

FNDL 27002, RLST 25102, MDVL 25102

Reading Augustine's *Confessions*

Autumn 2023

MW 1:30-2:50pm

Swift 201

Professor Richard Miller

Swift Hall 202

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Office hours: Wed 10am-1pm

(sign up on the sheet in the
Martin Marty Center)

Phone: 773-702-7252

Description

This course will carry out a close reading of Augustine's *Confessions*. We will study the work not only as a spiritual autobiography—a common approach—but also as a philosophical argument against alternatives to Christian faith and practice in the late fourth century. That argument will invite us to examine the implications of religious faith for human well-being and on how religious convictions affect the quality of human relationships, self-knowledge, and the emotions. We'll examine how *Confessions* interrogates the quality of human love, fear, hatred, and regret; moral responsibilities to ourselves and others; the (anxious) awareness that we are limited in body and time; and how to craft an honest narrative of self-understanding. We will ask (among other things), Is religion a source of personal healing and health, or an obstacle to it? What sorts of problems is religion meant to cure? What problems do religious beliefs create? How does religion bear on the self's loves, its past, its mortality, its doubts? Along the way we'll ask whether it is possible to *want* to do evil, whether it is possible to love or grieve too much, whether we are responsible for what happens in our dreams, what it means to be a friend—and how Augustine's answers to these questions presuppose a wider account of divine justice, charity, and the ordering of the cosmos.

Text

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. with an Introduction and notes by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2019). Please be sure to bring **this edition** to each class.

You are welcome to bring other editions to class in addition to this one, e.g., the Loeb Classical Library, but please be sure to acquire the Williams translation so that everyone will be able to reference the same text.

Please note that we may occasionally make reference to James J. O'Donnell's textual commentary of *Confessions*, available online at: <http://www.stoa.org/hippo>.

Resources

There are numerous secondary sources on Canvas\Files for our class, as well as a "Lexicon of Augustinian Terms" that I encourage you to consult on a regular basis.

Requirements

There will be two 2-3 page papers (single-spaced, typed) on suggested topics, worth 30% each. Those topics will be posted on Canvas\Files. I encourage you to develop your paper topics in

consultation with me. The due dates for these papers are listed on the course schedule below. All papers should be sent to my email as a Word attachment. Attendance and participation are worth 20%. There will also be a Final Exam (comprehensive), worth 20%.

Attendance policy: Only excused, documented absences are acceptable.

Summary:

2 Short papers (2-3 pp):	60%
Attendance & participation:	20%
Final exam:	20%

Missed Class Policy

If you miss a class, you are to write a 1 page single-spaced summary exposition of the reading for that session, and submit that to me as a Word document via email within a week of the missed class. You are to conclude your summary by raising one question that draws from your summary.

Course Schedule

Wk 1

September 27

Introduction to course and core concepts for understanding Augustine.

Read: *Confessions*, Book 1, and “Essential Scriptures” (xxv-xxvii).

Also, *skim* the entire volume to get a sense of the whole.

On lack, desire, attachment

On praise, witness, admission

*Learning **human** words*

Wk 2

Oct. 2

1. *Confessions*, Book 2 [flesh]

On reductive and non-reductive accounts of evil

Oct. 4

2. *Confessions*, Book 2, continued.

Wk 3

Oct. 9

1. *Confessions*, Book 3 [mind/curiosity]

On anthropocentric and theocentric sources of value

Oct. 11

2. *Confessions*, Book 4 [ambition]

On possessive and non-possessive forms of love

First paper due: please send to me as a Word attachment via email.

Wk 4

Oct. 16

1. *Confessions*, Book 4

On friendship and grief

On the paradox of evil: excess and deficiency

Oct. 18 2. *Confessions*, Book 5
Pivoting

Wk 5

Oct. 23 1. *Confessions*, Book 5
On style, substance, and anti-types

Oct. 25 2. *Confessions*, Book 6 [ambition]
*On faith **in** and faith **as***
On volitional and cognitive agency

Wk 6

Oct. 30 1. *Confessions*, Book 7 [mind/curiosity]
On illumination and earthbound desire

Nov. 1 2. *Confessions*, Book 8 [flesh]
On knowing, but not “being grounded”
Tolle lege, tolle lege!

Second paper due: please send to me as a Word attachment via email.

Wk 7

Nov. 6 1. *Confessions*, Book 9
On first- and second-order desires
On mediations

Nov. 8 2. *Confessions*, Book 10
On radical contingency and temporality

Wk 8

Nov. 13 1. *Confessions*, Book 10, continued
On memory, attention, and expectation

Nov. 15 2. *Confessions*, Book 11
On how to narrate truthfully
Father
Measure/form/order

Wk 9

Nov. 27 1. *Confessions*, Book 12
Joining Athens and Jerusalem
Son

Nov. 29 2. *Confessions*, Book 13
On Community
Holy Spirit
Exitus-reditus

On studying Confessions and the study of religion

Final Exam (2 hours, essay, comprehensive): Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2023