His name means Godsend or sent by God. Unknown if this is his given name of Baptismal name.
 - He dies shortly after his own Baptism.
 - We get the sense of who he was through the book written about the deep conversation Adeodotus and Augustine have with each other.
- Baptized, now what?
 - Augustine is now about 31 years old and has a career that doesn't quite align with Christianity.

- Augustine becomes ill and has difficulty speaking, so uses this as an excuse to retire and live a quasi-monastic life with his friends on a property loaned to him by Verecundus.
- While he gives up his life as a rhetorician, the rest of his life he uses those skills for Christianity.
- Augustine was very attracted to the monastic atmosphere and took this inspiration from St. Antony.
- To Marry or Not to Marry?
 - Within Christianity, there is nothing wrong with sex and sexuality within marriage.
 - What Augustine realizes for himself, is that sex is an addiction, so marriage would not necessarily help him conquer this specific sin.
 - This is why monasticism appeals to him so much:
 - If he puts marriage aside, it will develop other aspects of his spirituality
 - Becoming celibate makes sense for him (he wants to see if he can remain celibate, and using Paul as a model, he wants to be able to give God all of himself without being distracted.
 - It gives Augustine more time to be with God
 - “Wasting time with God”
 - While he may be inactive this time in his life, this will not be the case later in his life. He learns much now that he will use later as Bishop Augustine.
- Death of Monica
 - We have learned that Monica was far from perfect, but she was on her own journey just as all of us are.
 - While he was a bit flippant regarding the relationship of his mother at the beginning of his life, now that he is Christian, he has a different perspective on Monica and what she means to him.
 - The relating of Monica’s story is Augustine’s way of preparing the reader for her death. We learn of some virtues that she has:
 - She’s good at handling her household

- She was fond of wine (she started drinking out of rebelliousness, Augustine shows another form of addiction)
 - Through her, the journey they have both been on gives readers a look at the human condition-it's not just lust, but all manner of sins that lead to addiction and the separation of us from God.
 - She was a model in her relationship with her husband, Patricius.
 - She put up with his infidelities
 - Fidelity will only happen through Christianity
 - Women had very little power in the public sphere at this time, but they had much more influence within their own homes.
 - Family relationships were different back then, marriage then was much different than what it is now.
 - Her meekness
 - Augustine states that though Patricius had a violent temper, unlike other wives, she avoided being beaten due to the meekness she showed to him.
 - Monica was able to bring her mother-in-law to her side eventually
 - Monica gets sick and dies in Ostia around the year 387 while waiting to go back to Thegaste. She hoped to be buried by her husband but realized before she died that it didn't matter where she died, it was only her body.
- Joys of Heaven
 - A shared meditation about what Monica and Augustine believe Heaven is like pg. 251-253
 - This is the most that Augustine ever writes regarding mysticism
 - Even though Augustine's Christianity is very intellectual, he does not discount the mystical experience and even has his own.
 - Much like with descriptions of God, he uses language to describe what can't be described.
 - This experience shows the reader Augustine and Monica's unity with God.

- To seek unity is the purpose of all human relationships.
- Augustine Mourns
 - Now, Augustine mourns, but with few tears.
 - While he is grieved to lose his mother, he now sees her death as about her, rather than how he feels and what he wants.
- This book ends the narrative portion of Augustine's Confessions.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 9	Book	
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies
St. Anthony	Website	Life of St. Antony of Egypt
Psalm 4	Bible	

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why do you think this book is titled Death and Rebirth?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why did Augustine decide to leave the career he worked so hard for? How and when did he decide to do it, and why in that manner?	
How do the Psalms help Augustine? What was Augustine attracted to Psalm 4?	
How does Augustine's view of Scripture change throughout the narrative? Has your view of Scripture changed at all in reading Confessions?	
How does Adeodatus' death differ from the death of his unnamed friend in Book IV?	
From our reading and how he speaks about his son, what kind of father was Augustine?	
What are some of the most surprising aspects of the life of Augustine's mother, Monica?	
How do the stories of Augustine's father and mother remind us of the gap between domestic life in Augustine's time and in our own?	
How does Augustine use the death of his mother to illustrate his own spiritual life at this point in his life?	
Is Augustine's heart finally at rest by the end of Book IX?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Do the First nine books of the Confessions give glory to God? How so?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 10	Not started	

Confessions Book 10

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background

- Books 1 to 9/10 are about Augustine, Books 10 to 13 are about God
- The last 4 chapters are giving us a different way to praise God.
- Augustine wants us to use what came before to help us see and understand the ideas he now has
- These chapters continue to be a prayer to God.
- The type of confession has changed in these last books, but it is still a type of confession
- Augustine the Bishop
 - The Confessions has been an attempt to set the record straight, then he describes what it's like to be a bishop.
 - Augustine becomes a bishop, not of a city he is familiar with, such as Thagaste or Carthage, but of Hippo. He is a stranger there.
 - Through the Confessions he is asking readers not to look at what I did in the past, but what happened to me and where I am now
 - Reminder of grace and mercy of God
 - Model of Conversion
 - No one is perfect
- The Importance of Narrative and Story
 - Scripture is largely narrative
 - Augustine learned the power of telling a story early on in his education (Dido and Aeneas)

- They follow the flow of life
 - Truth versus story but anything that leads to a moral lesson within the story is good.
 - He is not just following tradition but enhancing it like Victorinus, etc.
- Conversion is a lifelong process
 - Temptation will always be an issue
 - Real payoff to continence
 - Can be more focused
 - The human condition doesn't allow for us to get rid of some of our temptations
 - An example is when he sleeps
 - Conversion is not the end of a process
 - It's not magic but it does change things
 - Life is a struggle
 - Augustine is dealing with a powerful mystery
 - This is an important lesson-priests and religious go through the same struggles we do
- Memory
 - Augustine is still looking for the nature of God
 - What's in our memory?
 - Historical recollections
 - Smells
 - Subtle differences of things
 - We don't have to be physically somewhere to go back to that place with memory
 - The content and context of ideas and education
 - Life would be unlivable without memory

- Memory in terms of language
 - Remember pain without feeling the same pain
 - Interactions between mind and body
 - We can remember things that are forgotten
 - That we can have forgetfulness as a concept
 - How do we deal with this paradox?
 - Education/Skills
 - Memory helps with repetition until it becomes second nature
 - Store math in memory
 - Imagine if you had to learn everything over again at the same time all of the time
 - Happiness
 - Everyone wants to be happy
 - Is this desire for happiness because we have all experience it?
 - It can be linked to our search for God-did God put this desire for happiness there?
 - We can look at all of our emotions from the distance of memory and those moments can mean more now then they did at the time.
- Senses are valuable but can be dangerous
 - Curiosity can be both good and dangerous for us
 - We need to learn how to inquire
 - There may be things that we should not learn about
 - Undirected curiosity-is this curiosity for a use or is it because it's there?
 - Music as a distraction to liturgy
 - To what extent do we keep out certain things?
 - Here he is reflecting on pastoral issues of his own time

- Trinitarian view of who God is and who we all are
 - How does this let us know about Augustine more and more about ourselves
 - Memory=Father=Past
 - intellect= Son=Present
 - will= Holy Spirit=Future
- } Trinitarian
- How much of what we call mind is memory?

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 10	Book	
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
One major theme of the Confessions is disordered thinking. How has your perspective on disordered thinking changed since beginning the book?	
How does Augustine think his book will help others?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Do you agree with Augustine's analogy of memory being like the mind's stomach in Chapter 14? Why or why not?	
Why is a discussion of memory appropriate in Book X of the Confessions?	
According to Augustine, what makes memory such a fascinating subject?	
What are some of the major paradoxes that Augustine associates with memory?	
Augustine asserts that happiness is a natural inclination of all human hearts, but what prevents us from achieving it? The central theme of the whole book (our hearts are restless..)	
Why is memory important to spiritual development?	
Why is memory ultimately not something that can ever fully be explained, according to Augustine?	
Chapter 23 paragraph 34. How does this relate to the modern world, and its temptation to be ignorant or negligent of the truth?	
Augustine goes into great detail regarding the senses. What is the point of all of this?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why does Book X end the way it does?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 11	Not started	
Genesis 1	Not started	
Timaeus by Plato	Not started	

Confessions Book II

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background

- In this book Augustine uses more philosophical rather than theological terms
- Again the idea of what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem
- Augustine has established his credibility with the reader
- Time
 - This is a meditation on time rather than giving actual answers about time.
 - It continues the discussion of memory but leads to knowledge of God-or at least a meditation on God
 - Genesis-God's autobiography of sorts
 - If people are made in the image of God, then to what extent is Genesis humanity's bio as well?
 - This is how Augustine thinks of Genesis'
 - Plato-he speaks of time and creation
 - The Timaeus- Augustine gets some of his ideas on time from Plato
 - Giving an account of creation-the Creator needs a model or a blueprint for creation, this is what creation in Genesis is
 - Time is the moving image of Eternity
 - This is what Augustine is trying to meditate on
 - He has no ultimate answer for this
 - It is the temporal expression of God's eternal Will

- Augustine must use his time wisely now because he is a bishop now and very busy
- Augustine tells an old joke about time
 - The answer should be, what I don't know, I don't know.
 - This time question should be taken seriously
 - We can't discuss God without discussing Time and what is outside of Time
 - God is not Time-bound, but we are
- Plato
 - Timaeus
 - Augustine's initial ideas come from this work by Plato
 - It is important because:
 - It gives an account of Creation
 - God or Creator needs a blueprint. The first creation is how it exists in God's mind
 - Definition of Time
 - The moving image of eternity
 - Meditation on time
 - Meditation on Eternity
 - Temporal expression of God's will
 - How do we sit in time but seek God in Eternity?
 - This is a mystery Augustine can't solve because
 - He can't talk about time without being in time-it's an important paradox
 - How long does the "Present" last?
 - As Time narrows, we can't say time exists because it is so fleeting.

- If we could freeze a moment of present before it comes and before it leaves, that moment would be Eternity.
- For Augustine, Eternity is always present.
- What is past, present and future to us is only “always is” to God.
 - To say that God knows the future is a human construct, not something that applies to God.
- Time is a part of Creation.
- God’s Will is Eternal (outside time).
- Augustine moves from Time to God
 - Time and Eternity meet when the Word Made Flesh comes into the world (Christ-these thoughts are all very Chrristological).
 - Past events remain through memory.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 11	Book	
Genesis 1	Bible	
Timaeus by Plato	Book	If you require a little extra light reading. Foundational book that was inspirational to Augustine.
CCC 465	Website	● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Why is Augustine asking these questions?	
If you could speak with one person from the Bible (other than God, Jesus, Mary or Joseph), who would it be? Why?	
What does Augustine believe about God and Time? Who or what is the Beginning and why?	
How does what Augustine believes about God and time relate to what happened before in the Confessions?	
According to Augustine, why did God create? Did God need to create? Is what God created eternal? Why or why not?	
How does Augustine come to define eternity?	
How does Augustine come to define time?	
How is time connected to memory?	
How does Augustine's meditation on time lead him to a meditation on the nature of God?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What does Augustine deduce about what God was doing before Creation?	
Is it true that “ There are few things, in fact, which we state accurately; far more we express loosely, but what we mean is understood” (XI.20.26)? Why or why not?	
What is the point of Book XI and why do we care about time and eternity as Catholics? What is Augustine trying to convey to his readers?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 12	Not started	
Genesis 1	Not started	

Confessions Book 12

Subject **Philosophy/ Religion**

Background

- Another way to approach the last three books:
 - Books I to IX-Manichean
 - Books X to 13- Subtle refutation of Manicheism
 - They got time and creation wrong!
 - If you get Time wrong, you get Creation wrong, if you get Creation wrong, you get everything else wrong!
 - Miseducation-----> Education
 - 1 -----> 9
 - 10-----> 13
- We don't have a vantage point outside of Creation to speak on Creation
- The Relationship between Creature and Creator:

Creation

Genesis 1

Creation and what follows is a more specific telling of how it happened

More Platonic model

-God thought of Creation first, then built it out (Timaeus)

-Augustine is in this camp

- What does the Creation story mean if it is not literal?
- Augustine is not trying to define it, but instead trying to open up the text.

- Augustine lists ten 'axioms' that seem to be required of all readings of Genesis:
 - God made heaven and earth
 - The 'beginning' refers to God's wisdom
 - 'heaven and earth' is a label for 'all natures made and created' (for Augustine, this means the heaven of heaven and formless matter)
 - mutability implies 'a kind of formlessness' in that everything mutable is in a state of flux
 - what is so totally mutable as to be without form and therefore changeless (as in the case of formless matter) has no experience of time
 - what is totally formless cannot suffer temporal successiveness
 - a source sometimes takes the name of its product (as in Augustine's reading of 'heaven and earth' as 'heaven of heaven and formless matter')
 - 'earth and the abyss' in Genesis refers to formed objects that possess almost total formlessness
 - God made everything that has form as well as everything capable of receiving form
 - anything that 'acquires form' is first formless
- Formless matter did not precede the physical in time, but rather in origin.
 - The visible creation is not made from formless matter, but rather is of it—an entirely more dynamic and interactive dependency.
- Augustine deliberately writes this way because it allows people to discuss and comment on it
 - Within this, though, there are boundaries, we also have to follow Church teachings on the matter
 - In order to read Scripture properly we must let go of our Ego.

Resources

Name	Type	Notes
Book 12	Book	
Genesis 1	Bible	
CCC 465	Website	• CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Creation is the theme of this book. Why do you think it was important for Augustine to discuss Creation toward the end of the Confessions, or at all?	
How have you visualized Creation in Scripture?	
What are the three ways of bringing something about that are mentioned in the Confessions (Hint: pg. 370)?	
What is life and death to Augustine? Do you agree or disagree?	
What does Augustine have to say about the interpretation of the first passages of Genesis that would be of particular interest to contemporary readers?	

Question	Notes/ Answers
What does time and creation have to do with one another?	
What does Augustine have to say about those who disagree with his interpretations of the Bible?	
What are some of the opposing interpretations of creation that Augustine mentions and what does he say about these ideas?	
What does Augustine say about facts and intentions in Scripture, and how does that affect your own reading of Scripture? Is it different from what you were taught?	
How has this Book changed your perspective of God and Creation?	

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 13	Not started	
Genesis 1	Not started	