



BOOK VII: Augustine and the “Books of the Platonists”

Confessions 7.9.13 - 7.9.15; Boulding Translation, pp. 125-127

Passage Summary

Augustine, still struggling with the truth of the Christian faith, comes upon “some books of the Platonists” that transform his view of God.

App Integrations

- Digital Highlighting & Annotation
- In-App Commentaries
- In-App Teaching Tips

Learning Objectives

- Close reading of primary texts
- Analysis and discussion
- Annotation of text

Further Connections

Confessions: This moment is a great opportunity to reconnect with book III, where Augustine speaks of his first conversion at the feet of Cicero’s *Hortensius*, another pagan text. Clearly Augustine has much to say for and against the pagans! Book III is also the beginning of his struggles with the vision of God/the problem of evil, much of which is corrected in book VII.

Augustine and Culture: Augustine’s experience with the books of the Platonists is often called an “intellectual conversion.” Thus it can pair well with other texts on the subject of reason, e.g. Kant’s “What is Enlightenment?,” or on the limits of reason and the need for mediation, e.g. Pascal’s *Pensées*.

Commentaries: For an in-depth philosophical discussion of what the Platonists gave Augustine, read the note from John Peter Kenney on Augustine’s mystical experience (book VIII, brown 5).

Out-Of-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Read (or listen to) the portion of text where Augustine encounters “some books by the Platonists,” and reflects on their significance.
- (To find out more about the Platonists and their influence on Augustine, read Fr. Allan Fitzgerald’s commentary [Brown 4]).
- Use the App Highlight to note what Augustine says about the Platonists: where they overlap with Christian faith and where they depart.
- After highlighting the text, use the App Commentary Feature to give short descriptions of each overlap/contrast.
- Come to class with a working list of how the Platonists relate to Christianity.

In-Class Assignment Suggestions

- In the beginning, Augustine explains how God “wanted to show me first and foremost how you thwart the proud but give grace to the humble.” This retrospectively frames his encounter with the Platonists.
- You might begin by returning to themes of humility and pride. What is the main difference? How has humility or pride so far characterized Augustine’s journey? How does humility or pride relate to education and “seeing God.”
- Invite students to share comparisons/contrasts between Christianity and Platonism as Augustine presents them. In addition, this is a good place to discuss the value and limitations of “pagan” literature in Augustine’s quest.
- Invite students to comment on what the Platonists teach Augustine. What did he need to learn from them, and what did they make possible for him? How does Augustine “find God” among pagans?