Augustine, *Confessions*

Books I-III

Study Guide

This text is rich and far too complex for us to discuss all of Augustine’s concerns. Therefore, to prepare for the lecture and discussion, here are suggestions for what to focus on as you read Chadwick’s “Introduction” and the first three books:

1. Try to get a sense of the variety of meanings caught up in the idea of “confession” for Augustine.

2. Generally speaking, what view of the soul (and of cosmology) did Augustine pick up from the Greek philosophers, especially Plotinus? How does A. modify this?

3. Study pages 3-6 in Chadwick. This has been called a “meditation on *in-ing*” as Augustine’s special way of depicting the relationship between the human being and God. Based on these three pages, what would you say this relationship is like? How does A. make use of the image of space to speak both of God and of human beings? What do you think of this? What alternatives would you propose?

4. How are the search for self and the search for God related?

5. Augustine is a professional rhetorician. Notice what he says about *signs* and the *acquisition and use of language*. Does he convince you?

6. Study closely A.’s observations regarding infants. What is he learning about human nature and human relationships in general from this? Is it an accurate report or not?

7. What is involved in the famous passage where he steals the pears? Why does he dwell on the story so much? What is he telling the reader about sin and evil?

8. Be aware of his account of evil throughout these first three books.