Classical Civilization 4550: Ancient Mythology and Religion:
Augustine, Confessions.
Fall 2019 • John Wynne

Topic description for Fall 2019:

Augustine’s Confessions are a spiritual exercise, a literary landmark, an entertaining autobiography, and a philosophical theory about life, the universe, and everything.

Augustine leads us on an expedition through the wild religious world of the late Roman empire: Christians who argue fiercely (or brawl in the streets); the ‘Pagan Resistance’; Manichaeanism, a forgotten world religion; encounters with mighty bishops like Ambrose and Faustus, with the emperor and, most terrifying of all, with Augustine’s mother. But he builds all this into a rigorous argument, that “my heart is restless until it rests in” God.

We will read all of the Confessions, very slowly, in English translation, paying close attention to the artistry of Augustine’s text and to its philosophical achievements. We will also read modern scholarly articles interpreting the Confessions, and supplementary readings illustrating the world in which Augustine lived. There will be a voluntary screening of the Terrence Malick’s film The Tree of Life.

The Confessions will also be the text for Latin 3610/4610 this Fall. Students can register for both classes.

Catalog description for CL CV 4550: Study of classical myth and/or religion (topics vary) in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds with an emphasis on mystery religions, later Judaism, early Christianity, later literary use of ancient myth, and modern anthropological/psychological interpretation of myth.

Required books, available at the campus bookstore, will be:


* There are very many English translations of the Confessions. I would be happy for you to use some of these instead of Chadwick. For example, some good versions are:

One does not read far in the Confessions before he recognizes that the term "confess" has a double range of meaning. On the one hand, it obviously refers to the free acknowledgment, before God, of the truth one knows about oneself—and this obviously meant, for Augustine, the "confession of sins." But, at the same time, and more importantly, confiteri means to acknowledge, to God, the truth one knows about God. St. Augustine - St. Augustine - Confessions: Although autobiographical narrative makes up much of the first 9 of the 13 books of Augustine's Confessiones (c. 400; Confessions), autobiography is incidental to the main purpose of the work. For Augustine, "confessions" is a catchall term for acts of religiously authorized speech: praise of God, blame of self, confession of faith. Introduction Augustine probably began work on the Confessions around the year 397, when he was 43 years old. Augustine's precise motivation for writing his life story at that point is not clear, but there are at least two possible causes.
This edition of Augustine's Confessions is a modernized abridgement based on Albert C. Outler's translation. The language has been updated to modern English and it has been abridged to make it more accessible. Confessions was originally divided into thirteen books, written in Latin between 397 and 400 AD. The work outlines Saint Augustine's sinful youth and his conversion to Christianity. Fathers of the Church, etc. The Confessions of Saint Augustine. St. Augustine, Translated by Edward B. Pusey, D. D. Table of Contents. About This Book... p. ii Title Page... p. 1 Contents... p. 2 Book I... p. 17. Librivox public domain recording of Confessions, by Saint Augustine of Hippo. Confessions (Latin: Confessiones) is the name of an autobiographical work, consisting of 13 books, by St. Augustine of Hippo, written between AD 397 and AD 398. Modern English translations of it are sometimes published under the title The Confessions of St. Augustine in order to distinguish the book from other books with similar titles, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions. (Summary by Wikipedia).