



ST. AUGUSTINE

Conversion | Death of Monica



PART I: THE DRAMA OF CONVERSION

The “monstrous split”





QUICK REVIEW

- ▶ Last time, I suggested that *Confessions* gives us the model for our modern understanding of:
 - ▶ confession as intimate (generally sexual)—and hence authentic
 - ▶ autobiography as a narrative of a radical change, written by an older, wiser narrator
 - ▶ selfhood as a narrative we tell ourselves about ourselves, about maturation, change
 - ▶ A model for *time*: before, now and after united in a single story
- ▶ This drama is internal, *inside*



BOOK VIII: 3 MAIN POINTS

- ▶ Relies on the structure of figure and fulfillment in its conversion narrative; the self that was is a primitive and immature version of the one that will be
- ▶ Bulk of chapter is an attempt to understand the contradiction of human psychology, what Augustine calls “the monstrous split” between what we do and what we know is right
- ▶ Finally, conversion is profoundly connected to literature; it is to be understood as a fundamentally literary act



BOOK VIII: CONVERSION

- ▶ Book VIII is climax of narrative, the pivot of the change in Augustine's intimate life, narrative of self
- ▶ Conversion narratives (and after, all autobiographies) *require* this moment of epiphanic change; they acquire the force of fate or destiny within the narrative
- ▶ Once again, the structure is that of figure and fulfillment: the immature Augustine is the figure of what is to come

“

For now we see through a glass,
darkly; but then face to face: now I
know in part; but then shall I know
even as also I am known.

— *I Corinthians 13:12*

see *Confessions* p. 133



BOOK VIII: PSYCHOLOGY

- ▶ Most of Book VIII is spent on an attempt to understand human psychology
- ▶ first, why is joy greater when set against fear, positive vs. negative? (parable of the lost coin) (137-38)
- ▶ the role of habit in determining the will (140-41)
- ▶ the problem of the *split subject*: how can I not want what I want to want, and want what I don't want? Who wants what? And who doesn't? (self-deception)

“ In every case the joy is greater, the worse the pain which is preceded it. Why is this, Lord my God? You are eternal to yourself, you are your own joy. Why is it that *this* part of creation alternates between regress and progress, between hostilities and reconciliations?

— VIII. iii (8), p. 138

“ The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. My new will was not yet strong enough to conquer my old will, which had the strength of old habit.

— *VIII. v(10), p. 140*

“

I was split between them [desires of the flesh and those of the spirit], but more of me was in that which I approved in myself than in that which I disapproved. But I was responsible for the fact that habit had become so embattled against me; for it was with my consent that I came to the place in which I did not wish to be.

— *VIII. v (11), p. 140*



BOOK VIII: SPLIT SUBJECT

- ▶ Augustine describes hiding behind his own back(144) to avoid facing himself.
- ▶ Has faith, however, that God can “set me before my face”—in short, the split self can be joined; the conversion will bring the two together in harmony (*I Corinthians* 13:12)
- ▶ This split condition is produced by the Fall (our free will no longer coincides with God’s), producing paradoxes like...

“

God, grant me chastity and continence —
but not yet.

— *St. Augustine, VIII. vii (17), 145*

“

Vorrei voler, Signor, quel ch'io non voglio.

I wish I wanted, O Lord, what I don't want.

— *Michelangelo*



BOOK VIII: SPLIT SUBJECT

- This split self leads to a “monstrous situation” (147), unacceptable both philosophically and religiously: the soul controls the body easily, but cannot control the soul itself. Controlling the body takes will plus force; controlling the soul requires will alone—but is *harder!*
- Concludes that the will to refrain from sin is incomplete and partial: we are not split, but incomplete
- I disagree

“

The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed. The mind commands itself and meets resistance. The mind commands the hand to move, and it is so easy that one hardly distinguishes the order from its execution. Yet mind is mind, and hand is body. The mind orders the mind to will. The recipient of the order is itself, yet it does not perform it. What causes this monstrosity and why does this happen?

— *VIII. ix (21), 148*

“The will that commands is incomplete, and therefore what it commands does not happen. If it were complete, it would not need to command the will to exist, *since it would exist already*. Therefore there is no monstrous split.

— VIII. ix (21), 148



BOOK VIII: SPLIT SUBJECT

- Why this complicated solution? Why not say “people are naturally lustful and gluttonous, so it’s hard to restrain our appetites”?
- The problem of evil (theodicy) acquires an unusual flavor in Augustine; it doesn’t exist. No evil, just absence of God.
- Hence, for Augustine, everything is traced back to the Fall; after the Fall, our will is distorted, incomplete, requiring constant rectification.



BOOK VIII: LITERATURE

- ▶ Augustine is a professor of literature, writing a book filled with citations of and allusions to other literature
- ▶ A visitor, after picking up a book (Paul), tells Augustine the story of how *he* converted after finding the *Life of St. Antony* (142-44); Antony converts after reading Matthew 19.
- ▶ Augustine opens the Bible at random to Romans 13, and it seems, of course, to speak directly to him:

“ Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.

— *Romans 13: 13-14*



BOOK VIII: LITERATURE

- Indeed, Augustine conceives of his narrative as an arc leading from Cicero (the book that inspired him to search for wisdom) to the Bible, from (pagan) book to (Christian) book
- Confession, conversion, autobiography, the sense of the self—these are not simply tied to literature. Our confessions, conversions, lives, selves are themselves books; we are literary beings, because we are built out of narratives



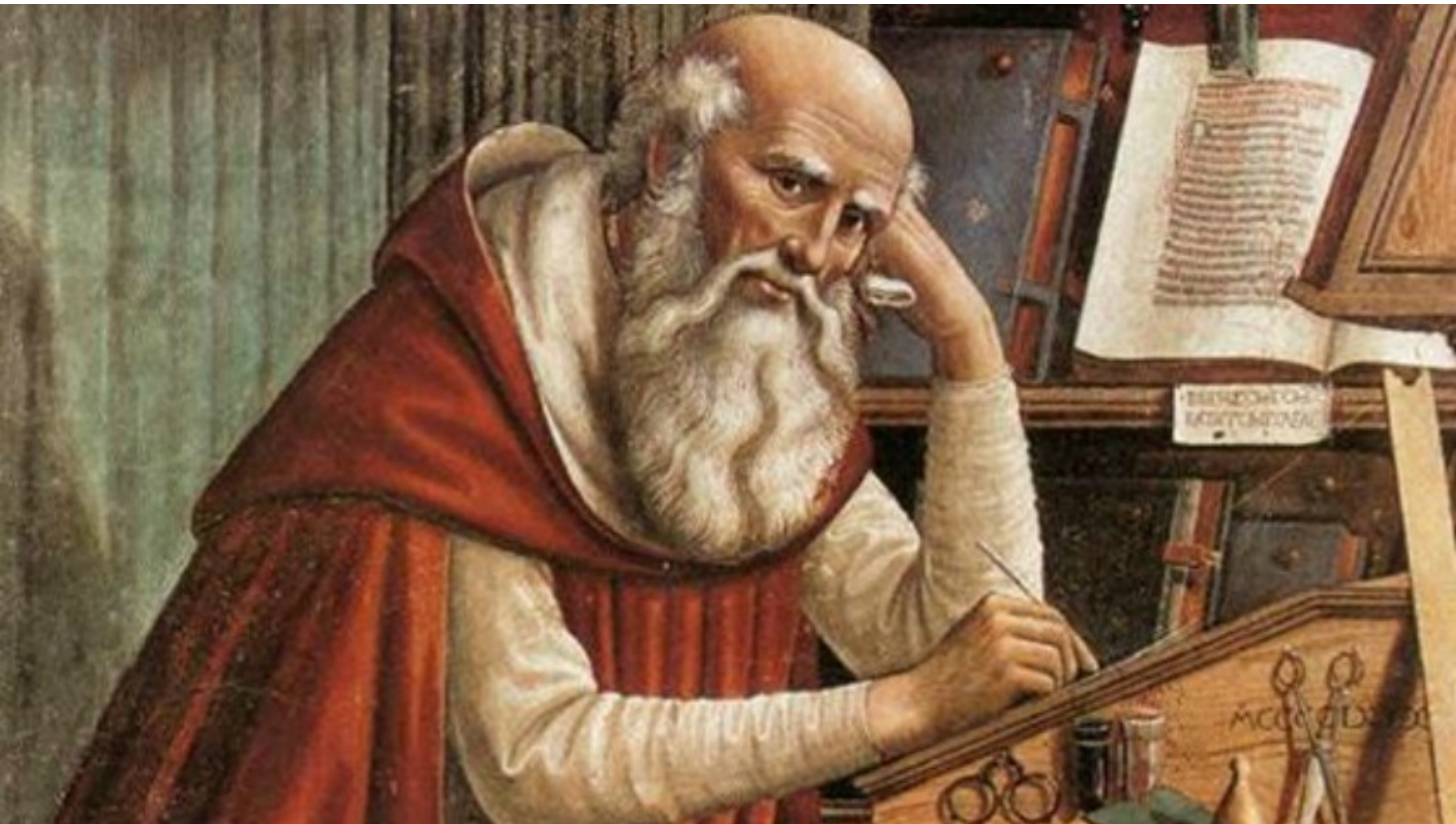
VERITAS

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PART II: THE DEATH OF MONICA





BOOK IX: 3 MAIN POINTS

- ▶ Augustine is totally sincere; but the text also exists to justify his decisions, especially Book IX (political)
 - ▶ retirement (155-58)
 - ▶ anti-Manicheanism (161)
 - ▶ crying for mother's death (174)
- ▶ asceticism vs. music (asceticism is the renunciation of aesthetic enjoyment, but music is a “spiritual” form of aesthetic enjoyment): Alypius vs. death of Adeodatus (given-by-God) (163-4)
- ▶ In the repression of pride, calling attention to himself, tears—everything is forced *inside*, intensified

“

I closed her eyes and an overwhelming grief welled into my heart and was about to flow forth in floods of tears. But at the same time under a powerful act of mental control my eyes held back the flood and dried it up. The inward struggle put me into great agony. Then when she breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus cried out in sorrow and was pressed by all of us to be silent. In this way too something of the child in me, which had slipped towards weeping, was checked and silenced by the youthful voice, the voice of my heart.

— *IX. xii (29), p. 174*

“Now I let flow the tears which I’ve held back so they ran as freely as they wished. My heart rested upon them, and reclined upon them because it was *your* ears that were there, not those of some human critic would put a proud interpretation on my weeping.

— *IX. xii (33), p. 176*



FINAL EXAM

**SOME MAY PASS THE TEST...
GOD HELP THE REST.**

FINAL EXAM, **TUES.** 12/14/21, 8:00–11:00 AM, HERE!

- A few finish in just over an hour, many finish at around the 2 hour mark, a handful stay to the very end.
- Four sections:
 - (1) short (3-4 sentences) answers to big questions: 4 questions, 5 points each; answer all (20 points).
 - (2) short answers to small questions (did you come to lectures?): 10 questions, 5 points each; answer all (50 pts).
 - (3) identifications (identify and comment): 8 questions, 3 points each; answer 5 out of the 8 (15 pts).
 - (4) long (1½ pages) essay on a “big topic” that covers much of the class (15 pts)



FINAL EXAM: GENERAL

- ▶ I will be looking over the same PDFs of the semester's PowerPoints to remind myself about lecture. I won't ask you about ideas and texts that aren't mentioned there (what 4 languages are unrelated to any other language?).
- ▶ Three is the magic number. Three historical-cultural eras. Three authors and three ideas. Three pieces of information for the IDs. Three examples. Three things that are correct, mind you (Augustine is not ironic; *Gilgamesh* is not lyric poetry; Cervantes did not write *The Tempest*).

“BIG” QUESTIONS (DID YOU DO THE READING?)

Answer all 4 questions with 3-4 sentences (refer to several important ideas, authors and texts). (5 pts. each; 20 pts. total).

1. Discuss the ancient world’s understanding of sex and sexuality.

2. Discuss the idea of irony, and what it meant to different authors in different ages.



SECTION I: BIG QUESTIONS

- A 5-point answer has 3-4 coherent sentences, and several important ideas, authors and texts; it convincingly shows you did some of the reading
- The “ancient sex” question: authors/texts include Gilgamesh; the Bible; Sophocles; Catullus; Ovid; Homer
- Ideas? the “public” and humanizing sex of Gilgamesh, openly bisexual; the invention of Oedipal sexuality in Sophocles; Augustine and sexual confession
- Can you tie it all together?



SECTION I: BIG QUESTIONS

- Irony: Plato, Sophocles, Augustine, Cervantes
- No irony in the Middle Ages
- Socratic irony, cosmic irony, modern “cynical” irony
- If you mention 3 appropriate authors and explain how they’re relevant, it’s a 5; only 1-2 examples will earn less
- The more confusion you show (Augustine is an example of cynical irony?!), the lower the grade
- Specific names and titles are good

“SMALL” QUESTIONS (DID YOU COME TO LECTURE?)

Answer all 10 questions, 3-5 sentences (5 pts. each; 50 total).

1. What are some ways that the story of Gilgamesh continues today

2. Show how, in Homer's *The Odyssey*, hospitality is radically ambiguous.

3. Compare and contrast Sappho and Catullus.



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UNIQUE
QUESTIONS
ABOUT
ME

SECTION II: SMALL QUESTIONS

- ▶ Here your answers are the same length, 3-5 sentences, but are focused on one author or one lecture.
- ▶ The more specific references to the lecture, the higher the score: the future of *Gilgamesh*:
“Darmok,” Babylonian architecture, *Ghostbusters*, *Snow Crash*, pyramid aliens, *Blade Runner*, *Stargate*, *Babylon 5*, *Metropolis*
- ▶ You’ll need to do a little more than just cite titles: these show that we look to our ancient past as “another world,” handy metaphor for science fiction



SECTION II: SMALL QUESTIONS

- ▶ You don't need to summarize the lecture, but give several specifics that show you got some of the main points
- ▶ Compare and contrast Sappho and Catullus: both wrote love poetry, but Sappho wrote from a distance, Catullus in the midst of it; different forms and styles (give a specific form); Catullus obscene and playful, writes mostly about one woman; etc.
- ▶ Hospitality is ambiguous: cite 3 examples of how hospitality is required but dangerous

IDENTIFICATIONS (DID YOU HAVE A SENSE OF STYLE?)

Give author and title, and comment briefly on the passage's importance. Answer only *five* out of the eight questions (3 pts. each, 15 pts. total)

1. My tongue freezes. Fire,
Delicate fire, in the flesh.
Blind, stunned, the sound
Of thunder, in my ears.

2. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. My new will was not yet strong enough to conquer my old will, which had the strength of old habit.



SECTION III: IDENTIFICATIONS

- 3 points: 1 for author, 1 for title, 1 for comment on passage
- Many poems have no title: “untitled” or the first line of the poem is fine. (Hint: “untitled” is safer)
- TAs: keep in mind that Sappho and Catullus did not give any titles to their poems—all the titles we see today were added by later editors

“LONG” ESSAY (A CHANCE TO GO IN DEPTH)

In the “Allegory of the Cave,” Plato suggests that *knowledge* is superior to—and at odds with—*belief*. Choose at least three different authors over the course of the semester (try to go from the ancient world to the early modern), and discuss how they understood the importance of knowledge and belief. Do you see a pattern, a direction? (15 pts. total).



SECTION IV: ESSAY

- ▶ 15 points
- ▶ Here, I tell TA's to give the essay a letter grade based on the usual criteria for a paper (understanding that time is limited): does the essay have a clear argument? Is it supported by evidence? Is it well-written? Does it engage with the material from the class?
- ▶ 14-15=A; 12-13=B; 11=C; 9-10=D; 8 and below is an F