

Augustine, The Confessions

This outline of Augustine's Confessions is based on the Oxford World Classic edition translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 1991, ISBN 0192833723). The numbers in the left column are PAGE NUMBERS IN CHADWICK EDITION.

BOOK I: THE EARLY YEARS

- 7 Infancy .
- 10 Boyhood .
- 13 Almost baptized by his Christian mother **Monica**.
- 13 Grammar school at **Madauros**, 366-369 A.D.
- 15 Aug hated learning Greek.
- 17 Aug didn't like **Homer** , liked Virgil (Rome)

BOOK II: ADOLESCENCE

- 26 Augustine returns to **Thagaste**. He is unoccupied and gets into trouble.
- 26 **Coming of age**: his father sees him in the bathhouse knows he is sexually mature.

This scene is Aug's way of introducing Book II which is a book about his coming of age sexually and his flirtation with chaos and destruction.
- 27 His mother **Monica** warns him against fornication.
- 28 Making his way through the streets of "Babylon" luxuriating in sexual indulgence.
- 28 "Such were the companions with whom I made my way through the streets of Babylon. With them I rolled in its dung as if rolling in spices and precious ointment."
- 29 Stealing the **pears**.
- 29 "I had no motive for my wickedness except **wickedness** itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall . ." (p.29)

"But my pleasure was not in the pears; it was in the crime itself."

This is one of the most important sections in the whole of *The Confessions*. Here Augustine challenges the whole of Greco-Roman ethics as summarized in Cicero's *On Duties* (*De Officiis*). Cicero following the Greek philosophers believed that the human being would not knowingly do evil. Wrongdoing is always a matter of insufficient knowledge. Augustine says here with his account of the incident of the pears, that the human being not only will do evil, the human being on occasion will LOVE doing evil exactly for the thrill of doing evil. This insight into human nature from this Christian theologian stood at the center of all Western ethics for the next 1400 years.

33 Alone and in **groups**.

Here is another insight that turns all of classical ethics on its head. Aug says he would not have done it alone. Thus the group makes us behave WORSE! (Hitler would agree) For more on this from the point of view of a modern writer see Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*.

Aristotle and Cicero would be scandalized. Their idea was that society (groups) make us behave better.

BOOK III: STUDENT AT CARTHAGE

35 In 376 A.D, Augustine is now in **Carthage**, a graduate student pursuing advanced studies in rhetoric, the philosophical path we would now call the liberal arts.

35 He arrives in Carthage with a mistress and a newborn child:
Adeodatus (gift of God).

35 His life in Carthage is full of philosophy and love.

35 He says he was "in love with love."

35 These are his days of love, lust, **sex**, bodies.

35 Living the life of love, he loves Virgil, the poet of the great tragic love affair of Aeneas and Dido.

37 He loves the theater of Carthage

Early Christians always worried about the theater, the power of drama.

37 He wonders whether we love suffering; that we go to the theater to see suffering and to suffer vicariously.

38 He is at the top of his class. "inflated with conceit."

- 38 He associates with the town tough guys, the "**Wreckers**" as he calls them, the "Radicals" and he is brilliantly honest and revealing about how he was not really one of them, he was not really a radical, a wrecker, but he enjoyed associating with them and basking in their danger and their reputation for danger. (p. 38) In other words, he enjoyed flirting with danger as long as it did not really harm his already high hopes for a career.
- 38 He reads **Cicero's dialogue, Hortensius** (now lost) and it changes his life. Cicero calls us to give up the pursuit of worldly things and worldly pleasures and to turn to the pursuit of truth, to philosophy. Augustine says it changed his life. How extraordinary it is to think about the fact that Cicero is the key figure in the life of young Augustine.
- 40 first encounters with the **Bible**. Doesn't like it.

BOOK IV CARTHAGE AND MANICHAEANS

- 52 Manichaeans. Augustine, age 19 (373) and his friend Honoratus join the Manichaeans founded by a Persian philosopher Mani (215-276) and only recently introduced into North Africa.
- 53 Augustine is now a teacher of rhetoric. Public speaking. He is a brilliant natural speaker all his life. His sermons become internationally famous.
- 53 Augustine's **girlfriend**. She remains unnamed. (Garry Wills in his very fine little Penguin biography names her "Una" ie number one. It is a good idea and I like it so I will call her "Una" too.) They are living together and have a child. All this of course scandalized his mother Monica so it is helpful to see that young Augustine was a "radical" ie unafraid to scandalize. And this continues all his life. He is very courageous about living and preaching according to his own ideas. At this point he is a sexy, brilliant young man living with his girlfriend and outraging his loving mother in the process. Sounds sort of like a 1960's kid off at UCB Berkeley turning into a "radical."
- 69 Reading **Aristotle's Categories**. Augustine wrestles with God and the Categories.

BOOK V CRISIS OVER MANICHAEAN TEACHINGS; AUGUSTINE GOES TO ROME (383)

- 77 Augustine examining **Manichaean doctrines**. Waiting for the coming of the brilliant teacher Faustus. Faustus comes and is charming and learned but unable to answer Augustine's needs. A Crisis of belief.
- 82 **Augustine goes to Rome (383)**. Augustine's family has connections in Rome. Aug quickly establishes a reputation as a brilliant teacher of rhetoric.
- 87 **Augustine goes to Milan. (October 384)** It is one of the amazing events of early Christian history that the most brilliant theologian of early Christian thinking should come to Milan and meet and be influenced by and be baptized by the other great leader in early Christianity: Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. With Jerome who was translating the Bible into Latin, these three contemporaries form the central doctrine and practices of the early Christian church.

BOOK VI SECULAR AMBITIONS AND PERSONAL CONFLICTS IN MILAN

- 90 Mother Monica comes to **Milan** to be with him.
- 94 Augustine gives a second look at the Bible and is now more sympathetic now that he has given up his Manichaean beliefs.
- 98 Living with a group of friends in Milan including his best friend Alypius.
- 106 **Sex, marriage, or chastity**. Augustine and his friend Alypius discuss how someone should live their lives. These pages allow us to have a window into the discussions of the fourth century out of which came the early Christian choice of chastity, something ultimately Augustine would choose for himself.
- 109 Augustine and his girlfriend Una break up and she returns to North Africa. Because she returned to a new life and very likely a marriage, Augustine protected her identity in this book and that is the reason we do not know her name. He describes her leaving as being "torn away" from him, that it was terrible and painful. His mother Monica was the force that brought about the breakup. She wanted Aug to convert to Christianity and marry in the Church. (Sound familiar?)

BOOK VII PLATO AND NEOPLATONISM

- 111 "By now my evil and wicked youth was dead." (Age 30)
- 121 Augustine begins extensive study of Plato and the Christian followers of Plato called "**Neoplatonists**," most important of whom was Plotinus (205-270).
- Aug discovered he could bring Neoplatonism and Christianity together into a coherent philosophy.

BOOK VIII CONVERSION

- 146 Augustine struggles with belief and unbelief in the garden.
- 152 The voice in the **garden**. "Pick up and read." Romans 13:13-14.
"Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strufe and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts."
- 163 **Baptism** by Bishop Ambrose in the Cathedral of Milan. Easter 387.

BOOK IX DEATH OF MONICA

- 166 **Death of Monica.**
- 174 The moment of Monica's death and Augustine's grief.

BOOK X MEMORY

- 185 Here begins a long dissertation on the role of Memory in our lives.

BOOK XI TIME

- 230 Here begins Augustine's ideas about Time. This book is the first extensive analysis of time in all of ancient philosophy. That it comes from the pen of a recent convert to Christianity tells us how central this concept is in Judeo-Christian thought and is the most "modern" element in all of Augustine's writings. He returns to the subject later in a big book called *The City of God*.

