



BOOK II: Augustine's Pear Tree Incident

Confessions 2.4.9 - 2.10.18; Boulding Translation, pp. 37-42

Passage Summary

Augustine recalls his experience stealing pears as a youth, plumbing the depths and complexities of his motives through confession.

App Integrations

- Digital Highlighting & Annotation

Learning Objectives

- Analysis and discussion
- Annotation of text
- Personal reflection

Out-Of-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Read Augustine's account of his theft of pears in Book II.
- Using the App Highlight feature, note every instance where Augustine gives a reason or motive for his theft. Some motives may overlap, and Augustine may question his previous judgment. Highlight all these moments.
- Using the App Annotation feature, write short summaries of the motive(s) Augustine cites. When you finish, write down what you think his true motive was. Come prepared to share your insights in class.

In-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Start class by introducing the pear tree incident, noting its resonance with biblical stories such as Genesis 3, and the seemingly trivial nature of the incident, then invite students to talk about why Augustine is so upset. Frame it as an exploration of the infamous "problem of evil."
- At any point, you could invite students to share their own stories of doing something wrong when they knew that they shouldn't (e.g. cheating on a test) and ask them why they did it.
- Invite students to make a list on the board of Augustine's motives.
- You could also break them up into groups to make the list, and then compare the lists of each group.
- Conclude by asking students to reach a verdict on the theft. Why did Augustine do it? What does his reason tell us about the nature of evil, human behavior, and our feelings of shame and guilt?

Further Connections

Confessions: The pear-tree incident finds an echo in book VIII, where Augustine struggles with the "divided will," and where he experiences a breakthrough in a garden in Milan, giving himself fully to the celibate life. Book VII also returns to the problem of evil, revealing that human beings have a corrupt and twisted will, and that this will lies at the root of evil.

Augustine and Culture: Luther's "The Bondage of the Will" explores the problem of human motivation, offering an Augustinian twist in response to Erasmus' humanism; Hobbes' *Leviathan* explores the extent of self-interest in a "state of nature," pressing the pessimism of Augustine even further; Shakespeare's *Hamlet* explores the complex dimensions of human agency, including the failure to act; Voltaire's *Candide* explores evil from the perspective of absurdity, ending also with a garden scene with a very different message.