

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important throughout the Confessions
Major Heresies	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of Heresies
CCC 465	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC mention of some of the first heresies

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 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?	
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 paragraphs starting with the second paragraph.	Not started	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platonic view of Friendship that Augustine baked some of his own views on
CCC 465	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Key terms and *concepts*

Term	Definition	Notes
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Definition of Good and Evil		
Orientation toward self		
Education Vs. Indoctrination/ Miseducation		

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

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
<p>"...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?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	

Question	Notes/ Answers
<p>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?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>Why exactly does Augustine steal the pears?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>How does the Biblical story of Adam and Eve parallel Augustine's story of stealing the pears?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	

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 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 Manicheism (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

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	

Term	Definition	Notes
	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 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		

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

Questions and discussion

Question	Notes/ Answers
Do you agree with Agustine 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.	

Question	Notes/ Answers
<p>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?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>How important is it to ask questions about your own education? How can you go about doing that now?</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>Do you agree with Ambrose when he refused to speak with Augustine at Monica's request(pg. 72)? Have you ever found yourself in that situation? How did you respond and what was the result?</p>	
<p>How can we prepare ourselves for the long journey to find genuine wisdom?</p>	

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 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 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, 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Book Augustine read
CCC 465	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CCC mention of some of the first heresies

Key terms and concepts

Term	Definition	Notes
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Term	Definition	Notes
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A friend should be a good person • Must bring you from plurality to unity • They must be trustworthy 	

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 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 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

Key terms and *concepts*

Term	Definition	Notes
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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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A friend should be a good person 	

Term	Definition	Notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must bring you from plurality to unity • They must be trustworthy 	

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)	
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	

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

Homework

Task	Status	Notes
Read Book 6	Not started	

