



BOOK X: Augustine's Memory of the Happy Life

Confessions 10.20.29 - 10.13.34; Boulding Translation, pp. 197-201

Passage Summary

Having searched through the caverns of his memory for God, Augustine finds there and interrogates the universal desire for happiness. But if everyone wants to be happy, not everyone finds it in the same place; why is that?

App Integrations

- Digital Highlighting & Annotation
- Synchronized Audio

Learning Objectives

- Close reading of primary texts
- Personal reflection
- Respectful debate

Out-Of-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Read through the entire text. As you do so, use the App Highlight Feature to highlight the moments where Augustine does one of the following:
 - Asserts that all humans desire to be happy.
 - Gives a reason for why humans do not always find happiness in God.
- Have students pay particular attention to 23.34, which is a powerful statement on the human condition. In many ways it summarizes Augustine's journey to truth, and why it took him so long to find it.

In-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Invite students to debate the claim that "All human beings desire to be happy." You could set this up as a formal debate or invite individual comments or group presentations. Develop examples that either demonstrate or disprove Augustine's claim, including examples Augustine gives, as well as examples from Augustine's life (e.g. the pear-tree incident).
- Now that students have established what they think about this claim, ask them to comment on Augustine's further claim that "This is the happy life, and this alone: to rejoice in you, about you and because of you. This is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else" (22.32).
- Listen to the audio portion starting at 23.34. After listening, open a discussion on this final claim from Augustine: "Yes, this is our condition, this is the lot of the human soul, this is its case...it attempts to hide [from truth], while at the same time not wishing anything to be hidden from it."
- Perhaps discuss how this last claim relates to the modern world, and its temptation to be ignorant or negligent of the truth.

Further Connections

Confessions: The exemplification of this passage, particularly 23.34, is the life of Augustine; and a good passage to pair with it is found in book VIII, where Augustine confronts the hard truth about his personal sin, lies, and continuous self-deception (VIII.7.16), which then prepares him for conversion.

Augustine and Culture: This section brings students back to themes of happiness and the life well-lived; it is thus a great place to sum up Augustine's journey and to reflect on what he teaches on finding true fulfilment. Obvious texts that discuss happiness include Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Pascal's *Pensées*, and Hobbes' *Leviathan* – the latter denying the concept of the *summum bonum*. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* offers an American angle on the question; Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* pairs well on the topics of memory and self-deception.