

Augustine and Rousseau on the Politics of Confession

by

Taylor Putnam

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the widely acknowledged but largely unexplored relationship between Augustine's *Confessions* and Rousseau's *Confessions*. In particular, it argues that Rousseau's text demonstrates an indebtedness to both Augustine's treatment of time within eternity and the political figure of the Christian preacher. By first comparing their competing interpretations of original sin as told in Genesis and then tracing those interpretations through the autobiographical narratives of each text, it is argued that Augustine and Rousseau both offer their lives as examples of their respective understandings of human nature. Further still, Rousseau's attempt to supplant Augustine's autobiography with his own sees the Augustinian preacher reformulated into the figure of the solitary walker. As a result, what was a politics of the will restrained by the temporal horizon of man becomes unleashed as the imposition of the timeless imagination.

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Introduction: The Politics of *Confessions*

This thesis argues that Rousseau's *Confessions*, while not only similar in structure to Augustine's identically titled work, stands as a rebuttal to the latter's understanding of human nature. Although on some level unsurprising that two autobiographies would appear alike in their narrative given the arc of birth to death that all men follow, when put opposite each other these two works offer competing theological accounts of original sin and present the assumed consequences to follow from those differing interpretations. As such, both narratives can be seen as attempts on behalf of the authors to persuade the reader by offering their lives as examples of their philosophies. For all their differences however, the fact that Rousseau seeks to replace Augustine's *Confessions* with his own merely demonstrates the extent of Augustine's success. Consequently, Rousseau's undertaking drags Augustine's concept of the preacher forward beyond his Roman time by transforming it into the more radical and modern political figure of the solitary walker.

Many have commented on the similarities between Augustine and Rousseau but surprisingly few have used the *Confessions* to make their argument. For example, Patrick Riley, arguing that the controversy about the nature of divine justice "is nearly as old as Christian philosophy itself," only goes so far in his comments to note that "[the debate] was fully aired in the struggle between St. Augustine and the Pelagians and resurfaced in the seventeenth-century."¹ Noting that Rousseau makes mention of reading the seventeenth-century theologians in the *Confessions* as a means to develop his understanding of the general will, Riley then omits to mention the Augustinian inspiration for the text. As a consequence, Riley's argument denies the larger scope of the history of ideas and has Rousseau responding exclusively to his contemporaries.

¹ Patrick Riley, "The General Will before Rousseau," in *Political Theory*, 6.4 (Nov., 1978): 486.

If that were truly the case, Riley and those who fall into a similar trap do not provide a satisfactory account of Rousseau's robust analysis of original sin. They almost unavoidably diminish his efforts to simple contrarian impulses. To that point, Ann Hartle notes in her review of *The General Will before Rousseau: the Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* that “[Riley’s] argument seems often to be about terms and to turn on the sheer occurrence of terms; [...] Riley [lacks] a substantive discussion of the content of [the] general will in Rousseau, designed to show what in the theological notion had been preserved and what had been lost in its transformation into a political notion.”²

To correctly understand Rousseau's *Confessions*, one must start by going behind it. Beginning in this way, it becomes clear that Augustine's *Confessions* was central in the creation of Rousseau's manuscript. In the introduction to her book *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions*, Hartle comments that, while her primary focus is on Rousseau's work, “I do this uncovering against the background of Augustine's *Confessions* [for] Rousseau himself calls our attention immediately and directly to Augustine: in addressing himself to Augustine, Rousseau indicates the manner in which we are to proceed.”³ Christopher Kelly, as another example, opens his book *Rousseau's Exemplary Life: the Confessions as political philosophy* with the remark that:

“The difference between Rousseau and Augustine begins to be revealed even when Rousseau most closely approximates Augustine's formulations. For example, while Rousseau does not address God directly, he discusses circumstances in which he would do so: ‘Let the trumpet of the last judgement sound when it wishes, I will come to present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand. I will say loudly: here is what I have done, what I have thought, while I have been.’ This passage does imply some religious intent quite directly, but it does not contain the least trace of repentance or hope for divine pardon. [...] This preliminary indifference to divine forgiveness is maintained through Rousseau's work, and it leads to a departure from Augustine's second purpose – pointing beyond oneself to God. [...] In choosing the same title as Augustine, Rousseau calls attention to his departures from his predecessor rather than to his agreements.”⁴

² Ann Hartle, “Sovereignty and the New Civil Religion,” review of *The General Will before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic*, by Patrick Riley, *The Review of Politics*, 49.2 (Spring, 1987): 286.

³ Ann Hartle, *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: a reply to Saint Augustine*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 3.

⁴ Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau's Exemplary Life: the Confessions as Political Philosophy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 10-11.

Considering the above, this thesis takes for its beginning the assumptions laid out by Kelly and Hartle and treats Rousseau's *Confessions* as an intentional response to Augustine's autobiography. But, as both academics only make use of Augustine as a foil for their interpretations of Rousseau, this thesis will expand on their work and deepen the understanding of Rousseau's indebtedness to Augustine.

The success of the project will depend on a close examination of the structure of the two narratives and will rely primarily on scriptural exegesis. With that approach Augustine's *Confessions* can be shown to differentiate between the three primary sections of the work by establishing the first nine books as purely autobiographical, the last three as a meditation on the concept of time in Genesis, and Book X as the argument for the preacher in Jesus Christ. These observations reveal a text that intimates the foundation of Augustine's theology through the presentation of his sinful existence before offering both an explanation to the devout, in his presentation on the concept of time, and a remedy for the non-Christian, in the presentation of conversion. Like Augustine, Rousseau demonstrates the consequences to his theological interpretation of original sin developed at the end of *Confessions* by similarly structuring his autobiography around his concept of natural goodness. This competing effort runs throughout the autobiographical content and is made most explicit in the distinctions Rousseau draws between his noble intentions animating his actions and the base behaviours that are observed. Therefore, while it is assumed both Augustine and Rousseau wrote their *Confessions* with the intent to provide a persuasive account of their particular interpretations of human nature through the autobiographical form, the mirrored structuring of the narratives will be used to highlight the strength of the relationship between the two.

By framing the project in this way, Rousseau's thought is brought to bear directly with

Augustine's. In the attempt to correct what he sees as the corruption of his age, Rousseau returned to thinkers like Augustine as a means to respond to the Enlightenment in general and his contemporaries in particular. In so doing, Rousseau not only attempted to refute Augustine's thought but, in a sense, reshaped certain Augustinian tenets as he reconfigured them to fit within the framework of modernity. As a result, a study of Rousseau's *Confessions* opposite Augustine's remains a valuable endeavour because it illuminates one aspect of Rousseau's thought within the broader context of the history of ideas and, moreover, the potential consequences of his philosophic project to our age. For example, one could look to Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* where, commenting on the history of man's reflections on his interiority, he writes that:

“Augustine’s inward turn was tremendously influential in the West; at first in inaugurating a family of forms of Christian spirituality, [...] but then later this turn takes on secularized forms. We go inward, but not necessarily to find God; we go to discover or impart some order, or some meaning or some justification, to our lives. In retrospect, we can see Augustine’s *Confessions* as the first great work in a genre which includes Rousseau’s work of the same title – except the Bishop of Hippo antedates his followers by more than a millennium.”⁵

Taylor contends that Rousseau and Augustine can be seen offering different articulations of man's interiority such that he first comes to the act in an effort to find God but over time comes to find himself. However, the continuum between Augustine and Rousseau on the question of interiority can only be taken so far for “this form of self-exploration, [to] become central to our culture, [requires] another stance of radical reflexivity to become of crucial importance.”⁶ Rousseau, it is argued, has done something fundamentally new.

By extension, Paul Archambault argues that “the ‘I’ in Augustine’s *Confessions* is not, in the Rousseauistic sense, a ‘displayer of oneself,’ the substance of his narrative will be neither conquest of his freedom against familial pressures nor the genesis of enslaving neuroses through

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity*, (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1989), 178.

⁶ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 178.

social conditioning, nor will it recount the progressive fragmentation of a personality or the dizzying revelation of Nothingness.”⁷ As a product of the modernity he critiques, Rousseau cannot completely recreate Augustine’s *Confessions* in the attempt to supplant him and instead moves beyond its original form. Archambault is quite right to argue that “Augustine’s *Confession*, whatever the meaning of the ‘modernity,’ lacks that indispensable ingredient of ‘modernity’ in autobiographical writing, which is that the emphasis of the first-person narrative be placed on the development of the narrator’s personality.”⁸ While the two projects are reminiscent of one another, they are not the same. However, that one can look to Rousseau and see the hints of Augustine buried within inescapably suggests that one not only can but must scrutinize the first to understand the second.

In a bid to develop these observations the thesis contains two chapters with one for each *Confessions*. Importantly, each chapter is divided into mirroring sections as a means to facilitate comparison between the two works. First, each chapter begins with the last section of the autobiography in question to uncover the interpretation of original sin laid within and to make explicit the conclusion the author uses to govern the presentation of their earlier, seemingly unphilosophic, life. Second, each chapter then goes through the narrative of the author’s early life as a way to demonstrate the philosophic implications to the construction of the particular events that make up the autobiography and will thus reveal the commonalities between the two texts. For example, both *Confessions* mark their transition from infancy to adolescences and the subsequent change in the structure of the passions with a theft in Books II. Moreover, both texts present the conversionary experience, with Augustine finding the truth in willing what God wills and

⁷ Paul J. Archambault, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as Autobiography: premodern or modern?” in *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Essays on Religion and Political Philosophy in Honor of Ernest L. Fortin*, A.A. eds. Michael B. Foley and Douglas Kries, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 184.

⁸ Archambault, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as Autobiography,” 184.

Rousseau discovering the image of the natural self, in Books VIII. Finally, both chapters conclude with an exegesis on the political figures that emerge when the epistemological claims made at the ends of the *Confessions* are understood in relation to the autobiographical narratives of the opening sections. In comparing Augustine's preacher to Rousseau's solitary walker and their purposes relative to the city, one can see the extent to which Rousseau is beholden to Augustine on the question of human nature as a theological and political concern while nevertheless reshaping the exercise into something uniquely modern.

Ultimately, Rousseau's attempt to replace Augustine's *Confessions* as the landmark autobiography in many ways merely brings Augustine into modernity. Sensing that Augustine's theology of original sin is used to frame his discussion of his childhood until conversion, Rousseau mimics the effort by offering a competing interpretation with the concept of a pre-political natural goodness governing his childhood until the conversionary experience on the road outside Paris. Whereas Augustine uses the *Confessions* to present the need for baptism to non-Christians and educate the converted on the concept of time, Rousseau uses the *Confessions* to establish the primacy of freedom opposite the determinism of original sin and demonstrate the contradiction between intent and outcome as a product of the subjugation experienced amongst men. As a means to crystalize these insights Augustine offers the figure of the preacher who, once granted an understanding of the nature of time, turns to the city and preaches the Word to the benefit of the unconverted. By contrast, Rousseau flees from the city as the figure of the solitary walker and, once returned to wholeness through the imagination, comes to an image of fatherland and offer it to the people. Although Rousseau strives to supplant Augustine's work, demonstrated by his imitation of the *Confessions*, he in many ways puts forward a new iteration of the Augustinian preacher in the figure of the solitary walker.

A Note on the Translations

Citations from Augustine's *Confessions* will be drawn from F.J. Sheed's notable 1942 translation that was rereleased with minor alterations in 2006. Sheed's text has been selected for its careful treatment of Augustine's Latin that reveals the flow of prose which constantly shifts between the intended audiences of the reader and God. As Sheed remarks on Augustine's use of language:

“[t]he use of *Thou* or *You* in speaking to God presented a real problem. St. Augustine, of course, knew nothing of *Thou* as a term reserved for religious use. He, like any other writer of Latin, used *Tu* when he was talking to one, *Vos* when he was talking to more than one. It would seem therefore that our usage of *Thou*, with the special religious atmosphere that now goes with it, introduces a note into the translation that was not in the original. [...] I have therefore made a compromise: in passages of straight prayer I have used *Thou* [as Christians of the English tongue are so accustomed]; but when he addresses God in narrative or discussion, I have used *You*.⁹”

Although this compromise imposes a certain interpretative framework onto the text, Sheed's translation facilitates the ability to demarcate passages of straight prayer from the more conversational sections of *Confessions*. Its use is fundamental to understanding Augustine's rhetoric. However, in circumstances where a particular word or turn of phrase is significant to the argument the original Latin, drawn from James J. O'Donnell's three volume commentary, has been included for reference alongside Sheed's translation.

Citations from Rousseau's *Confessions* are drawn from Christopher Kelly's recent translation of the definitive French edition and supplementary variants contained in the different manuscripts of the work. In particular, there are two complete manuscripts of the *Confessions*, “the so-called Paris Manuscript and the so-called Geneva Manuscript,” that complicate translation efforts as their publication dates overlap and elements within the text at times contradict each other.¹⁰ Kelly's translation begins with the Geneva Manuscript, as it was the one Rousseau

⁹ F.J. Sheed, note on the translation to *Augustine's Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 322.

¹⁰ Christopher Kelly, note on the Text to *The Confessions and Correspondences, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*,

originally intended for publication, and supplements the effort with bracketed passages and end notes referencing the Paris Manuscript. Following Kelly's lead the Geneva manuscript is treated as authoritative at points of contradiction between the two.

trans. Christopher Kelly, eds. Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman, (Dartmouth College: University Press of New England, 1998), xxxv.

Chapter 1: Augustine

I would know you [God], I would know myself.
Augustine, *Soliloquies*, II.I.1

Augustine's *Confessions*, while on the surface a call for men to submit their wills to God, produces the foundation for an argument that the human will is the only thing capable of imposing order on itself. Contrary to the overt determinism found in his later writings, the *Confessions* offers a meditation on the theology of free will that not only raises man's relationship to God as one of near equals, made most explicit in the discussion of man's creative capacity, but similarly provides a reflection on the repercussions to this elevated status.¹¹ To make this argument first requires an investigation of Augustine's understanding of Eternity drawn from his interpretation of Genesis and the concept of time from Books XI-XIII. Secondly, one needs to study his discussion of the free will as a consequence of the temporal existence of man that is presented in the hierarchy of sins found in his reflections on his past, from birth to adulthood, in Books I-IX. Finally, one must turn to Augustine's analysis of memory in Book X, offered as the bridge between his past (Books I-IX) and future (Books XI-XIII), which can be shown to articulate most clearly the convergence between the political reality of free will and the philosophic implication of Creation in the life of Christ as the temporal manifestation of Truth. Ultimately, Augustine demonstrates his reliance on the human will as the progenitor of earthly order by using the life of Christ as the foundation for his discussion of the preacher.

¹¹ Although not as substantive as *City of the God against the Pagans*, the treatise *On True Religion* offers a clear example of the determinism that comes to dominate Augustine's work later in life. Written before *Confessions* in roughly 390, he argues that "Christ did nothing by force, but did everything by persuading and warning. Indeed the old slavery [mankind under Mosaic Law] having been ended, the time of liberty dawned [the reign of the Gospels]. Man was already being suitably and profitably persuaded that he had been created with free choice." (*Political Writings*, 231) Returning to this passage at the end of his life when writing *Retractions*, a systematic commentary evaluating his previous work, Augustine remarks that he was wrong to state that Christ had never used force by pointing out that Christ attacked the money lenders in the temple with a whip. However, Augustine states that his mistake does not remove from the overall truth of his argument, for man remains bound in time, to be persuaded by the Truth revealed in the Gospels, as determined by God. ("The Retractions," I.XII.6)

In an emulation of Christ's self-sacrifice, Augustine's work of personal confession provides the beginning to a new politics centered on the role of the preacher as the architectonic political figure for the Christian age.¹² However, this figure and mankind more generally are presented in problematic terms. On the one hand, arguing that man's desire to know God requires a turn inwards, a search detailed throughout *Confessions* and culminating with the realization that "the depth of memory [is] like so many vast rooms filled so wonderfully with things beyond number"—that the contents of the mind are bigger than the mind itself - suggests there is some element of the Divine residing within man. On the other hand, Augustine's acknowledgement that "I am bound, and I weep bitterly, but I am bitterly bound," (X.XL.65)¹³ while not only expressing the agony of a temporal being, asserts that man is contained within a finite existence such that he is aware of the limitations imposed on him by the boundaries of Creation. In taking the belief that man cannot contain himself, given the link to Eternity found within, and coupling it with the argument that he exists in a temporal world where the creator-God remains hidden, Augustine reveals a tension whereby man is simultaneously burdened with the responsibility to rule while being fundamentally inadequate to the task. The preacher stands as Augustine's attempt to overcome this chasm by revealing the limitations of man through the act of public confession in a bid to promote a submissive Christian piety. But, in relying on a wholly temporal figure to complete the task Augustine's *Confessions* inescapably suggests there is no authority fit to govern

¹² The word 'confession' comes from the Latin *confiteri*, which was used to translate the Greek *exomologeisthai* from the Septuagint Psalter, itself a rendering of the Hebrew *hoda(h)*. The etymology is important because the language that Augustine inherited was imbued with multiple meanings. As F.J. Sheed notes, "first, it signified a profession of faith, particularly that of a martyr before [a] persecutor. Second, it designated the praise of God. Third, it referred to self-accusation, as in the sacrament of penance." While Augustine draws on all three meanings of the word, he significantly expands the function of sacramental penance by framing confession in terms of Christ's sacrifice. That is to say, Augustine's *Confessions* is itself a form of sacrifice to God and is undertaken in a manner similar to Christ and for the benefit of mankind, in this case the reader.

F.J. Sheed, "Appendix II," in *Confessions*, Second Edition, trans. F.J. Sheed, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 329.

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, in-text citations reference F.J. Sheed's translation of Augustine's *Confessions*.

other than man himself.

The Concept of Time in Genesis

As many commentators have noted, the *Confessions* were written to persuade, although there appears to be little consensus among them regarding to what end the reader is being persuaded.¹⁴ These differences generally emerge from the relative importance an interpreter grants to Augustine's treatment of Genesis in the work. While some merely dismiss the exercise outright, suggesting there is no cohesive whole to be found between the first ten and last three books, James J. O'Donnell's relatively new study distinguishes itself by affording significant space to demonstrating Augustine's use of Cicero which by extension suggests an overall rhetorical purpose to the text.¹⁵ In his own words Augustine reflects that "the one thing that delighted me in Cicero's exhortation was that I should love, and seek, and win, and hold, and embrace, not this or that philosophical school but Wisdom itself, whatever it might be." (I.IV.8) He further admits that it was from this particular delight, "by the sole pressure of my own desire to express what was in my mind," (I.XIV.23) that he became a gifted study of rhetoric. For example, Augustine's analysis

¹⁴ Interpretations vary widely. Carl Vaught's three volume study of *Confessions* locates Augustine's project as "finding a middle ground between the divine and human realms" where he "challenges his readers to find a place of their own between pious fascination and intellectual antagonism." (*The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions*, 15) Noted biographer of Augustine, Peter Brown, alternatively suggests that the book "was written to instill into those who first [read] it a sense of how the most familiar landmarks in their world – education, careers, conventional sexual and marital arrangements, even current notions of religious and philosophic truth – were, in fact, profoundly unfamiliar [...] if seen, as from and unexpected viewing point, with the quiet eyes of Augustine's God." (introduction to *Confessions*, xxi) Finally, James J. O'Donnell opens his three volume study with the observation that "the *Confessions* are not to be read merely as a look back at Augustine's spiritual development; rather the text itself is an essential stage in that development, and a work aware both of what had already passed into history and of what lay ahead." (*Augustine's Confessions*, vol. 1, xxxiii) Although all three examples share the assumption that Augustine's project in some way begins with an attempt to unmoor the reader from a complacency in their daily lives, there is little in common between Vaught's belief that the goal is one of self-motivated reflection, Brown's suggestion of a form of proto-alienation from the human world, and O'Donnell's argument that the work serves to illuminate a series of self-referencing stages of Christian spiritual development.

¹⁵ For further study, one can read O'Donnell's exploration of the topic throughout his three volume commentary on the *Confession*. However, his analysis of Augustine's introduction of Cicero in Book III.IV-V and subsequent retracing of those rhetorical elements back to the theft of pears in Book II.IV-X is particularly helpful. (*Augustine's Confessions*, vol. 2, 127-135; 162-164.)

of both the theft of pears in Book II and the death of his friend in Book IV recalls the advice given to students of rhetoric to neither investigate by “recounting from the remotest beginnings,” nor to “carry it forward [beyond] the point to which we need to go.”¹⁶ Although the investigation of Genesis centers on the concept of time itself, a topic that appears at first glance to be by its very nature unbounded, Augustine’s subsequent analysis both respects Cicero’s advice and bolsters O’Donnell’s commentary as Augustine’s treatment of time ultimately anchors his discussion of the preacher. While appearing at the end of *Confessions*, the logic to his interpretation of Genesis dominates the earlier discussion of sin throughout the first nine books in such a way that Augustine’s presentation of his past makes little sense without first understanding how he conceives of his future. Therefore in following Cicero’s advice, any meaningful discussion of *Confessions* must respect the limits Augustine imposed on his investigation and recognize that the last three books on Genesis serve a particular purpose to his overall argument.

Book XI starts by recalling the opening to Book I of *Confessions*, “how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe without a preacher?” (I.I.1) when Augustine similarly asks “[b]ut when will the voice of my pen have power to tell all Your exhortations and all Your terrors, Your consolations and the guidance by which You have brought me to be to Your people a preacher of Your word and a dispenser of Your Sacrament?” (XI.II.2) While the first iteration of the question includes Augustine himself, as it precedes his conversion and highlights his own need of a preacher for guidance, the second time the question is posed sees Augustine present himself as the preacher having undergone conversion in Book VIII. By drawing attention to the very beginning of the work and reminding the reader of the first question asked,

¹⁶ Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 1.ix.14. It should be noted that the author of the work is currently contested. Regardless, the work is listed as having been central at the time of Augustine’s rhetorical training and can be shown to guide his argumentation.

Augustine explicitly demonstrates a connection between the concluding and opening books of *Confessions*. That connection centers on the preacher's understanding of the nature of existence - on the nature of time - as the inescapable condition of man in Creation that separates him from the creator-God. As a temporal being man is unable to conceive of a reality unbounded by time without the revelation of eternity in the Gospels; an insight repeatedly demonstrated by Augustine's dual use of the language from Psalms and Genesis throughout the work.¹⁷ At base, an understanding of time serves as the anthropocentric foundation to any sustained contemplation of God because, for Augustine, the human world exists temporally within his understanding of Eternity.¹⁸ Therefore, if the first nine books detail Augustine's discovery of and conversion to Christianity through his relationships to various preachers, like St. Ambrose, Moses, or Christ, and their sermons within time, then the concluding books are his own sermons to the reader on the nature of time itself.

The sermon begins by claiming that the truth of his inquiry transcends the barriers of language. Augustine states that if he were able to question Moses it would be through "the inner retreat of my mind [...] which is neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor Barbarian" and, furthermore, it would be revealed through his mind whether or not "Moses spoke truth." (XI.III.5) However, it is precisely due to the ambiguity of the language used in Genesis that Augustine is brought to his initial questioning of the Gospels.

"But *how* did You make heaven and earth? What instrument did You use for a work so mighty? You are not like an artist [Latin: *artifex*]; for he forms one body from another as his mind chooses; his mind has the power to give external existence to the form it perceives within itself by its inner eye

¹⁷ Although by no means a definitive proof, it is important to note that Augustine opens *Confessions* I.I.1 with "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no number," a melding of Psalm 95(96 in the Authorized Version based on the Hebrew numbering) and Psalm 146(147), and then uses the seemingly contradictory teachings between God's eternity of the New and Old Testament to argue the validity of an exegitical interpretation of Genesis.

¹⁸ The concept of time is a product of past, present, and future. For Augustine, all three categories of time are held exclusively in the mind through a process that remains possible with the grace of God. In contrast to Aristotle's *Physics*, where time is a measurement of change through the motion of an object and is therefore not a phenomena exclusive to men, Augustine's three categories of time are explicitly anthropocentric as they exist solely within the minds of men.

— and whence should it have that power unless You made it? It impresses that form upon a material already existent and having the capacity to be thus formed such as clay or stone or wood or gold or such like. And how should these things have come to be unless You had made them to be? [...] What exists, save because You exist? You spoke and heaven and earth were created; in Your word You created them.” (XI.V.7)

Augustine’s confusion stems from the inability to reconcile his materialistic understanding of nature - of God’s Creation - with the seeming immateriality of God. It remains unclear to Augustine how God as told in Genesis could shape the physical heavens and earth without Himself having corporeal form. By framing the argument as a rejection of the comparison with an artist, arguing that one merely reorganize pre-existing material, the opening investigation into Genesis not only rejects the physical world and man’s temporal limitations but also establishes the most basic premises of divine will through its negative, the temporal human will.

At root, the ability to choose is exclusively the dominion of man as choice requires that something exist prior to selection. Without available options choice is impossible. Even though the “form it perceives within itself by its inner eye” allows him to shape “one body from another,” (XI.V7) he must nevertheless make a choice. For example, to opt between painting on canvas and sculpting marble presupposes the existence of both cloth and rock. An artist’s choosing between the two only has meaning in the temporal for without the restrictions imposed by time it would not matter the order in which the decision to paint or sculpt was made. In a state of being lacking finitude, like God’s Eternity, the artist would forever be free to do both. It is denied that God can be an artist for He is not temporally restricted and in making that claim Augustine also denies the possibility that God acts in time. Further still, precluding that God wills temporally challenges the assertion that He directly influences the affairs men for, again, if God did it would require a choice between competing options. Insinuating He could have allowed one outcome over another debases Him to the temporal realm of man and undermines the very premise of His eternal will.

The above is not to suggest that God is absent however. Continuing with the example of

an artist and the act of reorganizing existing material, Augustine implies that if God does not act temporally then the capacity for choice is the exclusive domain of man. One is to appreciate that “[God is] calling us to the realisation of that Word [...] which is uttered eternally and by which all things are uttered eternally.” (XI.VII.9) Man organizes the material of Creation through art but cannot create art independent of God in the world for Creation is upheld within His eternity. The divine act of creation is “a movement in time but serving [His] eternal will” (XI.VI.8) and all acts within time operate under the stewardship of His will. Put another way, contrary to man’s abilities the emergence of Creation is not a work of art because it could not have emerged by choice. Before Creation there was a near void, described as formlessness, “something between form and non-being,” (XII.VI.6) that precluded the possibility of art as understood in temporal terms. As a consequence, the very possibility of art emerges alongside Creation through the grace of His eternal willing. By accepting that Creation precedes choice and that His will is immutable, it follows that God does not influence man directly but man instead realizes that God is present and alters his choices accordingly. In short, it is man who freely discovers Eternity and chooses to will what God wills. At its most extreme the above suggests that God’s will is not free at all for freedom is a category that can only exist in time. Augustine asserts that it simply cannot be the case that God wills within time. Due to the limitations of the temporal horizon that bounds the world of men the creator-God remains hidden through the sheer vastness of eternity in the Word as pure Willing.

In more practical terms this line of reasoning can be extended to the myth of Creation itself. Given that the story of Genesis and the Bible broadly speaking were constructed in time, it follows that the work is by its very nature incomplete. (XII.XIV.17) Although divinely inspired, the story was written down by men like Moses who necessarily introduce a temporality into the making of the myth which ensures that any attempt to recount the Word produces a retelling closer to art than

Truth. Augustine's argument thus inescapably leads to the conclusion that any literal reading of Genesis is at best incomplete and at worst meaningless. The insufficiencies of a literalist approach to interpretation is revealed by the inability to answer the Manichean query "what was God doing before He made heaven and earth?" (XI.X.12) using Scripture alone. For Augustine, the question problematically presupposes that God wills within time, suggesting a knowable beginning to God's willing. The assertion implies a finite nature to God, for, if God had a beginning, it would establish a point in time prior to Him existing.¹⁹ A time without God would deny His eternity and undermine all possibility to claim Him as Truth. While lacking explicit Scriptural evidence but enjoying an abundance of wit, Augustine can only offer the dismissive answer: "[God] was getting hell ready for people who pry too deep." (XI.XII.14) The question presented by the Manichees' hubristic attempt to judge God by temporal standards presents itself as fundamentally flawed to Augustine because it is predicated on a set of assumptions that are antithetical to his understanding of reality. Augustine argues that what precedes the emergence of time alongside Creation is simply unfathomable and leaves him to alternatively claim that it is a question answerable only with faith. What are originally seen as inconsistencies emerging from a literal reading of Scripture he argues are in the end no more than mankind's inability to understand that time cannot fully encapsulate Truth. Moreover, the Bible is but a work of art fabricated by men to give a finite account of their first glimpses of Eternity. Ultimately, it is on this conclusion that Augustine offers his sermon to the reader as mankind's temporality is the necessary first step to advancing his exegetical analysis

¹⁹ A more elaborate treatment of this topic can be found in Augustine's *On Genesis against the Manichees*. In particular, he argues that "we cannot say that there was a time when God had not yet made anything. For how could there be a time that God had not made since he is the maker of all time? And if there began to be with heaven and earth, there cannot be found a time when God had not yet made heaven and earth. When they say, 'why did he suddenly decide?' they speak as if some time passed during which God produced nothing. But a time could not pass that God not already made, because he cannot be the producer of time unless he is before time. Surely the Manichees themselves read the Apostle Paul and praise and honor him, and they mislead many by interpreting his Letters wrongly." (*On Genesis against the Manichees*, I.II.2) In short, the Manichees wrongfully judge the Scriptures in temporal terms.

of Genesis and our understanding of the nature of Creation because it establishes, while not the beginning of God, the beginning of time and with it the possibility of free choice.²⁰

Given the line of reasoning that God is not an artist but rather the source of possibility and one assumes once revealed to man the source of inspiration for art, for He is eternal, it is then necessary to comprehend time as its existence is itself temporal.²¹ At first glance it would appear that time is not universally the same always but instead a collection of past, present, and future. Augustine notes that “[i]f the future and past exist, I want to know where they are [and] if I cannot yet know this, at least I do know that wherever they are, they are there not as past or future, but present.” (XI.XVIII.23) The nature of time can only be expressed with relation to the present, where man exists, and the whole inquiry of time happens within that particular moment. Augustine further clarifies that “in other words [time] passes from that which does not yet exist, by way of that which lacks extension, into that which is no longer.” (XI.XXI.27) By establishing that time

²⁰ It is on this point that Thomas Pangle comments: “[b]iblical faith at its most challenging understands itself to be rooted in experiential *knowledge* – of a kind superior to that available to unassisted reason, or to human experience not yet illuminated by grace.” (*Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, 7-8) He then goes on to quote at length from *Confessions* and, in particular, that “[n]ot with a doubtful, but with certain consciousness do I love Thee [...].” (X.VI) But, it is precisely with the certainty of doubt that Augustine presents his argument of Creation against the Manichees. Pangle similarly misattributes the certainty of doubt expressed in Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* to Kierkegaard’s presentation of Abraham’s faith in *Fear and Trembling*. (*Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, 172-181) Both Kierkegaard and Augustine, contra Descartes and Manicheism, articulate a paradoxical certainty that emerges from Revelation whereby the experiential knowledge of God undermines the authority of experience such that one can no longer be certain of the initial experience of God. In fact, it is Descartes and the Manichees with their unstated certainty of experience that more accurately reflect Pangle’s treatment of Biblical faith and experiential knowledge. Because man is bound in time, where the certainty of the present slips into the uncertainty of the past and non-being, Augustine cannot definitely state that he has knowledge of God given that all experiences become recollections of the past. Augustine must rely exclusively on a faith that his memory of the past approximates what he believes to be the Truth revealed in the Bible. Faith leads to a certainty of doubt that then immediately undermines the certainty of which the doubt is predicated upon. Kierkegaard criticizes Descartes and Augustine criticizes the Manichees for having doubt without faith, thus making their doubt a faith unto itself. It is the misappropriation of experiential knowledge into absolute knowledge made available to unassisted reason that allows the Manichees, in Augustine’s case, and Descartes, as understood by Kierkegaard, to hubristically question the existence of God in temporal, and therefore human, terms.

²¹ For God to be eternal He must Be before time as time emerges with the ability to observe change. If God and time were synonymous, because we can conceive of a point when there was no change and, therefore, without change there is no time, we would be able to conceive of a point where there was no God. Thus He must Be independent of time and, as a consequence, time itself is not eternal, making it transitory, and temporal.

can only be understood in the present, Augustine further differentiates man's domain in Creation from God's eternity.

"Whatever may be the mode of this mysterious foreseeing of things to come, unless the thing is, it cannot be seen. But what now is, is not future but present. Therefore when we speak of seeing the future, obviously what is seen is not the things which are not yet because they are still to come, but their causes or perhaps the signs that foretell them, for these causes and signs do exist here and now. Thus to those who see them now, they are not future but present, and from them things to come are conceived by the mind and foretold. These concepts already exist, and those who foretell are gazing upon them, present within themselves." (XI.XVIII.24)²²

Contrary to Eternity, where time is but one aspect, man is limited by the horizon of the present. Without the ability to stand outside of time itself man cannot claim knowledge of his future and must remain rooted in the present. That said, the Word as told in Genesis, although bounded by its expression within time, nevertheless reveals to man that there is something beyond his temporal horizon. Thus, it is precisely the knowledge catalogued in Genesis that enables Augustine to account for how he comes to understand the nature of time while inescapably operating within its limitations.

Moreover, by insisting that man can only understand time with relation to the present there emerges a further question of where that knowledge is located. If time manifests in the present as it slips between the two poles of non-being, past and future, then it would seem that "time is certainly extendedness, [...] probably of the mind itself." (XI.XXVI.33) This suggests that as time expands with future events moving through the present and into the past the mind extends in an effort to retain the memories of its passing. But in asserting that all past and future exists solely in

²² It is interesting to note, as does translator F.J. Sheed, that the above quotation borrows heavily from Cicero's *On Divination*. In particular, Cicero writes that "for the results of those artificial means of divination by means of entrails, lightnings [sic], portents, and astrology, have been the subject of observation for a long period of time. But in every field of inquiry great length of time employed in continued observation begets an extraordinary fund of knowledge, which may be acquired even without the intervention or inspiration of the gods, since repeated observation makes it clear what effect follows any given cause, and what sign precedes any given event." (*On Divination*, I.49.109) Augustine further refines Cicero's explanation of observation by acknowledging that all observation is a recollection of the past expressed in the present. For the purposes of this discussion, it would suggest that the powers of observation and deduction are the products of man's temporality, not Divine intervention.

the present minds of men, Augustine is also claiming that time itself is constituted within human memory; further suggesting that “[o]nly in the sense that by its passing it was spread over a certain space of time which made it measureable.” (XI.XXVII.34) Interestingly, Augustine’s assertion that “it is in you, O my mind, that I measure time” (XI.XXVII.36) establishes man’s relationship to the concept of time in terms that are reminiscent of God’s relationship with the temporal world. As time emerges with Creation from God’s will, similarly the concepts of past, present, and future emerge phenomenologically with man’s memory. Although the emergence of time within the minds of men is pre-ordained by God in eternity, man comes to understand his temporal nature through the measurements of time produced by the extension of his mind in the effort to collect the unending transition of events that come in and out of being in the present. In this regard man is like God whereby past and future do not exist prior to the mind and are upheld exclusively by it. Man is the creator and archivist of time given that he resides in the temporal world of Creation.

Augustine is quick to offer limitations to the mind’s ability to uphold divisions of time. He states: “I am divided up in time, whose order I do not know, and my thoughts and the deepest places of my soul are torn with every kind of tumult until the day when I shall be purified and melted in the fire of Thy love and wholly joined to Thee.” (XI.XXIX.39) Although the mind produces and catalogues all time outside of the immediate unfolding present, the mind is itself nevertheless temporal and like all created things can only be made whole in God. Thus, even the mind’s effort of cataloguing time, a uniquely human activity, is necessarily and inescapably incomplete. To that point Augustine writes: “[Your works] have a beginning and end in time, a rising and setting, growth and decay, beauty and defect.” (XIII.XXXIII.48) The mind’s ability to conceive of time is beholden to what “[God] had predestined outside time” (XIII.XXXIV.49) and the exercise of mentally collecting time is without meaning until the revelation of the Word in

Genesis that gives man the ability to contemplate Eternity by recognizing the limitations of the temporal world. The activity of cataloguing time is innate to man - it is in human nature to do so - but prior to the knowledge of God's eternity man's recording of history as the practice of recollecting time is natural to him only inasmuch as it is animalistic; it lacks the progressive dynamic Augustine sees in the Christian mind's accumulation of time's passing in the present.²³ Therefore, it is in the very study of the nature of time that man comes to understand his distance from God for man "says things in terms of time, whereas time does not affect [Your] Word, because it abides with [You] equally in eternity." (XIII.XXIX.44)

As a consequence, by understanding his distance from God man begins to understand himself. Nowhere is this distance more evident for Augustine than with the inability to definitively interpret the contents of Moses' writings. By tracing a number of different interpretations spilling out of '*In the beginning God made heaven and earth,*' Augustine concludes that, although each interpretation presents a competing truth claim, they all derive their arguments from the same literal presentation of the opening line to Genesis. (XII.XX.29) This acknowledgement allows Augustine to establish the literal text of the Scriptures as sacrosanct while at the same time admitting an irreconcilable conflict between its various interpretations. Interpreters of the Word, although drawing on the accepted canonical language of the Bible, cannot create the foundation

²³ There is a comparison to be made with Aristotle's *Politics* and, in particular, his argument that man is by nature a political animal. While expanding the scope of what is both natural and exceptional to man, Augustine nevertheless would seem to agree with the general thrust of Aristotle's assertion that "nature does nothing in vain" and that "the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal." (*Politics*, 1253a1-5) Because "man alone among the animals has speech," (1253a10) that speech is natural to man, as ordained through God's grace, is that he alone stands aware of his temporal existence and discusses that awareness, a practice displayed throughout the *Confessions*. Furthermore, the burden of mankind (although framed with language Aristotle would certainly not recognize) is to record history by recollecting time in the mind, for, according to Augustine, that is what he is fitted to do. Although discussed below in much greater detail, Augustine's suggestion that man is best suited for a community of Christians whereby all members recount their individual experiences of time through acts of public confession mimics Aristotle's assertion that man is best fitted for life in the city as it facilitates the practice of politics. The act of confession similarly presupposes the city and, in the theological account of time, replaces, what has become through consequence of argument, a mundane form of politics.

for a definitive understanding of Truth.²⁴ All interpretations exist as relative truth claims that are equal to one another in their incomplete understanding of Truth. And, while Augustine readily admits that it is up to God to “judge between us,” (XII.XVI.17) suggesting that only God may transcend the subjective truths of men, emerging as a consequence of their temporal natures, there remains an unresolved problem on the question of interpretation that had been previously dismissed with the Manichean argument. The issue at hand is such that even if interpreters of the Scriptures accepted that one cannot question God in temporal terms, thus assuming Augustine’s discussion of time is taken to be correct, there exists no certainty that those interpreters of Scripture would arrive at Augustine’s conclusions themselves when using his methodological assumptions. In his own words, Augustine reflects that “it is one thing to seek out the truth as to the mode of creation, quite another thing to seek what Moses [...] wished the reader or hearer to understand by his words.” (XII.XXIII.32) Given the inability to adequately differentiate between competing truth claims derived from Scriptural interpretations, Augustine arrives at the unavoidable conclusion that if anyone had asked him which interpretation reflected Moses’ intended meaning “these would not by my confessions if I did not confess to you that I do not know.” (XII.XXX.41) Most importantly, Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis cannot escape the temporal limitations of man’s inability to access Truth that he himself had used to undermine all prior claims to knowledge drawn from the Scriptures. It is in this unavoidable admission of unknowing that the political dimension

²⁴ Northrop Frye makes a similar argument with regards to the tower of Babel in his discussion of rhetoric and the Bible when he writes: “[a] militant faith of this kind strives to become free of doubt, just as a soldier in battle abolishes from his mind all questions of the justice of his country’s cause. Structures of faith are normally structures of unity and integration, and hence reflect back to us the finiteness of the human mind. [...] There comes a point at which a structure of faith seems to become a part of the tower of Babel, one of a number of competing and mutually unintelligible assertions with a vague factual basis.” (*The Great Code*, 251) Although relying on an interpretation of Scripture to make his argument, a process Augustine equally undermines and utilizes, Frye suggests the tower of Babel simultaneously establishes a structure of faith that is existentially accessible for all mankind, making it a touchstone of certainty, which eradicates doubt, and undermines that very certainty through the confusion of tongues. To frame it in Augustinian terms: man shares with all other men the inability to overcome his temporality and, as such, remains inescapably alone in his shared aloneness.

to Augustine's understanding of time in relation to Truth becomes apparent.

Fundamentally, the problem rests on the inability to settle any debate by way of an orthodox reading of Scripture and, consequently, the political instability that follows such a claim. Simply put, Eternity is too big to be fully revealed and thus understood by man in time. Augustine's re-interpretation of Genesis stands not only against the Manichees but against all preachers of his past up to and including Moses himself. By insisting that man's temporality precludes his ability to fully comprehend Truth, in a sense to grasp how God understands Himself, even when accessed through the Scriptures, Augustine can offer no more than "the sacrifice of my confession in what I am now writing." (XII.XXIV.33) As a result, one concludes that all truth claims derived from Scripture are mere opinion and, by denying the authority of reason or observation, all interpretive disagreements can be reduced to a willful assertion. In the end, Augustine's discussion of time as a means to deconstruct the Manichean orthodoxy of Biblical Scripture inadvertently demonstrates that order does not come from the wise but the powerful.

Compounding these claims is the recognition that if it is impossible to fully comprehend God in time it is also impossible for man to understand himself in time. As a product of Creation upheld by God's grace man carries within himself an element of the divine such that he can intellect Eternity however incompletely but in a way that operates as an entirely subjective exercise.²⁵ The concept of time presented here risks annihilating all access to Truth including the Bible itself to such an extent that man would conclude that his existence is wholly subjective given an unknowable and relative world. Indeed, "the times over which justice presides are not alike for

²⁵ In a demonstration of sophistic brilliance only surpassed by Socrates, Augustine, in the attempt to show the falsehoods present in the arguments of his interlocutors, undoes the very Word he clings to by, first, questioning man's ability to understand Truth in such a way that the very authority of the Bible comes into question and, second, replacing that newly established uncertainty with the persuasiveness of his own argument in such a way that he alone emerges as the last and best authority on the matter at hand.

they are times” and because the lives of men are temporal they are “unable of their own observation to compare the conditions of past ages and foreign nations which they have not experienced with those which they have experienced.” (III.VII.13) Following the logical consequence from above, whereby communities are products of the powerful in the absence of knowable divine authority, Augustine’s understanding of the concept of time here challenges man’s ability to know himself and similarly reduces self-knowledge to willful assertions. In this regard, one can see hints of the post-modern notion of ‘identity’ that is picked up in Rousseau’s *Confessions* and developed into the imagination. However, like Rousseau’s elastic human nature, where the question of what constitutes man is flexible while nevertheless maintaining a tiny but unmistakable connection of consistency across all time, Augustine’s discussion of man as a temporal creature saves itself from total relativism by insisting on man’s consistently miserable response to his finitude within Creation without God.

To conclude, Augustine’s presentation of the temporal is such that neither the Bible, as an artifact constructed in time, nor Moses, ultimately no more than a man, can be trusted in their respective accounts of God.²⁶ And yet, even at its most radical rejection, where Truth is simply beyond the capacity of man in the temporal world to comprehend, Augustine seeks to demonstrate the omnipresence of God in the affairs of men by equating his approach to Genesis with its author Moses in a bid to deny the latent historicism of his argument.

²⁶ This line of reasoning is likely drawn from Cicero’s *De re publica* where he argues that “[if this justice were natural, innate, and universal, all men would admit the same] law and right, and the same men would not enact different laws at different times” (3.XI) and then later on also states that “[t]rue law is right reason conformable to nature, universal, unchangeable, eternal, whose commands urge us to duty, and whose prohibitions restrain us from evil.” (3.XXII) What emerges from the *Confessions* is an attempt to reconcile the first claim that justice is relative to time and place, demonstrated in Books I-IX, with the second claim that there is Truth beyond individual claims or expressions of justice, arguably the central purpose to Books XI-XIII. The Eternal City, so called by Cicero’s contemporaries Tibullus, Ovid, and Virgil, who in the Aeneid has Jupiter tell Venus that he will give to the Romans ‘an empire without end [Latin: *imperium sine fine*],’ arguably colours, when coupled with a sustained Scriptural exegesis, Augustine’s presentation of the concept of Eternity.

"Now if I had been Moses, [...] if I had been the same as he and You had given me the book of Genesis to write, I should have wished that You would grant me such a skill in writing, such an art for the construction of what I had to say, that not even those who cannot as yet grasp how God creates would reject my words as too much for their strength; and again that those who can grasp so much, would find fully contained in the few words of Your servant whatever truths they had arrived at in their own thinking; and if in the light of truth some other man saw some further meaning, that that too would be discoverable in those same words of mine." (XII.XXVI.36)

It is through the presence of the Divine found within man that he is first able to experience the truth of God's eternal willing even though He resides beyond the temporal realm. Augustine and Moses are equivalent in their capacity to preach the Word of God for they are equally bound by time and makes the act of preaching a suitable basis for political communities whereas scriptural orthodoxy is not. The challenge facing Augustine at the conclusion of his Biblical exegeses becomes one of how to effectively preach the Word, whatever it may be at the time of its interpretation, as opposed to the impossible task of correctly interpreting the Word within time. Building from this analysis of Augustine's claims for the primacy of effective and affective preaching, of the theological justification for guided rhetoric given the hidden creator-God, one now turns to the opening of *Confessions*.²⁷

Free Will and Human Sin

The largest section of Augustine's *Confessions* spans his discussion of sin, covering Books I-IX, and presents the reader with a metaphysical account to the growing awareness of his

²⁷ Not to be confused for an argument that overtly supports lying, a practice which Augustine spends two texts denouncing. However, *On Lying*, written in 395, and *Against Lying*, in 420, detail Augustine's relationship to lying as one that is at best complicated. It is interesting to note that his stance on lying does appear to change between the two texts. For example, in the earlier work, which predates *Confessions*, Augustine flatly argues that "a lie consists in speaking a falsehood with the intent of deceiving," (*On Lying*, V) while in the later work, written after *Confessions*, he suggests a more nuanced approach when he concludes that "either we are to eschew lies by right doing, or to confess them by repenting." (*Against Lying*, XLI) In the effort to persuade towards the Truth of Christ, it may be possible to argue that Augustine has established for himself a way to intentionally mislead through rhetoric, or outright lie, to the reader through the act of confessing his misdeeds as they unfold in *Confessions*. To paraphrase Ernest Fortin: much like Cicero's teachings on rhetoric, whose principle goal was persuasion, Augustine similarly demonstrates an ambivalence towards, while if not the willful misrepresentations of the truth, at the very least, a willful omission for the sake of an argument. While the above speculation goes beyond his original argument, for interest please see: Ernest L. Fortin, "Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric," *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974), 85-100.

disordered soul as a product of seeking happiness from earth-bound goods when he substitutes the temporal for the eternal. The autobiographical account of the first nine books can be seen to presuppose the epistemological foundation laid out in his later argument on the nature of time that was discussed in the previous section. By constructing the text in such a way that readers of *Confessions* are shown the suffering of an disordered existence, through Augustine's descent through a hierarchy of sins, before his account of a theological justification for the concept of time, Augustine not only mirrors early Church practices whereby nonbelievers were dismissed when the Liturgy of the Word began but more practically establishes a series of events to be used as common ground for the purpose of persuading non-believers down the line.²⁸ Thus, the presentation of sin in *Confessions* serves a dual purpose. First, it bolsters the belief in man's fallen nature long before an account of original sin is provided through the exploration of fundamental human experiences like lust, child rearing, and death. Secondly, the construction of the work lends itself to a belief in the necessity of conversion by providing a stark contrast between his descent into moments of deepest despair, culminating in the death of his friend in Book IV, and his later ascent towards the voice in the garden preceding the decision to convert and be baptized in Books VIII and IX. Much like Augustine's argument for an exegetical treatment of Scripture, where Truth although revealed remains impossible to fully understand given the limitations of time, the *Confessions* offers a similar challenge given that the text stands as an incomplete account of Augustine's own life as he lived well after the text was completed. This makes it, like the Bible, a partial glimpse to a greater whole. Furthermore, at least to some extent, the work stands as a creation brought about by divine inspiration for it was written after his conversion. Like the myth of Creation as told in Genesis, the contours of Augustine's life remain ill-defined due to the inevitable limitations of a temporal

²⁸ For a more complete discussion of the practices of religious ceremony undertaken during Augustine's lifetime, please see: F.J. Sheed, *Confessions*, 329-330.

construction built from recollection and deduction, both activities of the mind. Similar to Scripture, they too require an exegetical analysis to uncover the divine elements embedded within the particular truth claims of his life and confession.

Unlike the analysis of the concept of time however, which in a certain sense followed Cicero's lessons on rhetoric extolling clearly defined boundaries of discussion as presented above, due to time's emergence alongside Creation, Augustine cannot give an account of his own beginning and must instead rely on the acknowledgement that "I know not where I came from, when I come into this life-in-death – or should I call it death-in-life." (I.VI.7) Paralleling the discussion of the unknowable totality of Truth in time covered by the last three books, the opening to *Confessions* focuses on the mysterious beginnings of the soul and its relationship to the Divine because Augustine neither knows where his soul began nor when his time on earth will end. To compensate for the unbounded aspects of human life, Augustine creates set pieces like the theft of pears in Book II or his sorrow in the death of his friend from Book IV to reflect particularly sinful events in the early narrative of the work as a means to examine the latent truths within. Presented alongside his physical maturation from infant to adult, established as the natural cycle of birth to death that all created things must follow, Augustine systematically reveals a structured development of sins that emerges first from appetitive desires, then the love of honors, and concludes with the degenerative self-manipulation of the intellect.²⁹ These sins, while exclusively

²⁹ Treating Augustine's presentation of his sins in this way suggests a possible precursor to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Such a claim is not entirely without merit. First, near the end of *Paradiso* Dante is given a vision of Empyrean and sees Augustine of Hippo as one of the great fathers of the faith, suggesting not only a familiarity with his work, but a profound respect for it as well. Secondly, and more importantly, Dante mirrors Augustine's questionable honesty with the reader over his personal assessment of his sins and faith. As Ernest Fortin notes, remarking on the argument that Dante did not write exegetically, "we would be more comfortable with such an interpretation if Dante had not alerted us through the intermediary of Statius that he was not bound to reveal himself fully to us and if his own confession of faith did not leave so much to be desired." (*Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 129) Although Fortin does not systematically address Augustine's *Confessions* in relation to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, instead relying largely on *City of God* and *On Christian Doctrine*, he nevertheless provides a substantive commentary on the modes of writing shared between the two authors. In particular, Fortin comments on the apparent literal and philosophic

the burden of mankind as an outgrowth of the consequences of choice, itself a product of temporal existence, demonstrate the creative capacities as the product of man's free will.

At the beginning of Augustine's life sin was already present. From his first breath Augustine "knew how to suck, to lie quiet when content, to cry when in pain" (I.VI.7) but "the will grew in me to make my wants known to those who might satisfy them [...] for my wants were within me and those others were outside." (I.VI.8) Given that biological necessity dictates an infant's requirement of a mother's milk to survive, these appetitive desires were not necessarily sinful. Rather, an infant demonstrates his sinful nature by desiring beyond his immediate needs. Augustine gives the example of "when I did not get what I wanted, either because my wishes were not clear or the things not good for me, I was in a rage." (I.VI.8) The evidence of sinfulness emerges for Augustine in the differentiation between an infant's desires for basic sustenance and an infant's desire to see their will fulfilled by another, with the latter cast as the acts which resulted in taking "revenge in screams." (I.VI.8) It remains unclear, however, if Augustine believes it is possible to separate an infant's cries of hunger from crying as a form of revenge for an ignored desire that was a product of an independent will as the infant lacks the capacity for speech to give an account of their desires. Nevertheless, by ascribing a willful act to an infant's appetite and placing it opposite the necessity of physical nourishment, in a sense avoiding the need to interpret the motivations of a baby, Augustine from the very beginning of the work establishes one of the fundamental problems of the human will.

The sinful expression of a child's appetites, in this case Augustine screaming for more of his mother's milk even though he had his fill and when the mother relented suffering the inability to consume more, demonstrates on the most basic level the will's ability to create objects of desire

insufficiencies residing in the respective presentations of sin given their claims to a divinely ordained temporal understanding of reality.

within the self. In terms of the appetites the human will is able to delude itself into desiring something untethered to physical need. An infant's cries for something beyond his immediate need, Augustine argues, is demonstration that "the innocence of children is in the helplessness of their bodies rather than any quality of their minds." (I.VII.11) The appetitive sins are separate from the faculties of the mind, although both the mind and the appetites can succumb to the influence of the human will. However, Augustine notes that he does not "remember living this age of infancy" and "must take the words of others about it." (I.VII.12) In so doing, Augustine claims that the mind was not present at his earliest stage of development, only the appetites and the will, for he lacks any memory of these events. This observation allows him to establish a hierarchy of sins that follows his linear development from infancy into old age and the subsequent emergence of the mind's dominance over his will and appetites. As he remarks: "these childish tempers are borne with lightly, not because they are not faults, or only small faults; but because they will pass with the years."³⁰ (I.VII.11) The sins of an appetitive nature are tolerated at the point in time when the mind is not yet able to impose order on itself.

In a peculiarly way the nature of man as a temporal being on the one hand allows for the ability to make choices while on the other absolves him of the responsibility of making certain choices at certain points in time. If a man acted like an infant as described above, it would be deemed intolerable by those in his community and yet the infant is not punished. When appraised in human terms, that is to say when appraised within time, a child's inability to understand the sin of his actions allows for a type of reasoned leniency on behalf of his parents even though, as

³⁰ One must be careful to not confuse the overcoming of particular faults in time with an overcoming of original sin. Continuing with the general argument that the earlier books serve, at least in part, to establish an account of Augustine's life with the goal of making the sermons of later books more persuasive, the explicit discussion of original sin does not emerge in the text until Book VII.III-V, shortly before his conversion. Claiming that certain sinful actions, here referred to as "faults," will disappear as the baby ages is simply suggesting that a different fault will take its place in time as original sin manifests itself differently through a person's life.

Augustine insists, the child chose to act in a particular way. By contrast, when perceived from Eternity, in other words when treated in absolute terms, a child's desire to consume more than possible is a demonstration of the baby's abject sinfulness because he has been tricked or has tricked himself through the will's created object of desire that is not there of necessity. Although not evident until the Books XI-XIII of *Confessions*, Augustine is suggesting that an infant's tyranny of screams is judged on fundamentally different terms depending on one's position relative to Creation, either within temporality or beyond as Eternity. Therefore, Augustine's treatment of God denies a subjective relationship with Creation as all expressions of judgement imply the capacity to choose, something that requires an action in time. Man can prudentially overlook particular manifestations of sin at particular times because he is free to interpret the possibility of acting otherwise. God, in the Augustinian understanding of Eternity, is afforded no such freedom and emerges as a constant, immutable standard of judgment over Creation.

Interestingly, the disparity between these two standards of judgement, one divine and the other temporal, decreases with age. Augustine describes his transition from infancy to boyhood in terms of speech and focuses on the education in language he was encouraged to pursue by his parents and schoolmasters which sought the “handling of words to gain honour among men and deceitful riches.”³¹ (I.IX.14) Although he did not “lack mind or memory” (I.IX.15) for the tasks put before him, Augustine like all boys his age “revelled in play.” (I.IX.15) In particular, Augustine “loved the vanity of victory,” (I.X.16) a product of beating the other boys in correctly recounting grammar lessons in competition. Similar to the infant's appetites emerging from the necessity for food, these childhood games, although steeped in the sinful love of honour, presented themselves

³¹ Augustine categorizes his life in terms of what was at the time thought to be the six ages of man: infancy (I.VI.7), boyhood (I.VII.13), adolescence (II.I.1), youth (IV.I.1), and young manhood (VII.I.1). The final age, old age, is not explicitly mentioned, likely because Augustine had not reached that stage in his life at the time of writing *Confessions*.

as a tolerable component of boyhood. A boy's playful outbursts in the schoolyard served the practical function of educating him on his physical and mental limitations through the love of honour and victory; both deemed necessary precursors to the pursuit of excellence. But much like an infant's hunger, a boy does not do "well against his will." (I.XII.19) And, like the infant's inability to impose his will on others, which cultivates a type of impotent innocence, Augustine's boyhood, although he "told endless lies" (I.XIX.30) to his tutors, masters, and parents, similarly lacked the capacity to pursue his sinful desires to the detriment of an audience beyond the schoolyard games.

Yet there are differences. Unlike an infant's vengeful screams, a boy is punished when caught inappropriately acting out. Whereas a parent tolerates the outbursts of an infant, overlooking the expressions of sin as an unavoidable product of the age, a boy is scolded precisely because it is thought possible that he may begin to change his behavior. If nothing else, Augustine's boyhood love of victory demonstrates the potential usefulness of a vice for it was this specific desire that motivated him towards the studies of Latin and rhetoric; both used later in life to preach the Word of God and promote conversion. That being the case, as the mind develops with age the temporal standard of judgement used to promote or prohibit particular behaviours and previously contradicted the unwavering standard of justice found with Eternity can now be seen more closely approximating it.³² Augustine states that he believes "every disorder of the soul has

³² Others have also suggested that Augustine presents a hierarchy in his ascending love of objects that mirrors Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As Martha Nussbaum argues in her chapter "Augustine and Dante on the Ascent of Love," Augustine's moral psychology concludes that "the Platonist ladder is an altogether inappropriate path for the good Christian soul," (*The Augustinian Tradition*, 67) and further argues that "Augustine and Dante restore pagan love to the self-sufficient universe of the pagan ascent tradition – but, ultimately, in the service of advancing the contrite soul towards a nonerotic life." (85) This thesis agrees with Nussbaum's argument insofar that Augustine provides a metaphysics on the ascent of love, but disagrees on the presentation of the political goals of the two thinkers. Dante's *Comedy*, in presenting an ordered cosmos that punishes the soul based on its actions in life and subsequent rehabilitation through suffering and love, is not necessarily analogous to Augustine's political teachings on educating the mind insofar that Augustine's sins are not universally framed as acts which undermine earthly political community while Dante, in his presentation of sin throughout *Inferno*, articulates precisely the point. Dante's

its own punishment” (I.XII.19) such that the mind at the stage of boyhood can begin to understand its sinful nature and start attempting to impose order on his will. Furthermore, the sin of loving honour, opposite the sins of infancy, is a perversion of a human good – the pursuit of greatness – instead of a perversion of a biological necessity. Therefore, while a boy’s exuberant love of honour and an infant’s crying are both framed as unavoidable products of their respective ages, it is in boyhood that the desires of the mind, instead of merely the appetites, become untethered from necessity as the mind begins to accumulate the means to pursue those desires in the world at large. Unlike the purely appetitive infant, a boy demonstrates the first capacity for politics and, in particular, politics shaped by the will.

It is with the singular goal to win a contest, framed as a battle of wills, which Augustine claims to have tried to win “by cheating from the vain desire for first place.” (I.XIX.30) The motivation behind this sin is clearly more complicated than that of the infant and the earliest discussion of boyhood because it carries with it a nakedly political dimension in the pursuit of honor. If nothing else, the desire to win honors, an activity that requires others to recognize the bestowed title, is inherently political as it establishes among other things divisions among men.

From the text:

I hated to be wrong, had a vigorous memory, was well trained in speech, delighted in friendship, shunned pain, meanness and ignorance. In so small a creature was not all this admirable and reason for praise? Yet all these were the gifts of my God, for I did not give them to myself. All these were good and all these were I. Therefore He who made me is good and He is my Good: and in Him I shall exult for all the good qualities that even as a boy I had. But in this lay my sin: that I sought pleasure, nobility, and truth not in God but in the beings He had created, myself, and others. Thus I fell into sorrow and confusion and error.³³ (I.XX.31)

Comedy presents an ordered cosmos whereby the soul is cleansed of its erotic earthly sins in the afterlife to, as Nussbaum suggests, a nonerotic end. While both Augustine and Dante articulate a hierarchy of sins given their belief in an ordered cosmos upheld by God’s grace and both similarly rely on a temporal understanding of the soul to underscore their particular educative projects, it is Augustine’s argument for preaching the Gospels as the imminentized purpose of political community that Dante, writing much later, takes for granted. The *Confessions*, as an exploration of the political responsibilities of a Christian preacher contra a re-emerging Roman paganism, is beholden to pagan *eros* in a way that Dante, writing in a wholly Christian setting that largely assumes Augustinian philosophy, is not.

³³Thus far this chapter has merely alluded to Augustine’s veiled references to the tripartite soul. As can be seen here,

The sins of boyhood, although partially reminiscent of those from infancy, are more troubling to Augustine because they are motivated by objects found in the world and in himself. These sins, unlike an infant's, carry within them the grounding for politics by relying on contests for title. A boy cannot win a grammar competition without competitors to beat and is an observation that speaks to the necessity of community. Augustine's thought establishes the distinction between infancy and boyhood on the growing capacity of the mind, a faculty necessary for politics, and, as demonstrated throughout his later exegesis of Genesis, provides one with the ability to produce scriptural interpretation. But a boy's mind is not yet self-sustaining and when Augustine remarks that he "was in less peril of sin [now] than in my adolescence." (I.XII.19) Suggesting that it was the schoolmaster and his parents whom guided his latent victory loving spirit towards competitions of grammar, Augustine retains some element of the infant's political impotence in boyhood by acknowledging that a boy, beholden to his superiors and lacking autonomy, is not willfully pursuing his destruction on his own accord.

The relationship between independence, in the form of a mistaken belief of self-sufficiency, and sinfulness is further elaborated with the theft of pears in adolescence. Stating at this point in his life that his "one delight was to love and to be loved," (II.II.2) giving a nod to the seeming insatiability of a pubescent male, Augustine is careful to differentiate these sins from those of boyhood in that he now "set about the same exploits [of winning honours] not only for the pleasure of the act but for the pleasure of the boasting."³⁴ (II.III.7) This observation is a critical

the appetites (pleasures), thumos (nobility), and nous (truth) are all offered explicitly as compounding manifestations of sin. Given that Augustine's ultimate conclusion is to follow Christ and "will what God wills," an effort that begins and ends internally with the soul, for God resides in the mind and beyond time, any attempt to order the soul based on a political good is temporal, corruptible, and sinful. A further exploration of the consequences to Augustine's rejection of the tripartite soul can be found in: Karl Lowith, "Can there be a Christian Gentleman?", in *Nature, History, and Existentialism: Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, edited and translated by: Arnold Levison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 204-213.

³⁴ Interestingly, it is on this distinction that Augustine addresses the reader of *Confessions* for the first time, potentially in an attempt to underscore the importance of this transition. From the text: "But to whom am I telling

transition in the discussion of sin for it highlights the difference between attempting to excel in the activities of another, given as the example of mastering grammar for the purposes of beating students in competition, and excelling in one's own activity for the purpose of gaining praise. In boyhood he competed to be better than his classmates, acknowledging the standard of greatness set by another, but in adolescence he competed to be loved which was a largely subjective enterprise. As such, the theft of pears is a watershed moment not only in Augustine's life but in the development of the overall argument to *Confessions* because it articulates the first self-sustaining act of free will as it was not done out of necessity at all nor was it undertaken with the encouragement of a parent or schoolmaster but, rather, for the sole enjoyment of the act of sinning.

In addition, while "there was no beauty in [the pears] to attract" (II.VI.12) and Augustine lacked "any desire to enjoy the things [he] stole," (II.IV.9) a marked difference from the analysis of his earlier appetitive desires, he nevertheless derived enjoyment in "the stealing of them and the sin." (II.IV.9) It is worth noting, as Augustine does repeatedly, that the theft was undertaken with friends and even goes so far to suggest that "I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone" because he "really loved the companionship of those with whom I did it."³⁵ (II.VIII.16) The independence of the theft is grounded in the group of friends acting on their own desires to appear sinful to each other and not on basic necessities, like an infant's need for food or a superior's governing of Augustine's childhood play. Although contained within a group of friends, the emphasis on the freedom of choice in the theft of pears significantly parallels the story of Adam

this? Not to Thee, O my God, but in Thy presence I am telling it to my own kind, to the race of men, or rather that small part of the human race that may come upon these writings. And to what purpose do I tell it? Simply that I and any other who may read may realise out of what depths we must cry for thee." (II.III.5) Up to this point in the work the burden of sins were discussed in terms that were unavoidable, a baby cries and children play, but as the argument progresses, sins are presented exclusively as outcomes of conscious choice.

³⁵ Some interpreters have taken this admission as Augustine's attempt to demonstrate the latent insufficiencies of the communal and political traditions in the Aristotelian sense. For example, see: Carl G. Vaught, *The Journey towards God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I-VI*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 57 and, more generally 54-67.

and Eve in the Garden of Eden and, moreover, points to the larger theological issue of original sin as a product of the will guided by the mind.

As Augustine elaborates in *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, the will of man cannot be free without God's prohibition on eating from the Tree of Knowledge because, without access to something banned, there is no ability to exercise the choice to obey. A lack of choice in the Garden of Eden would denote obedience through an absence of opportunity and not a positive affirmation of a properly ordered human will.³⁶ Similar to Adam, who would not have bitten if not for Eve's encouragement, Augustine's account of the pear theft suggests he was brought to sin through his association with friends. But, far from excusing his involvement, Augustine's presentation offers a more robust condemnation of his actions than the one levelled against his friends. By acting first in the theft, the arrogance of his companions offered him an example to observe and a course of action he then chose to follow. Much like Eve to Adam in the biblical account, his friends acquired the knowledge of the sin and then offered it to Augustine in turn. Adam's innocence prior to eating from the Tree of Knowledge like Augustine's ignorance to sinning for the sake of sinning before he chose to follow his friends does not excuse the sin of their respective choices because they were both given evidence to the consequences before they acted. Unlike in boyhood, where Augustine's parents and teachers encouraged him to participate in grammar competitions for prizes and honour, a path imposed on him and followed in ignorance, the adolescent Augustine knew better but nevertheless acted otherwise. The knowledge of man's free will emerges when he is made subject to a command but left free to do as he pleases and willingly chooses to disobey. Thus the ability to recognize sin and embrace it requires the paired activity of the mind, to comprehend the

³⁶ Augustine, *On Genesis against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), VIII.6.12, VIII.13.28.

instruction of obedience, and the will, to desire to transgress.³⁷ In this regard, Adam's sin is more terrible than Eve's, Augustine is worse than his friends, and adolescence more dangerous than boyhood.

Given that in each instance the one who acted second had knowledge of the consequences and given that Augustine understands Creation as emerging from God's eternal willing, which is immutable and Good, there must be something unique to men that allows them to deviate from God's goodness and pervert the desires of their individual wills towards baseness. As mentioned earlier, the freedom of the will exists as a consequence of man's ability to create objects of desire within himself. For Augustine, these created desires exist independent of God insofar as they emerge opposite the natural inclinations of Creation towards Goodness. The best example of this effect is most clearly demonstrated in the infant's ability to pursue nourishment beyond what is necessary to him. But, as extrapolated throughout *Confession*, the abilities demonstrated by the infant are defined by his rejection of necessity where, in contradistinction to the pear theft, the adolescent stands unbounded by material needs for as Augustine points out "we carried off an immense load of pears [but] not to eat." (II.IV.9) Instead, these created desires, while requiring friends to inspire the aversion to shame, are nevertheless products of the mind.

At the conclusion of his discussion on the matter Augustine notes that of those involved all would have been "ashamed to be ashamed" (II.IX.17) had any of them hesitated to join in the theft. Although cast as a negative desire, for man does not want to be shamed and thus the friends chose

³⁷ One of Augustine's first works, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, a dialogue between Augustine and his student Evodius, sets down his basic understanding of the relationship between the mind and the will that becomes central to the *Confessions*. At its most unrefined, the will is what drives man and the mind is what allows him to choose between the will's objects of desire. Most importantly, Augustine's division allows for him to claim that God is Good while acknowledging the presence of evil in His Creation. For further reference, please see: Augustine, "On the Free Choice of the Will," in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter King, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.20.58.198-3.21.59.202.

to act sinfully to avoid the damaging reputation of cowardice, the whole ordeal offers an example whereby man has created his own understanding of what is desirable. He has created his own good as a replacement to God's goodness. Further clues to the transition in Augustine's argument emerge immediately following the theft of pears with his arrival to Carthage and his claim that he found himself "in love with love [Latin: *amans amare*]." (III.I.1) Contrary to the former account, denoting a desire to avoid shame, this latter expression offers a positive claim to an object of the will's desire. Much like the theft of pears where Augustine consciously chose to sin while nevertheless aware of the evil in the act, loving the very concept of love itself privileges a human construction in relation to God's Creation in that he is not desiring an object in the world but instead desiring an object in himself. Unlike shame, which requires the presence of friends to feel it and their companionship to encourage an aversion to it, Augustine's longing to feel love in Carthage is self-originating inasmuch as it is a desire to desire a desire.³⁸ Failing to recognize that the locus for his longing resided within himself establishes the event as a moment in Augustine's life where his ability to imitate God's creative capacity usurped the will's proper ordering towards the Creator beyond Creation.

Recalling the discussion of time where it was argued that man creates categories of non-being within his mind as a means to catalogue the passing of time, as both past and future only exist in the present, the above discussion of desiring desires similarly articulates Augustine's understanding of man as one who mimics God's creative powers. Although the act of constructing time in the mind through the recollection of experiences is said to create a memory of non-being in the form of past, present, and future, it is in a sense creating something that does not exist except

³⁸ From the text: "I came to Carthage, where a cauldron of illicit loves leapt and boiled about me. *I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love*, and from the depth of my need hated myself for not more keenly feeling the need." (III.I.1, emphasis mine) Finding himself without the emotional desire naturally, Augustine started desiring to feel the desire. In a sense, Augustine attempted to take control of his will's desires by pursuing desire itself.

as an object within the self. The activity is not in and of itself sinful for it is unclear if it is done by choice. As stated above, man is differentiated from the other animals in Creation by his ability to understand time, suggesting that it is in some way an innate quality and not entirely a product of the free will. Should that be the case, Augustine appears to be implying a differentiation in the categories of created things in terms of created times (the categories of past, present, and future) and created desires as man's ability to create the latter is deemed inherently sinful while the former is not. While the objects of desire are located in the temporal by drawing man to something appetitive, honorable, or materially intelligible, objects of time are necessarily created in relation to the divine. Divisions of time upheld in the mind are only given meaning when contrasted with the revelation of Eternity in the Gospels whereas objects of desire have a co-terminus meaning with Creation. Therefore, although Augustine claims that evil is an absence of God and not as the Manichees contended a competing substance to God, the origin of evil rests in the ability to create things in the self to the point that "our free will is the cause of our doing evil."³⁹ (VII.III.4) As with the discussion on the concept of time, temporal things are created and are fundamentally incomplete when compared to Eternity. Treating desires that originate in the self as equivalent to the desire for Truth misattributes the creative powers of God to that of men.⁴⁰

This argument culminates with Augustine's transition from adolescence to youth and the

³⁹ It is unclear how successful Augustine is in divesting himself from Manichean dualism. As this discussion demonstrates, man's ability to create objects for the will to desire places him in direct competition with the innate tendency of Creation to desire God's love. The human will becomes torn between what man intellects and God, resulting in what Augustine describes as the burden of having "two wills." (VIII.IX.21)

⁴⁰ Augustine appears to compare man's ability to create desires within himself with God's presumed ability to create ex-nihilo. However, man cannot truly emulate God's power because he, as an artist, can only re-orient the pre-existing material of his desires towards a different end. While God "made something and made it out of nothing" (XII.VII.7), man merely tricks the will into desiring an object of the mind; the mind being something already existing in Creation because it is temporal. The closest Augustine gets to suggesting man has the power to create ex-nihilo comes with his discussion of time and the categories of past and future as non-being. Even then, those division emerge after the revelation of the Gospels when man is made aware of Eternity. For more information and specific reference to *Confessions*, please see: Paul Copan, "Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* A Post-Biblical Invention?" *Trinity Journal*, 17.1. (Spring 1996): 77-93.

death of his unnamed friend in Book IV. Signaling the turn in his education away from further descent into sin and the beginning ascent towards God, he even goes so far as to claim “I had my back to the light and my face to the things upon which the light falls: so that my eyes, by which I looked upon the things in the light, were not themselves illuminated.”⁴¹ (IV.XVI.30) Reflecting that in the very beginning of their friendship they “depended too much upon each other,” (IV.IV.8) Augustine remarks it was not the fact that the two loved each other as only friends could but their dependence became such that he lived through his friend and his friend through he. With the death of his friend a part of Augustine died and “he feared to die lest thereby [his friend] should die wholly.”⁴² In the effort to preserve the memory of his friend Augustine began to live his life for the benefit of the dead. It is clear that the memories of his friend came to pervert Augustine such that he cared more for the dead than for himself. The danger of loving the memories above his own life is first expressed as “feeling as though we were dead because he is dead” (IV.IX.14) but quickly degenerates into “[created things] go their way and are no more; and they rend the soul with desires that can destroy it, for it longs to be one with the things it loves and to repose in them.” (IV.X.15) In other words, the will of a man desires to rest in the things he loves and given that all created things, like men, are transitory by their very nature, loving created things leads the will to inevitably pursue, by virtue of a temporal object’s transitory nature, incompleteness, decay, and death. Memories of the dead, although outlasting the individual who passed, are nevertheless transitory themselves for they too are created things. As such, orienting the will towards memories,

⁴¹ It does not take much imagination to see the potential imitation of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in *Republic*, 7.514a-b, although it is uncertain if Augustine is drawing directly from *Republic* or a Roman source, like Cicero’s *Res Publica*.

⁴² It is worth noting that in *Retractions*, a work from late in Augustine’s life that systematically reappraised all his writing up until that point in time, one of the only comments offered on *Confessions* pertains to this quote. He writes that “it seems to me that this statement belongs more to a light school-speech than to a serious confessions,” (*Retractions*, I.VI.2) reflecting that the rhetoric of the loss was overblown. Considering the overall structure of *Confessions*, it is clear the death of his friend is meant to stand as the point of deepest loss, so it is somewhat curious the limitations Augustine retroactively places on the passage. In hindsight, does he not believe it possible to feel this profound a loss with the death of a friend? He offers no further explanation.

although a similarly unsustainable exercise, is shown to be even more disordering than ‘loving to be loved’ for it leads men to worship the very antithesis of Creation, non-being in death.

The sins of youth are thus to be understood as the most destructive for they are wholly products of the mind. While the sins of infancy were presented in terms of the appetites and those of adolescence as sins of honour, with boyhood transitioning between the two, Augustine offers his youth as an age dominated by the intellect. His love for the unnamed friend began with “the ardour of studies pursued together” (IV.IV.7) and only hesitated in the friendship when, after his friend was baptized on his deathbed, it became difficult to “discuss what was in my mind.” (IV.IV.8) The evident instability of the relationship was proof that he was not “a friend in the truest meaning of friendship, for there is no true friendship unless You weld it between souls” with the shared love of God and His charity. (IV.IV.7) By loving each other, Augustine and his friend had replaced God with their studies as the mutual bond that assured friendship. They ultimately shared no common good between them as their academic pursuits were transitory when looked at opposite God’s eternity and could only be understood subjectively within the temporality of Creation. As Augustine comments later on: “if souls please you, then love them in God because they are mutable in themselves but in Him firmly established: without Him they would pass and perish.” (IV.XII.18) Friendship as the true basis for political community, placed opposite the derivative relationships expressed in the impotent infant and the honor loving adolescent, is only possible through shared objects of affection. Augustine and his friend loved their relationship to one another as a means to sustain a friendship but, as death reveals, the exercise was inescapably insufficient.

When placed opposite Augustine’s earlier discussion of exegetical interpretation as a wholly subjective approach to Scripture the presentation of friendship here appears to suggest that there exists nothing within time with which to uphold it for even the Bible is transitory in its

temporality. The foundation for political association and by extension the basis for friendship therefore does not emerge with an adherence to a particular orthodoxy but rather the act of conversion to Christianity; itself requiring the immutable and eternal will of God. By placing the presentation of his conversion after his development through the various stages of his life, Augustine clearly intimates a readiness of the mind to approach a proper ordering to the extent that it is possible within the temporal world.

The conversion itself is described rather simply. Augustine stands alone in despair, hears an androgynous voice in the garden that tells him to “take and read” (VIII.XII.29) the Bible resting on the table opposite him. When he opened the Book it fell open to the passage of Romans 13:13-14, which he read, and immediately converts.⁴³ Fittingly, Augustine’s conversion is couched between the death of his friend in Book IV and the death of Monica, his mother, in Book IX. The juxtaposition offers the reader a comparison between loving the friendship of another and loving God which orders one’s love of Creation and the love of those creatures found within. In loving God, a continuous act that begins with his conversion, Augustine loves his mother in a properly ordered manner. Thus, the loss associated with the transitory nature of created things is mitigated by their presence within Eternity. The despair of losing his friend in Book IV is replaced with a love of God when his mother passes.

The ease in which Augustine converts and the simplicity of the event’s presentation conceals the political consequences to his philosophy thus far elaborated in the text. From the

⁴³ Augustine’s presentation of the event strains belief and begs scrutiny. In Book IV, just before he discusses the death of his friend, Augustine offers a commentary on the practice of bibliomancy using Virgil’s poetry by stating: “if one happened to consult the pages of some poet, who was singing of quite some other matters, the eye often fell on a verse quite extraordinarily relevant to the matter in one’s own mind; [...] not by art but merely by chance – things should sometimes emerge that should seem to have a bearing upon the affairs and actions of the inquirer.” (IV.III.6) Coupled with his later assertions in Books XI-XIII that God cannot act in time, for that impugns choice, Augustine’s claim of hearing a voice in the garden is altogether spurious. Augustine’s intentions for offering significant arguments against the likelihood of his conversion remain unclear. Perhaps, as a nod to the careful reader, it stands as an acknowledgement that rhetorical flourishes remain necessary in the act of preaching the Word.

opening pages of *Confessions* Augustine has systematically undermined man's ability to self-govern. Beginning with infants and parts of boyhood the mark of original sin is established as a component of man that denotes the will's ability to run contrary to the ontology of Creation by desiring objects independent of God's goodness. Adolescence and youth are dominated by the will's pursuit of objects of desire that are inevitably located in the self but, because the mind operates through a temporal veil of ignorance that precludes its ability to fully appreciate the sins of its actions, the mind requires the insufficiencies of those actions to be revealed to it through the mutability and eventual death of those created objects. The mind must experience the existential failure of its designs before it can become properly ordered. As Augustine notes: "the mind commands the mind to will [...] but it does not do it" (VIII.IX.21) for "there are two wills in us." (VIII.IX.21) The link to Eternity found within man that on the one hand allows Augustine to state "man is a great deep," (IV.XIV.22) suggesting man is unable to know himself, on the other hand provides the foundation to man's salvation. The mind must recognize the limitations of the mind and turn the will towards willing what God wills.

As the concluding books on Genesis reveal, man cannot know what God wills for He wills beyond time. Acting as a preacher Augustine has presented himself as the archetypal Christian convert while denying the possibility for archetypes altogether as it would imply a transhistorical form on which men could rely to provide guidance. In a community of like minds, where men share the knowledge of the mind's limitations, Augustine has quietly denied the possibility of a politics correctly understood for man's relationship to God is wholly subjective. Conversion to Christianity denotes the formal recognition of the mind's limitations but it does not establish the community of Christians thereafter. Augustine has successfully hollowed out the community of mankind of purpose by first arguing that all non-Christian desires are inevitably destined to fail

due to their temporal construction and by secondly insisting that man as a temporal being is himself destined for baseness for he lacks the capacity to understand God and by extension the capacity to understand himself. What remains of *Confessions* is Book X and Augustine's discussion of the political figure Jesus Christ whom instills new purpose to the heretofore sterile community of believers.

The Mind and the True Mediator

Book X opens with a prayer to "let me know Thee even as I am known" (X.I.1) and formally rejects the world of created things because "the more we weep for [things] the less they deserve our tears." (X.I.1) It is between these two statements, recognizing that one may begin to know who they are through their limited ability to know God and accepting that it is only God's eternity which enables such discovery, that Augustine offers an account of why he writes *Confessions*. Alluding to the overall purpose of the previous nine books, stating that "my groaning is witness that I am displeasing to myself," (X.II.2) Augustine turns to the reader and tells them that they are "a race curious to know of other men's lives but slothful to correct their own." (X.III.3) Moreover, by revealing the struggle and eventually overcoming of his faults in time Augustine notes that "it rejoices [the reader] to hear of sins committed in the past by men now free from them: not because these things are sins, but because they were and no longer are."⁴⁵ (X.III.4)

⁴⁴ It on this point that Augustine's indebtedness to Aristotle on the topic of the city is most clear. From *The Politics*: "Hence [men] strive to live together even when they have no need of assistance from one another, though it is also the case that the common advantage brings them together, to the extent that it falls to each to live finely. It is this above all, then, which is the end for all both in common and separately; but they also join together, and maintain the political partnership, for the sake of living itself." (*Politics*, 1278b19-24) As the above section has argued, Augustine rejects Aristotle's presentation of the city where "there is perhaps something fine in living just by itself" (1278b25) as man, absent God, cannot live finely. However, Augustine, like Aristotle, acknowledges the basic observation that men naturally gather together into communities, if for no other reason than to capture the benefits of a division of labour. Augustine breaks with Aristotle on the question of the good life and the assumed political nature of the city by asserting that a citizen without God is incapable of understanding the common good and, therefore, would be inept at the art of politics.

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that at the end of the paragraph Augustine comments: "the charity by which [the readers] are good tells them that in my confession I do not lie about myself; and this charity in them believes me." (X.III.4)

In making these claims, Augustine frames the project of his *Confessions* in terms of a performative exposition while relying on the backdrop of God's grace to ward the effort from baseness as subjectively understood by Augustine. Ultimately, the revelation of Augustine's life through the text seeks to rally "not the mind of strangers nor the children of strangers, whose mouth has spoken vanity, [...] but the mind of my brethren who rejoice for what they see good in me and are grieved for what they see ill, but, whether they see good or ill, still love me." (X.IV.5) Book X serves as the nexus for Augustine's proselytizing efforts in the present, standing between his sinful past of Books I-IX and assumed future glory of God's grace detailed in Books XI-XIII, that are aimed squarely at memories in the mind.

Book X recalls the first book of *Confessions* where Augustine claims that "our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (I.I.1) by suggesting the story of his life will "stir up the hearts" of his readers. (X.III.4) To make such a prediction requires one to assume a consistent commonality amongst all men. Given the nature of Augustine's argument that the condition of a hidden creator-God allows man the freedom to sin insofar as he can come to desire objects of the mind's fabrication but in so doing brings upon himself an inescapable restlessness from the unsatisfied longings of a disordered will, it stands to reason he believes there to be a human nature insofar as man's inability to order his soul remains a permanent issue across all time. As such, the investigation into memory begins by seeking in the nature of all men the particular aspects of the will that unwaveringly desires God despite the pursuit of an individual's will towards various

Remembering back to Augustine's discussion of rhetoric and his justification for using certain modes of speech to preach the Word, it is not altogether clear if he is stating that he has not misrepresented the facts of his life as they literally unfolded or if the reader could not be brought to believe otherwise. Although this claim falls after his famous denunciation of his professorship or rhetoric in Book IX.II, there is still lively debate amongst scholars as to the extent to which Augustine abandoned the practice. For an excellent summary, please see: Dave Tell, "Augustine and the 'Chair of Lies': Rhetoric in *The Confessions*," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* vol. 28.4 (Autumn 2010): 384-407, and especially 385-387.

earthly objects prior to the act of conversion. In particular, Augustine suggests that all individuals have within themselves a link connecting them to Eternity hidden in the deepest recesses of their memory and differ only in their respective minds' ability to plumb those depths.⁴⁶ Consequently, Augustine answers the opening rhetorical question "how shall they believe without a preacher?" (I.I.1) by insisting that it is a preacher whom must intervene through an analysis of memory. A preacher can demonstrate to others the previously forgotten but always present personal connection with God that rests within the minds of all men.

Augustine begins to establish his analysis of memory by describing it in both spatial and temporal terms.

All this I do inside me, in the huge court of my memory. In my memory are sky and earth and sea, ready at hand along with all the things that I have ever been able to perceive in them and have not forgotten. And in my memory too I meet myself- I recall myself, what I have done, when and where and in what state of mind I was when I did it. In my memory are all the things I remember to have experienced myself or to have been told by others. From the same store I can weave into the past endless new likenesses of things either experienced by me or believed on the strength of things experienced; and from these again I can picture actions and events and hopes for the future; and upon them all I can meditate as if they were present. 'I shall do this or that,' I say to myself in the vast recess of my mind with its immeasurable store of images of things so great: and this or that follows." (X.VIII.14)

As was discussed with Augustine's interpretation of Scripture, where time was presented as a "certain extendedness of the mind," (XI.XXVI.33) Augustine offers the mind as an endless expanse of storage capable of collecting all the events of a life lived. Further on, he goes so far as to describe memory as "a spreading limitless room within" (X.VIII.15) that as a faculty of his soul belonging to the nature of man is so prohibitively large that Augustine is unable to "totally grasp all that I am." (X.VIII.15) In other words, "the mind is not large enough to contain itself"

⁴⁶ Peter Brown notes that the theme of 'plumbing the depths of memory' becomes a common touchstone in Augustine's later sermons, after he wrote *Confessions*. (*Augustine of Hippo*, 436) For example, from a later sermon, Augustine preached: "whoever does not want to fear, let him probe his inmost self. Do not just touch the surface; go down into yourself, reach in to the farthest corner of your heart. Examine in them with care... then only can you dare to announce that you are pure and crystal clear, when you have sifted everything in the deepest recesses of your inner being." (Sermons, 348.2) Interestingly, such an observation would suggest the insight originates from *Confessions*.

(X.VIII.15) and Augustine exists as a mystery to himself insofar as he is physically incapable of exploring the entire vastness of his mind and leaves himself uncertain of the contents residing within but certain that in that vastness one finds God.

To a certain extent the outline above is a foregone conclusion because Augustine from the very beginning of the text has asserted a degree of impenetrable ignorance to the contents of his soul. As a temporally bound creature Augustine believes himself unable to comprehend the Truth of Eternity as it is irreconcilably larger than time itself. Lacking the ability to understand the Whole precludes man from acting in accordance with perfect goodness for every decision is made with incomplete knowledge and is thus determined to become corrupt, decay, and perish. By contrast, only God has the capacity to will perfectly for He is eternally true. However, even though Augustine presents his life as a series of events of the will's desiring of increasingly destructive objects and concludes in his exegesis on Genesis that man cannot know Truth while residing within time, he nevertheless comes to assert his knowledge of these insights through the act of conversion. Although temporally bound, Augustine claims absolute knowledge over the act of converting to Christianity as Truth. Without relying on the Scriptures, for again the *Confessions* denies the Bible's ability to fully articulate Eternal truth in time, and denying the ability of the mind to intellect God on its own, for it is limited in its temporality, requires that his argument rely on another authority entirely.

Augustine provides his alternative with an argument that relies on the seemingly unknowable depths to memory and in particular the part of the mind that, given man's ability to create categories of non-being within his mind and remember the activity of doing so, suggests the mind "is outside of itself and not within [itself]." (X.VIII.15) For example, although the mind can uphold divisions of time within itself and hold within itself a subsequent memory of the creation

of those divisions, the divisions themselves as expressions of past and future only exist in the abstract as non-being. Recalling Augustine's earlier claim that "God is not like an artist" (XI.V.7) for an artist merely re-organises pre-existing material, the categories of non-being held within the minds of men are not created ex-nihilo per say but are instead expressions of a memory of God's creative power recovered within the mind. Augustine later claims that "we find that to learn those things which do not come into us as images by the senses, but which we know within ourselves without images and as they actually are, is in reality only to take things that the memory already contained, but scattered and unarranged, and by thinking bring them together." (X.XI.18) In other words the "memory contains the innumerable principles and laws of numbers and dimensions" while none of those things "have been impressed upon it by any bodily sense." (X.XII.19) Therefore, Augustine's presentation of memory allows him to conclude that the memory of God resides hidden within the minds of men and, moreover, they are merely ignorant of that fact through their forgetfulness as temporal creatures.

Augustine summarizes the consequences to his understanding of memory thusly: "those who do not wish to be revealed by truth, truth will unmask against their will, but it will not reveal itself to them." (X.XXIII.34) As the first nine books of *Confessions* demonstrates, the mind domineers the will towards inappropriate objects of desire in the absence of revealed Truth and subsequently avoids the act of conversion. As the last three books of *Confessions* demonstrate, the Scriptures are unable to sufficiently convey Truth to man in time. Book X serves as Augustine's present solution to man as a temporal creature by preaching the existence of forgotten memories in an effort to reveal the presence of God in the mind and so it follows that God's "best minister [preacher] is not so much concerned to hear from You what he wills as to will what he hears from

You.”⁴⁷ (X.XXVI.37) Yet there remains the issue of how one comes to know the need to remember God in the vast expanses of memory if, as Augustine claims, “[truth] will not reveal itself.” (X.XXIII.34) In a sense, Augustine must explain how he came to know these truths given that his understanding of God, that which exists immutably and cannot be seen to act in time, requires a mediator to act within the temporal realm of Creation.

The solution rests in the figure of Jesus Christ who as the manifestation of Truth in time serves as the architectonic political figure in the role of the first preacher. Augustine writes that “the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, appeared between sinful mortals and the immortal Just One: for like men He was mortal, like God He was just.” (X.XLIII.68) By annihilating the literal authority of Scripture and denying man’s ability to independently govern himself in time, Augustine’s argument requires an interpreter of God who exists both in and outside of time. Paradoxically, Augustine’s denial of man’s ability to understand the world and his denial that man can effectively act to his benefit in the world while on the one hand undermining his own argument for it is unclear how he can reach the conclusion he does without having access to Christ in time on the other establishes his presentation of Christ as the sole authority capable of providing the foundation for a properly ordered political community. Further still, by presenting Christ as the political figure as a consequence to his articulation of man’s limitations within time, Augustine affirms the only authority fit to govern men, although in constant emulation of Christ, is man himself. The role of the preacher is such that he replicates the life of Christ in a bid to reveal the hidden creator-God within the memories of men and acts wholly within the confines of time itself. As such, despite the temporal veil that obscures man’s ability to comprehend eternity in time,

⁴⁷ Thomas Prufer suggests it is with this heralding call that Augustine appears to deny the possibility of privacy, as man is only manifest in another. That is to say, man is unable to exist fully formed without the imposition of another and the constant confirmation of ourselves in another. Please see: Thomas Prufer, “Notes for a reading of Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X,” *Interpretations* vol.10/2&3 (May & September 1982):197-220, in particular 198.

Augustine's concept of the preacher relies solely on the successes of human affairs in calming the restlessness of souls for its authority to govern.

Going even further, Augustine's denial that Truth can be understood in time, coming from his exegesis of Genesis that is given after his claims that Christ is the first and best preacher, greatly constrains the extent to which man can appreciate the co-terminus relationship between Him and God. Man comes to know the first preacher within time and it thus denies his ability to access Truth such that the transcendental nature of Christ remains unintelligible and is subsequently rationalized through a teleological assessment of His works on earth. Taking the full argument of *Confessions* at face value, Augustine's philosophy claims man cannot come to know Christ as the True Mediator through revelation but instead asserts Him as Truth in time through personal introspection of His good works in the hidden memories of the mind. Man authenticates Christ's claims of godhood by finding temporal peace of mind. Therefore, given his constant acknowledgement that he wrote the *Confessions* not to God for He "[has] heard from me before I utter it," (X.II.2) but for the audience of his fellow man, Augustine, like Christ, has assumed for himself the mantle of preacher. He persuades the masses to come to understand a God that is hidden from them due to the temporal nature of existence but nevertheless accessible through the vastness of their memories.

The conclusion to Augustine's argument is unquestionably dangerous. The last section of Book X sees him reflecting that although "terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert." (X.XLIII.70) Longing to flee from political obligations, likely to enjoy a quiet monastic life reflecting on God within himself until natural death, Augustine instead accepts what he sees as his duty and becomes a preacher of the Word for "Thou didst forbid me and strengthen me [by] saying *And Christ died for all.*"

(X.XLIII.70) As the *Confessions* reveals, Augustine interprets his role as preacher in relation to those who came to that role before him by comparing himself to both Moses when establishing new methods of Biblical interpretation, going so far as to state “now if I had been Moses,” (XII.XXVI.36) and Jesus when discussing the purpose for writing his autobiography with the intention to facilitate his role as “a preacher of Your word and a dispenser of Your Sacrament.”

(XI.II.2) Summarily both the lawgiver Moses and the preacher Jesus find equal expression in Augustine once his will is properly ordered through the act of conversion. Thus Augustine rejects the possibility of becoming a solitary walker by rejecting life in the desert and turns to the city in an effort to implement a new politics of the will whereby one preaches the Word to men in an attempt to reveal the forgotten presence of God in the memories of their mind. Lacking any alternative means to finding God, for He is beyond time, Augustine’s preacher has as his political objective the removal of men’s ignorance to their innate Christianity whether they realize it or not.

Summary

This chapter established Augustine’s *Confessions* as the foundation for a politics of the will. Starting with his theological justification for Scriptural exegesis, it was shown that man as a temporal being is precluded from comprehending Truth in the Word of God because eternity cannot be encapsulated in time. As such, Augustine historicizes the Bible and establishes the universality of man’s subjective relationship to Truth. Then, by turning to the opening books of *Confessions* it was demonstrated how Augustine’s presentation of his life through infancy, boyhood, adolescence, youth, and young manhood, presupposed his treatment of the temporality of Creation. In particular, man as a created being develops within time and consequently suffers increasingly destructive manifestations of original sin as men are led to desire themselves over God because the mind erroneously orients the will to the pursuit of temporal objects. Man’s ability

to sin as an act of self-deluding independence from God's teleological ordering of Creation rests on his ignorance of the Whole as a product of his temporality. Finally, given the inability to know God fully within time but continuously suffering the restlessness of the will, Augustine concludes He must nevertheless reside within man and locates that knowledge within the memories of the mind for the mind in recalling categories of non-being is believed to be bigger than itself. In so doing, Augustine suggests man is merely ignorant of his Christianity and establishes preaching as the foundation for politics as it emulates Christ's revelation as Truth in time. The preacher acts as the founder of earthly order within time by revealing the limitations of man through public confession. But, absent Christ, Augustine relies on a wholly temporal figure to complete the task and inescapably suggests there is no authority fit to govern man other than man himself.

Chapter 2: Rousseau

We do not know ourselves; [...] all we have is imagination.
Rousseau, *Emile*, Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar⁴⁸

According to Rousseau “there was a Rousseau in public life, and another in solitude who in no way resembled him.”⁴⁹ His *Confessions* offers an account of the seeming inability to reconcile the private view he has of himself with the collectivized view the public holds of the intellectual known simply as ‘Jean-Jacques.’ Given the treatment of Augustine’s *Confessions* in the previous chapter, where it was argued that he establishes the theological justification for self-governing through a politics of the will, Rousseau’s text can be shown to not only build on Augustine’s foundation by expanding man’s dominion over the internal self with his analysis of the imagination but radicalizes the Augustinian project by removing the shadow of doubt - a product of man’s temporality - meant to temper the potential political ambitions of the preacher. To make this argument the similarities between Rousseau’s and Augustine’s identically titled works must be addressed. At minimum one must make sense of the mirrored locations of distinct life events found in both texts, like the analysis of a childhood theft in Books II, the conversion scenes of Books VIII, and the reflections on the possibility of being rendered complete, either through God or personal reverie, in Books XII. Furthermore, Rousseau’s political thought as presented in the *Confessions*, while established on a competing set of founding principles to those of Augustine, perhaps made most explicit by his rejection of the doctrine of original sin, viewing it as overly deterministic, must be understood in relation to the construction of the work itself. Finally, the Citizen of Geneva, although advocating a nearly diametrically opposite conclusion whereby the Solitary Walker alone in the wilderness comes to replace the preacher, who by duty

⁴⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom, (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 268.

⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Ebauches des Confession,” in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Oeuvres complètes*, eds. Bernard Gagnébin and Marcel Raymond, (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 1151.

is located in the city, nevertheless suggests that the progenitor of earthly order derives from the human capacity to govern oneself, in this case by use of the imagination.

The central task of this chapter, therefore, is to demonstrate that Rousseau's work of personal confession stands as a continuation of Augustine's thought in the *Confessions* by recasting the preacher, formally the architectonic political figure of the Christian age, into the solitary walker for the age of Enlightenment. This preacher-like political figure, while burdened with the challenge of reconciling his subjective understanding of self with the amalgamated views of a public account, is made complete through the transmission of his imagined version of himself to the public at large as a reformulation of Augustine's presentation of the human will in relation to God. For ease of comparison Rousseau's *Confessions* will be approached in a manner similar to the previous chapter. First, Rousseau's treatment of a return to wholeness in solitude from Book XII, standing as "a testimony about my soul that corresponded to the one which all my behavior gave about my natural disposition," (XII.535)⁵⁰ will be used to establish the fundamental principles he sees governing his life that emerge through reverie. Second, the discussion will turn to Rousseau's presentation of his life from earliest childhood memory to conversion into public intellectual, spanning Books I through VIII, as an account of the natural goodness in human nature. Finally, the center of the work located in Books IX to XI will be used to elucidate the role of this public figure, spanning the publication of all Rousseau's major philosophic works until he renounces being an author, as a means to elaborate the intended purpose of the figure of the solitary walker. Ultimately, Rousseau's *Confessions* offers a political teaching that in many ways emulates

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*, trans. Christopher Kelly, eds. Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 535.

All in-text citations will be from Kelly's translation of Rousseau's *Confessions* in the format of (book number.page number) unless otherwise noted.

Augustine's theology of time. But by taking for granted that man is the exclusive actor within Creation while nevertheless affording him the quasi-divine power to create objects within the self through the imagination, Rousseau inescapably frames politics as an exercise of the will pursued through the imposition of objects of the mind onto the world of men.

The Return to Wholeness in Solitude

Making claims to the intended structure of Rousseau's *Confessions* remains a contentious undertaking.⁵¹ Initially planned as a post-mortem publication, Rousseau deviated from that arrangement at least twice and discusses both decisions in the text itself. The original project was intended to be solely Books I-VI that stand today as the first of two parts to the whole of *Confessions*. Rousseau concludes the first half with the remark that "if my memory reaches posterity, perhaps one day it will learn what I had to say" and ends by suggesting "it will be known why I am silent." (VI.228) After completing the first half, as Rousseau tells the reader in the introduction to the second, he took "two years of silence and patience" but "in spite of my resolutions, I am taking up the pen again," (VII.233) likely as a response to the growing scandals around him. This break in the history between the two parts presents the first challenge to

⁵¹ For example, there is lively debate throughout the secondary literature on how to divide the *Confessions* in terms of themes that correlate to Rousseau's use of 'epochs,' which appears at numerous points to signify a differentiation between, what he deems to be, two distinct modes of internality. In treating the text least philosophically, noted biographer Maurice Cranston in both *Jean-Jacques: the early life and work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754* and *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754-1762* ignores Rousseau's claims to internal transitions and focuses solely on the changes in physical location, thereby subdividing the *Confessions* geographically. While this approach in many ways steamrolls the nuance Rousseau attempts to cultivate through his writing, Cranston is wildly successful in contextualizing the external world that Rousseau sometimes treats glibly and, at other times, omits entirely. Alternatively, Christopher Kelly, who also makes use of Cranston's three volume biography, suggests that the *Confessions* was intended to stand as a moral fable and divides the text around what he sees as a systemic progression of fundamental arguments. As such, Kelly presents *Confessions* in four parts: the awakening imagination and departure from nature in Book I, the alternatives to civilized life spanning Books II-VI, the rediscovery of nature in Books VII and VIII, and the possible return to nature throughout Books IX-XII. Finally, Ann Hartle sees the work mirroring the movement of Augustine's *Confessions* such that there are identical division in both texts: Books I-IX are past and Books X-XIII (XII in Rousseau) are present, or, alternatively, Books I-VII are genealogical, Book VIII is conversion, and Books IX-XIII (XII in Rousseau) are epistemological. It is worth noting that none of the above interpretations acknowledge the divisions that Rousseau himself offers in the text.

interpreters of the work who wish to suggest an intentional philosophic structure to the overall narrative as it is not at all clear that Rousseau intended the *Confessions* to exist in the form that it does today. At minimum, the addition of a second part began as an attempt to clear his name raises doubts on its compatibility with the first and, more broadly, on the overall cohesion of the two parts. The second issue comes with the conclusion to the second part when Rousseau suggests “if I ever have the strength to write it, in my third part one will see how, while I believed that I was leaving for Berlin, I was in fact leaving for England.” (XII.549) While there does not exist a definitive third part to the *Confessions*, as alluded to in the preceding quote, Rousseau continued to write and some, like Maurice Cranston and Christopher Kelly, have explored his further autobiographical works *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* and *Rousseau: Judge of Jean-Jacques* as possible expansions on the themes and content of his first published autobiography.⁵² Nevertheless, Rousseau’s concluding statement to the second part of *Confessions* raises further doubts if the work can be treated as an intentional whole given that the third part did not materialize.

Luckily, Rousseau offers the reader a template for the structure of his *Confessions* as it is known today. At the beginning of Book XII, the last in the work, it is stated that “here begins the work of darkness in which I have found myself enshrouded for the past eight years” and clearly demarcates the last book from the rest of the text. He then goes on to claim: “I narrate the events that concern me [...] these primitive causes are all marked out in the three preceding books.” (XII. 493) In short, there exists three sections to the text as it is presented in its two part format. There is a concluding book that elaborates on his current misery, a second section that runs the length of the preceding three books, IX-XI, that detail “all the interests relative to me, all the secret

⁵² As Christopher Kelly notes in his translation, “the sequel to the *Confessions*, *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* was undertaken in part because Rousseau had lost confidence in the ability of readers to act as impartial judges.” (599n6)

motives”⁵³ (XII. 493), and lastly, by default, the earliest eight books that by implication are free of both the causes of and outcome to his present state of being. Furthermore, the sections that Rousseau draws attention to convincingly correspond with shifts in the focus of the narrative. Generally, it can be seen that the autobiography transitions from natural goodness of childhood, to the corrupting bourgeois emptiness of high society, and concludes with the attempt to reclaim the lost innocence of a pre-societal selfhood. Similar to Augustine’s *Confessions*, the epistemological revelations of the concluding section governs the phenomenological discussion of earliest childhood to the age of majority and informs the content of the political figure that follows. With Rousseau’s divisions in mind, as with Augustine’s text, the concluding section must be treated first to make sense of the whole.

As mentioned above, Rousseau found himself in a “work of darkness” (XII.493) that he quickly attributes to the public outcry against him and the warrants issued for his work. In particular, “these two Warrants were the signal for the shout of malediction that was raised against me throughout Europe [...] with unprecedeted fury” (XII.494) and tellingly states that “while I vainly sought the cause of this unanimous animosity, I was ready to believe that the whole world had gone mad.” (XII.495) At issue in this opening presentation of a non-rational world stands Rousseau’s fundamental and unwavering belief in the private image he holds of himself. Although he is shaken by the violation of the highest laws in the disregard for the Ecclesiastical Edict, a Genevan law extending the right to plead one’s case if accused of religious dogmatism, and the

⁵³ It is worth pointing out that Rousseau makes clear that he believes there are secret machinations conspiring against him and a large focus of the second part to *Confessions* is meant to provide an account for the public to scrutinize and, one assumes, see the intrinsic truth to the facts that would validate his paranoia. Christopher Kelly is quite successful in his argument that asserts it does not matter whether Rousseau was motivated by paranoia or not if the purpose of the *Confessions* was intended to persuade its audience to the natural goodness of Rousseau himself. As Kelly puts it, “because the *Confessions* presents his understanding of human life in the most concrete form, it is one of the works most responsible for Rousseau’s effect on the world.” (*Rousseau’s Exemplary Life*, xiii) As such, the portrait of the man, paranoia and all, compliments the philosophic opprobrium the work reveals to the reader.

lowest, “beginning with the law of good sense,” (XII.494) the collective outrage never brings Rousseau to question his own goodness as a possible cause. Even after taking note of the estrangement beginning to take shape between he and his wife Therese, claiming “I felt that she no longer was for me what she was during our fine years, and I felt it all the more since I was still the same for her,” (XII.497) Rousseau does not lack confidence in his purity of soul which provides the motivation for his actions.⁵⁴ Under attack by the elites of Geneva and Paris with “each rushing to imitate his neighbour,” (XII.495) facing open hostilities from the public, finding an expanding distance in his marriage, and, finally, remarking that he had “[given] up literature completely,” (XII.503) Rousseau establishes the basis of his alienation while simultaneously laying the groundwork for his turn inwards.

Having forsook his literary efforts and lacking ties to the external world, Rousseau proclaims himself to be comfortable relying instead on “a most perfect inaction: by filling up all the voids, my imagination was enough to occupy me all by itself.” (XII.503) As a consequence, the remark that “since my departure from Montmorency, [...] I saw myself condemned [to the wandering life] because I felt very much that from then on I would be a fugitive on the earth” (XII.497) can be seen as the first hint to the foundation of his later discussion on the reclaimed natural self for it reflects his view of an unceasing hostility towards him that spans the world over. Moreover, the privileging of “a most perfect inaction” alludes to a solidity of his self-image such that he is able to remain unmoored from the city while not losing himself to the wilderness of a fugitive’s wanderings. Supported by imagination Rousseau uncovers the authentic self as the

⁵⁴ Rousseau goes further in discussing the relationship he has with Therese. First, he revisits the reasoning he used to persuade her to abandon their children at a foundling home and admits the intellectual poverty of his argument. From the text: “I felt that I had neglected duties from which nothing could dispense me.” (XII.497) Rousseau also admits that “intercourse with women made my condition sensibly worse” and suggests Therese “had the same attachment for me out of duty, but she no longer had it out of love.” (XII.498)

distractions of the city are forcefully removed from him through his political ostracism.

The turn inwards begins with a return to his religious roots that were lost with the politically motivated conversion to Catholicism in childhood. Reaching out to the Minister M. de Montmollin, Rousseau writes:

“[A]fter my solemn reuniting with the reformed Church, while I was living in a reformed country I could not neglect the public profession of the worship into which I had returned without failing in my engagements and my duty as a Citizen: thus I assisted at divine service. On the other hand, I was afraid that I might be exposing myself to the affront of a refusal by presenting myself at the communion table, and it was by no means probable that, after the uproar raised at Geneva by the council and at Neuchâtel by the Classis, he would wish to administer Communion to me tranquilly in his Church. [...] To me it appeared to be a very sad destiny always to live isolated on the earth, above all in adversity. In the midst of so many proscriptions and persecutions I found an extreme sweetness in being able to say to myself, “At least I am among my brothers,” and I went to communion with an emotion of heart and tears of tenderness which were perhaps the most agreeable preparation for God that one could bring.” (XII.506)

Given that Rousseau’s misfortunes stemmed in large part from the widely held belief that he was at minimum impious and more seriously charged with atheism, it would be easy to dismiss Rousseau’s glowing discussion of the Protestant faith in the above passage as a prudential rhetorical flourish.⁵⁵ Such a simple treatment of Rousseau’s writing would overlook the subtlety of the passage, not the least of which comes with the realization that he claims the very same minister comes to denounce him as both the antichrist (XII.525) and a werewolf (XII.526) shortly thereafter. Moreover, while speaking positively of the Protestant faith, Rousseau succeeds in conflating the duties of a Citizen with the active participation of worship and the administration of communion. His concern centers on the “public professions of worship” and worries about the possible “affront of refusal.” That he would be denied participation in the community of “brothers”

⁵⁵ Rousseau’s treatment of religion, especially in his more controversial texts, like the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*, continues to vex scholars. As Lee Maclean argues in her book *The Free Animal*, it is likely that Rousseau, although speaking through the Vicar, attempts to establish the foundations of a natural religion that could serve as a new civil religion and, in her words, “[f]reedom of the will is the *sine qua non* of that natural religion.” (*The Free Animal*, 96) His statements in the *Confessions* should not appear to contradict his earlier writings but, instead, be seen to merely reaffirm his genuinely held positions on the role of faith in human affairs. In particular, Maclean’s third chapter, “Free Will in Emile: Interpreting the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*,” is immensely helpful on this topic.

is critical to the passage for it extends political association along religious terms, precisely the thing he was accused of undermining. Taken opposite his comments a few pages earlier, where Rousseau believed himself to be a “fugitive on the earth” doomed to “the wandering life” (XII.497) by a “world gone mad,” (XII.495) the sudden juxtaposition to an ordered and rational commitment found in faith is striking. It appears that if nothing else, the sincerity of his desire to worship is meaningful to the overall argument of the passage as it elevates religious practice in its ability to provide order for him in a time of great turmoil. Further, the particular serenity of worship works as a ballast to his sense of self such that he is able to remain confident in the private image he holds of himself.

As well, the Protestant welcome serves to highlight the core denominational differences between the two religions Rousseau publicly participated in over the course of *Confessions*. Back in Paris “the printed insults went on their course” and the “concurrence of carping, the motors for which continued to act under the veil, had something sinister and frightening in it.” (XII.507) Importantly, Rousseau believed “this mandate was of the Jesuits making” for “even though they were themselves in misfortune at the time” he “still recognized their old maxim of crushing the unfortunate.” (XII.507) While it would be difficult to completely dismiss the partisan impulse to honor Protestant friends and slander Catholic enemies, Rousseau’s contrasting of the two nevertheless reaffirms the importance he places on religious practice in relation to his overall argument and the need to excise the vices of high society. The “sinister and frightening” machinations of the Jesuits that Rousseau saw operating through the public highlights the extent to his paranoia and what he sees as the complete turning of society towards common purpose against him. For example, it is not merely the Jesuits and the public who scorn him but the very

theology of Catholicism becomes antagonistic as a product of the general will's disdain for him.⁵⁶

Therefore, the first reversal in the alienation outlined at the beginning of Book XII corresponds with his personal profession of faith contra Catholicism and takes the form of his writings intended to speak out against the mandate of the Archbishop of Paris Christophe de Beaumont.

Believing his *Letter to Beaumont* to have successfully followed his “old maxim of honoring the titular Author and striking down the work,” (XII.507) Rousseau wanted the letter included in the appendix of *Confessions* as a matter of public record and makes note of it in the text itself.⁵⁷ His acknowledgment of the letter in the work and the stated intention to use it as reference material arguably renders it part of the *Confessions* and suggests he deemed it necessary in the effort to understand his autobiography.⁵⁸ Taking the above claim at face value, the tone of the letter succeeds in underscoring the importance Rousseau places on the topic at hand and, furthermore, draws attention to what he was willing to openly defend in light of his persecution, real or imagined. Considering that the Archbishop’s mandate banned *Emile* and *The Social Contract* as

⁵⁶ Although Rousseau claims the evidence he reveals in the *Confessions* will present irrefutable evidence to the hidden machinations against him, there exists widely differing opinions to the merit of his claims. For example, biographer Maurice Cranston is hesitant to validate Rousseau’s increasingly grandiose claims but nevertheless acknowledges that Rousseau, “whose memory was exceptionally keen,” (*The Solitary Self*, 175) may very well have parsed together a reasonable confluence of evidence to support some of his claims. By comparison, Ann Hartle sees “these all-inclusive explanations [of the Great Plot] as the work of the creative imagination and correspond to nothing real,” (*The Modern Self in Rousseau’s Confessions*, 124) serving instead as an intentional presentation to the reader of the limitations to imagination. Given the erratic and widely documented outbursts that follow after the narrative of the *Confessions* ends, it seems unlike that Rousseau was self-possessed as to a degree whereby he intentionally constructed his paranoia to the service of a literary device.

⁵⁷ The amount of reference material intended for the Appendix wound up being so large that it was not possible to include it in a single volume and, as a consequence, scholarship on the *Confessions* tends to omit Rousseau’s private letters. Furthermore, when shipping his correspondences across Europe as he fled from the warrants, Rousseau was forced to rely on friends of dubious morality and notes that some letters appeared to have gone missing while in the care of d’Alembert, among others.

⁵⁸ As he comments in the introduction to *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Christopher Kelly convincingly argues that even if a letter was not written for immediate publication, “Rousseau knew from experience that any letter he sent or manuscript he showed to anyone would be widely circulated and possibly published with or without his permission.” (xi) Taken in that vein, the *Letter to Beaumont*, while not necessarily intended for wide circulation, would have been written with the possibility in mind.

heretical and accused Rousseau of atheism,⁵⁹ Rousseau's contention that the charges would prevent readers from honestly grappling with the issues at stake in his writings and as a consequence obscure the fundamental truths held within them was not an unreasonable concern. In addition, the Archbishop's *Pastoral Letter* as a personal attack only further demonstrated the "unceasing battle between dogmatic intolerance and equally dogmatic disbelief."⁶⁰ Again, although polemical in nature, the *Letter to Beaumont* serves as Rousseau's personal profession of faith in an effort to provide an alternative to what he sees as the stagnant dogmatism of Europe fueling his persecution.

Turning to the letter itself, it is worth noting that Rousseau prefaces his defence with a quote from Augustine's *Epistulae 238*, a work written by the Church Father to the Roman Pascentius, steward of imperial property in Africa and acting chief tax collector for the emperor, in regards to a disagreement over Scriptural interpretation based on a translation of the Greek to Latin.⁶¹ The quote reads: "Pardon me if I speak freely, not to insult you, but to defend myself. I presume upon your seriousness and prudence, because you can consider the necessity of responding that you have imposed on me."⁶² The implied connection between a powerful Roman bureaucrat and the Archbishop of Paris is hard to miss but, perhaps more significantly, Rousseau also succeeds in drawing a parallel between his desire to speak truthfully about the charges of impiety and Augustine's attempt to clarify a similar libel over his translation of Scripture. In both

⁵⁹ Christophe de Beaumont, "Pastoral Letter of his Grace the Archbishop of Paris," in *Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written from the Mountain, and related writings*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 14.

⁶⁰ Christopher Kelly, introduction to *Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written from the Mountain, and Related Writings*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush, (Hanover, University Press of New England, 2001), xv.

⁶¹ For more information on the context in which Augustine wrote the *Epistulae*, please see: William A. Sumruld, *Augustine and the Arians: The Bishop of Hippo's Encounters with Ulfilan Arianism*, (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1994), 78-84.

⁶² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to Beaumont," in *Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written from the Mountain, and Related Writings*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush, (Hanover, University Press of New England, 2001), 17.

circumstances, the fundamental truth of their efforts imposes on them the duty to speak against their accusers and marks the two thinkers as equals in this regard. Furthermore, while this quote hints to the tenor of the letter to follow, more importantly, it signals the grounds on which the debate will be fought. Theological in nature, based in large part on the Archbishop's use of the Church Fathers and even remarking that "you draw your proofs from so far back that you force me to seek my replies from afar also," Rousseau's argument is quick to offer an analysis of Augustine's presentation of original sin as the means to respond to what is at core a political issue.⁶³ The conflation of his persecution, in the form of his exile from Paris and the destruction of his major publications, with Augustine's concern with Scriptural exactness suggests a similarity to the respective projects that extends far beyond their philosophic disagreement on the political-theological consequences to the concept of original sin.

After establishing the parameters of his letter where he would first "avoid talking about my contemporaries" and second have answered the Archbishop well "if I prove that everywhere you refuted me you reasoned badly," Rousseau turns to the core of their disagreement: Genesis.⁶⁴ The central point of contention rests on Rousseau's and the Archbishop's competing interpretations of original sin that by extension include Augustine's line of reasoning as a father of the Church. In particular, the Archbishop claims that Rousseau's "plan of education, far from agreeing with Christianity, is not even suited to making Citizens or men" because it is premised on a denial of the consequences of original sin as outlined by Augustine's understanding of man as a temporal creature.⁶⁵ For example, when it is argued in the *Emile* that "we shall join [Emile] to neither this [religion] nor that one, but we shall put him in a position to choose the one to which the best use

⁶³ Rousseau, *Letter to Beaumont*, 29.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 24-27.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 29.

of his reason ought to lead him,”⁶⁶ the Archbishop contends that Rousseau’s discussion of choice implies Christianity is not the one true religion for if it was “he would infallibly have prepared [the boy] for the lessons of Christianity.”⁶⁷ Beaumont asserts that the affliction of original sin clouds man’s judgement and Rousseau’s faith in Emile’s ability to rationally deduce which religion would be most favorable to him is predicated on a denial of the burden man carries from the sin of Adam. The Archbishop concludes that Emile cannot be left free to choose because he cannot be trusted to make the right choice.

For his reply Rousseau turns to the source material behind the Archbishop of Paris’ argument, writing that:

“It is not at all certain, in my view, that this doctrine of original sin, subject as it is to such terrible difficulties, is contained in the Scriptures either as clearly or as harshly as it has pleased the Rhetorician Augustine and our Theologians to construct it. Is it conceivable that God creates so many innocent and pure souls purposely to join them to guilty bodies, to make them contract moral corruption thereby, and to condemn them all to hell for no other crime than this union that is his work? [...] Isn’t the blood of Christ powerful enough yet to erase the stain completely, or is it rather an effect of the natural corruption of our flesh, as if God – even independently of original sin – had quite deliberately created us corrupt in order to have the pleasure of punishing us? [...] Original sin explains everything except its own principle, and it is this principle that has to be explained.”⁶⁸

Rousseau’s critique of original sin is twofold: it is deterministic and hermeneutically inconsistent. To the former, original sin asserts that man will necessarily transgress any boundaries put before him thus denying him the freedom of choice. To the latter, if man was absolved of Adam’s sin with the blood of Jesus, in effect that the Mosaic Law was nullified with Christ on the cross, then it should follow that Christian men are born free of that recalcitrant disposition or, at the very least, cleansed of it through baptism. In short, men can only be said to be free if there exists the possibility to live without sin. But should man require baptism to be rendered free of sin, that freedom comes at the subjugation of the act which problematically admits man’s freedom is contingent. As a result,

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *Emile*, 260.

⁶⁷ Beaumont, *Pastoral Letter of his Grace the Archbishop of Paris*, 5.

⁶⁸ Rousseau, *Letter to Beaumont*, 29-31.

for man to be born free he must be born good; a condition that would preclude the burdens of original sin as expressed in the Archbishop's *Pastoral Letter*. Rousseau contends that the insufficiency of the Archbishop's reliance on original sin is such that, although it provides an account for man's earthly condition, its paradoxical determinism is at odds with the freedom of choice that is necessary to justify punishment in the first place. If man is destined to sin he is not free and, if he is not free, punishment is absurd.

Although Rousseau presents his familiarity with Augustine in his *Confessions* as no more than reference material, claiming in Book II that "it was not that I had ever read [St. Augustine, St. George, and the other fathers], nor perhaps had [my priest]; but I had remembered many passages drawn from my Le Sueur,"⁶⁹ (II.55) the *Letter to Beaumont* clearly presents evidence to a nuanced reading of the Church Father. Rousseau begins his challenge of the Archbishop's use of original sin by relying on Augustine's own argument from his *Confessions* where, in discussing one's ability to ascertain Moses' intentions when writing Genesis, Augustine states that men are "unable of their own observation to compare the conditions of past ages and foreign nations which they have not experienced with those which they have experienced."⁷⁰ Similarly, Rousseau argues that "it would be necessary to understand Hebrew perfectly" and to "have been a contemporary of Moses to know for certain what meaning he gave to the word translated for us by the word *created*."⁷¹ Both philosophers premise their Biblical exegesis on an acknowledgment of the historical limitations to the exercise in an attempt to undermine existing orthodox readings of the Bible while, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Archbishop does not. While Rousseau's argument at this point in the *Letter* is in many ways a restatement of his *Second Discourse*, where man is separated

⁶⁹ A colloquial name for Jean Le Sueur's *Discourse on Universal History*.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, III.VII.13.

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Letter to Beaumont*, 44.

by the various stages of historical development, it is important to note that in an effort to emphasize his point he quotes directly from Book XII of Augustine's *Confessions*. Relying on an admittedly liberal translation, Rousseau reminds the Archbishop that the Church Father argues "Divine truth [...] is neither mine, yours, nor his, but ours, whom it calls upon forcefully if we do not communicate it to others."⁷² Although historically constructed, Rousseau, like Augustine, suggests that the timelessness of Divine truth is located in the communities that embody it and the preachers who spread the Word. The Archbishop's rigid orthodoxy runs contrary not only to Augustine's own thought in the *Confessions* but to the modern treatment of faith emerging from historical circumstance in Rousseau's own thought.

Given the polemical nature of the work, one should not be surprised by Rousseau's final jab to the Archbishop when he again quotes Augustine, this time on the nature of the Trinity, and writes that: "after heaping up many unintelligible speeches about the Trinity, [Augustine] agrees they have no meaning. But, says this Church Father naively, we express ourselves this way not to say something, but in order not to remain silent."⁷³ There appears to be two possible implications behind this statement. First, Augustine's argument that man speaks of the Trinity not out of comprehension but from the recognition that the act of speaking itself gives meaning to the doctrine would suggest that Rousseau believes the theological doctrine's inability to encapsulate Truth fully understood is problematic. However, this reading would run contrary to Rousseau's claims of piety elsewhere in the letter and in the *Confessions* more generally for the ability to fully

⁷² The full quote is: "Divine truth, says Augustine, is neither mine, yours, nor his, but ours, whom it calls upon forcefully to publish it together, on pain of being useless to ourselves if we do not communicate it to others. For whoever appropriates for himself alone a good that God wants everyone to enjoy loses through this usurpation what he hides from the public, and finds only error in himself for having betrayed the truth." (*Letter to Beaumont*, 53) For comparison, Rousseau's quote comes from a passage in Augustine's *Confessions* that asserts it is fruitless to argue over what Moses intended to write, and, instead, states "O Lord, Your judgements are to be dreaded, since Your truth is neither mine, nor his, nor another's, but of all of us, whom Thou publicly callest to have it in common, warning us terribly not to hold it as specially for ourselves, lest we be deprived of it." (*Confessions*, XII.XXV.34)

⁷³ Rousseau, *Letter to Beaumont*, 78.

understand divine Truth was never considered possible by man within Creation. As an alternative, Rousseau's use of Augustine's claim that man cannot definitively know the nature of the Trinity removes the Archbishop's ability to denounce Rousseau's competing interpretation of original sin and surreptitiously marks the two arguments as equal by virtue of man's inability to pass judgement on each other's relative approximations of Truth. It suggests that the Archbishop, while acting as the steward over one of many possible truth claims, does not speak out against Rousseau's thought based on some definitive comprehension of Truth, although he may indeed believe his orthodoxy to be Truth. Beaumont simply speaks out so as to avoid appearing to be doing nothing. Arguing that his protests against *Emile* and *The Social Contract* essentially amount to willful assertions, opposite his claim to correcting a demonstrably inferior Biblical exegesis, Rousseau reduces the *Pastoral Letter* to an attempt to basely dismiss a competing Scriptural interpretation through orthodoxy instead of a reasoned account. As a result, he succeeds in establishing his work on theological grounds first, opposite Augustine, and political grounds second, opposite the Archbishop's denunciations.

The *Letter to Beaumont* arguably sets the foundation for the rest of Book XII of Rousseau's *Confessions* as it details his first step in his inward turn and explains his rejection of the doctrine of original sin. In addition, it allows him to offer a competing account of human nature. More specifically, the doctrine of natural goodness facilitates Rousseau's meditation on wholeness within the self that he describes as the reveries he experiences during his stay on the Island of St. Pierre which are later expanded and turned into the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

Following the *Letter* and the burning of his major works, Rousseau's second step towards the inward self takes place when "seeing myself abandoned by my Fellow Citizens, I decided to renounce my ungrateful fatherland where [...] I saw myself so unworthily treated by unanimous

consent, since those who should have spoken had said nothing.” (XII.510) While Book XII opened with an account of Rousseau forced into “the wandering life,” (XII.497) Rousseau does not become truly isolated until he renders himself stateless.⁷⁴ The perceived injustice of his fellow countrymen’s inaction in the face of the public injustices Rousseau believes himself to have suffered reveal a fundamental disunity between his private will and the general will of his fatherland. By completely disassociating himself from his community of birth and moving to the Island of St. Pierre in the middle of the Lake of Bienne, Rousseau begins a second age of happiness, the “supreme happiness” (XII.536), that is offered in comparison to the first age that it outlined in his time with Mamma from Book VI.

This age of happiness was built on Rousseau’s ability to remove the uncertainty of his position in the world and his dependence on contingent pleasures.⁷⁵ Towards the latter, he remarks that he “took every measure imaginable to remove myself from the necessity of having to maintain [dealings with mortals]” such that he found himself “abandoned to the sweetness of inactivity and the contemplative life.” (XII.534) In solitude, having renounced ties to fatherland and Church, Rousseau was free to pursue his imagination as he wished without the impositions of the attachments set by his previous life as a public figure. To the former, although his solitude was in

⁷⁴ Rousseau closes his discussion of the Government of the Republic with the exultation “siluit terra,” Latin for “the earth was silent.” (XII.511) Coming from I Maccabees 1:3, it references the Greeks under Alexander the Great and the failed attempts to suppress the practice of basic Jewish Law, ultimately resulting in the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid rule. Comparing himself with the effectively stateless Jews is likely meant to highlight, what he perceives, as the immutable truth in his convictions and the unjust punishment through subjugation he suffers.

⁷⁵ Although generally left unstated, Rousseau had also freed himself from sexual desires at this point. At the beginning of Book XII, he states that “I had noticed that intercourse with women made my condition sensible worse” (XII.498) and, as a consequence, found himself no longer interested in the act. Kelly merely comments on Rousseau’s freedom from “dependent desires” (*Rousseau’s Exemplary Life*, 221) and Hartle similarly notes that “Rousseau is like the savage of the *Second Discourse* whose ‘soul, agitated by nothing, is given solely to the feeling of its present existence.’” (*The Modern Self*, 149) While neither commentator is wrong to bundle Rousseau’s lost interest in sex with his overall emancipation from dependent desires, it is interesting to note that Rousseau felt the need to draw attention to that particular desire, especially in light of his professed lack of libido throughout adolescence and, subsequently, the centrality his libido plays in Books V-VII. It is unclear as to the goal Rousseau intended for the comment but, given his statement, it is remise to not make mention of it.

a sense “leaving the field free to my enemies in the world,” Rousseau “was leaving behind a testimony about my soul that corresponded to the one which all my behaviour gave about my natural disposition.” (XII.535) His major works complete and the rebuttals to his largest critics, like the *Letter of Beaumont*, disseminated amongst the public the authenticity of his work would inevitably emerge regardless of the content to his detractors’ comments. He “did not need any other defense against my calumniators” (XII.535) for although “they could depict another man under my name, [...] they could deceive only those who wanted to be deceived.” (XII.536) Confident that the construction of his major works would convey a consistent message to all honest readers, as the only real danger to the project was the libelous claims of atheism, like those made by Beaumont, Rousseau “took leave of my Century and of my contemporaries, and I bade farewell to the world by confining myself on this Island for the remainder of my days.” (XII.536) Retreating to the Island of St. Pierre was intended to conclude his activities as a public intellectual and participant in civil society.

Comparing the Island to “Papimania, that blessed country where one sleeps,” and hoping to live “without bother in an eternal leisure,” Rousseau proclaims that “I am seeking out solitude solely to abandon myself to idleness.” (XII.536) The idleness he speaks of is not the idleness of a lay about. Rather, Rousseau clarifies his desired state of being by explaining that:

“The idleness I love is not that of a do-nothing who stays there with his arms crossed in total inactivity and thinks no more than he acts. It is both that of a child who is ceaselessly in motion while doing nothing and, at the same time, that of a dotard who strays when his arms are at rest. I love to occupy myself by doing trifles, beginning a hundred things and finishing none of them, going and coming as the fancy comes into my head, changing plans at each instant, following a fly in all its flying about, wanting to uproot a rock to see what is under it, undertaking a labor of ten years with ardor, and abandoning it without regret after ten minutes, in sum, musing all day long without order and without sequence, and following only the caprice of the moment in everything.” (XII.537)

The above describes a state of timelessness where the urgencies of a temporal being are forgotten. Much like the savage of the *Second Discourse*, the ability to undertake “a labor of ten years” and abandon it “without regret” speaks to the ability to disregard the products of one’s labors when

freed from the sting of necessity. Such a circumstance is only possible if one lives in the moment, denying both past and future, and embraces a certain conscious timelessness. This state of happiness can thus be understood as the outcome of two mutually complimentary realities. First, the ability to experience idleness on the Island is dependent on Rousseau's earlier labors that provided the financial, political, and physical stability necessary to shelter him from the turmoil of European society. By arriving on the Island of St. Pierre without association to Church or state and confident that his *Letter to Beaumont* would assure the sanctity of his life's work, Rousseau had become authentically individual. He was emancipated from the scandals that plagued him and which imposed restrictions on his person. Secondly, given his understanding of the human condition, as one that is free of original sin and due to his newfound freedom from both religious and political associations, Rousseau's constant idleness would inevitably lead to positive outcomes. The state of perfect happiness emerges as a product of the external freedom from the burdens of society and the internal freedom that, while developed by his understanding of goodness, was finally allowed to shine forth in the idleness of the Island.

The happiness of Book XII is the precondition for Rousseau's uninhibited imagination that once unleashed reveals to him the world of the reveries. Describing his solitary walks around the Island he writes that, while "letting my boat drift at the mercy of the air and water," he "abandoned [him]self to reveries without object."⁷⁶ (XII.539) Crying out "oh nature, oh my mother, here I am under your protection alone; here there is no clever and deceitful man who comes between you

⁷⁶ It is worth comparing Rousseau's presentation of his time on the Island of St. Pierre in the *Confessions* with that of the Fifth Walk of *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. If nothing else, the *Reveries* makes far more explicit the timelessness experience as one descends into the self. From the text: "but if there is a state in which the soul finds a solid enough base to rest itself on entirely and to gather its whole being into, without needing to recall the past or encroach upon the future; in which time is nothing for it; in which the present lasts forever without, however, making its duration noticed and without any trace of time's passage; without any other sentiment of deprivation or of enjoyment, [...] as long as this state lasts [...] one finds a [...] a sufficient, perfect, and full happiness which leaves in the soul no emptiness it might feel a need to fill." (*The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 46) For further analysis between the two, please see: Kelly, *Rousseau's Exemplary Life*, 221-235.

and me,” Rousseau rearticulates his complete freedom from the world of man and his return to the natural world. Returned to the womb of nature the experience reveals to him the inalienable truth that his self-understanding, derived through the image he had created of himself, is his authentic self and recommits himself to a project whereby he “will nonetheless continue to set forth faithfully what J.-J. Rousseau was, did and thought, without explaining or justifying the singularity of his feelings and his ideas, or looking for whether others have thought as he did.” (XII.540) Now at one with nature, Rousseau comes to fully understand how the public’s perception of him has become corrupted and realizes he has an obligation to himself to remain consistent in the representation of his image. Constructed for the first time out of the private imagination while residing in the public, Rousseau sees that his self-image has not changed in the idleness of nature and takes this to demonstrate that the image is both natural in its creation and, as an outcome of its natural creation, realizes it must be good. Man as a free being is not beholden to the determinism of original sin.

Unfortunately, the revelation of the natural world and man’s ability to return to wholeness is only fleeting. Soon after his experience of the reveries on the lake Rousseau’s “repose was disturbed [...] by anxiety about losing it.” (XII.540) Time, as the outcome to recognizing prospective future dangers, reasserted itself. Eventually, the machinations that worked against him across Europe find Rousseau and successfully petition his removal from the Island and “for the first time I felt my natural pride bend under the yoke of necessity, and I had to lower myself to asking for a delay in spite of the murmurings of my heart.” (XII.542) But the governor of the Island M. the Bailiff of Nidua was insistent and gave Rousseau a day’s notice to the eviction that was promptly upheld. Rousseau “sighed more than ever after that lovable idleness, after that sweet quietude of mind and body which I had coveted so much, and to which my heart limited its supreme

felicity now that it had returned from the chimeras of love and friendship.” (XII.545) Had he remained on the Island undisturbed, Rousseau would not have had reason to write the *Confessions* nor would he have been able to clarify the solidity of his self-created image. Having realized that the image he held of himself remained unaltered during his time on the Island and throughout his return to society after the eviction, Rousseau was provided with the evidence that the imaginary self, a natural and good creation, offered protection against the renewed dangers in the attachments of love and friendship.

The loss of the Island sanctuary provides the *Confessions* with its inevitable conclusion. Book XII began with a discussion of his rejection of Catholicism and, in particular, the deterministic doctrine of original sin as developed by Augustine and espoused as orthodoxy by the Archbishop Beaumont. Subsequently, Rousseau rejects his citizenship of Geneva due to the public’s unwillingness to reciprocally defend his interests as they would their own as he had with theirs. Freed from the shackles of civil society he fled to the Island of St Pierre as a final refuge to live the rest of his life as an authentic individual. Upon returning to an idleness last experienced in childhood, Rousseau’s imagination was left free to roam the interiority of his mind and, as a product of his reveries, reveals to him the fundamental truth to the image he holds of himself as it stands immutable throughout his transition from public intellectual to re-naturalized individual. The solidity of this image paradoxically stands as the product of and proof to man’s intractable goodness for, after his eviction from the Island, Rousseau’s image of himself remains unchanged. Present in childhood, reclaimed in idleness, and maintained in the return to society, Rousseau’s imagination stands as the epistemological foundation to his understanding of natural goodness that, now properly understood, can be charted throughout his discussions on childhood spanning Books I-VIII.

Natural Goodness and Human Corruption

Rousseau presents himself as a child born good who becomes corrupted over time. Although a reversal of Augustine's presentation of a hierarchy of sins from the previous chapter, insofar as Rousseau offers a different origin of man born with sin in man's natural goodness, Rousseau's work can be shown to correspond to a roughly similar narrative structure with stages of corruption between birth and adulthood. Beginning with Books I-IV, Rousseau explores the contents of his youth in a bid to "depict myself as I am" and argues that "in order to know me in my advanced age, it is necessary to have known me well in my youth." Central to the discussion is Rousseau's insistence on the difference between crimes of malice, which signal truly corrupt acts, and his own actions that are merely mischievous in nature as a product of his good natured soul. (IV.146) Following childhood, spanning Books V-VII, Rousseau turns to the bloom of amour-propre as he reaches the age of majority and outlines the steady debasement of his soul as he begins to govern himself according to external desires and ventures further into the corrupting world of civil society.⁷⁷ Finally, Book VIII provides an account of Rousseau's conversionary experience and lays the foundation for his time at the Hermitage where his life as a public intellectual takes root. Looked upon in this way, the first eight books of *Confessions* can be seen to offer the phenomenological account of corruption that when taken in hand with the epistemological claims in Book XII provide the framework to Rousseau's philosophic undertakings and political proscriptions that come in the middle of the work.

In the preface to the *Confessions* Rousseau famously tells the reader: "here is the only

⁷⁷ Rousseau's use of the term amour-propre in the *Confessions* is largely consistent with the definition commonly given from the *Emile* where he writes: "but amour-propre, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible. [...] Thus what makes man essentially good is to have few needs and to compare himself little to others; what makes him essentially wicked is to have many needs and to depend very much on opinion." (*Emile*, 213-214)

portrait of a man, painted exactly according to nature and in all its truth, that exists and that will probably ever exist; [...] it is] a useful work which can serve as the first piece of comparison for the study of men, a study which certainly has not yet begun.”⁷⁸ (Preface, 3) This proposed study, facilitated by the “Eternal Being” who will “assemble around [Rousseau] the countless host of fellows,” and, “let them listen to [...] confessions, let them shudder at [...] unworthiness, let them blush at [...] woes,” has as its final goal the judgement of Rousseau’s quality of character and goes so far as to openly challenge the reader of *Confession* to claim “I was better than that man.” (I.5) Underlying Rousseau’s project is the assumption that, as someone keenly aware of his self-diagnosed natural goodness, no reader who is honest with themselves would be able to condemn him or the intent of his actions. Rousseau’s frank discussion of his most depraved acts, including but not limited to sexual misconduct, theft, voyeurism, and fraud, should come as no surprise for the intention behind such acts is rooted in a fundamental goodness that stands beyond reproach. Exploring these youthful misadventures will begin to lay bare Rousseau’s understanding of an innocence corrupted.

Although birth was only “the first of [his] misfortunes” (I.6) and bestowed with “a sensitive heart” which “brought about all the other misfortunes of [his] life,” Rousseau nevertheless comments that he was indistinct from “the common fate of humanity” for he, like all mankind, experienced “feeling before thinking.” (I.7) But, Rousseau contends that his childhood was markedly unique from others due to his ability to read at an early age. Combined with his sensitive disposition, his reading allowed him to become “the character whose life I read” (I.8) and vicariously experience these alternative lives with the aide of his imagination.⁷⁹ Importantly, the

⁷⁸ It is worth noting, as does translator Christopher Kelly, that this forward only appears in the Geneva manuscript. Including it here is consistent with Kelly’s translation.

⁷⁹ It is on this point that the *Confessions* can be seen as yet another text to illuminate Rousseau’s use of the sentiment of compassion. Although commenting on his more well-known works, Orwin could very well have been speaking of

exposure to literature and history drew Rousseau outside of himself and “these confused emotions [...] formed one of a different stamp in me, and gave me bizarre and romantic concepts about human life, from which experience and reflection have never been able to cure me.” (I.8) Experiencing the lives of others at a young age, Rousseau believes to have inadvertently inoculated himself from, or at the very least delayed, the more sever dangers of amour-propre by forcing himself outside of himself. As a result, he became aware of the entity known as ‘Rousseau’ that existed independent of others. His early education, while not governed by a tutor but rather a type of freewheeling discovery through books made available by circumstantial opportunity, is presented as the initial backdrop to his youth and cements the *Confessions* on the grounds of natural goodness in the authentic self and not, as is the case for the rest of mankind, a socially constructed identity unconsciously beholden to the whims of public perception.

Unfortunately, a natural goodness does not guarantee a natural obedience. While there exists an intuitive morality in children, it remains dormant until brought to the fore of consciousness through experience. As such, Rousseau turns to his many childhood indiscretions, including incidents where he urinated in a stock pot or, at another point, took pleasure in the physical discipline forced upon him⁸⁰ and pauses to comment on the effects of being falsely accused, calling it “the first and most painful step in the obscure and miry labyrinth of my

the *Confessions* when he wrote: “The great cosmopolitan soul is not the least but the most reasonable of men, who rises furthest above the conventions that hamper the rest of us like blinders. Compassion figures here as the basis of a new morality that, while surely not founded solely on reason, is one only to those few human beings whose vision is clearest. [...] Whatever may have been the basis of compassion in the state of nature, in society it depends on the proper education of our sentiments by means of both reason and imagination.” (“Rousseau and the Discovery of Political Compassion, 301) Rousseau childhood is a compassionate one and, by extension, he sees that the sentiment of compassion was fundamental to his later successes when confronting his adolescent amour-propre.

⁸⁰ From the text: “I had found in the suffering, even in the shame, an admixture of sensuality which had left me with more desire than fear to experience it a second time from the same hand. [...] This second offense, which I postponed without fearing, happened without it being my fault, that is to say the fault of my will, and I took advantage of it, I can say, in security of conscience. But this second time was also the last: because, having doubtless perceived by some sign that this punishment was not serving its purpose, Mlle Lamercier declared she was abandoning it and that it tired her too much.” (I.13)

confessions.” (I.15) Discovering a broken comb one day, the maid questions the young Rousseau and challenges him on his claims to innocence. Resolute in his lack of transgression, calling it “the diabolical wilfulness of a child,” (I.16) Rousseau is forced to suffer an unjust punishment for a crime he did not commit. Consequently, “this first feeling of violence and injustice” (I.17) imparted the knowledge of injustice and, while being the inverse of what should be applauded, provided a lasting education on justice itself at the cost of his childhood happiness. The experience ended his first innocence. Due to his fundamental self-understanding as a product of being drawn outside of himself through his early childhood reading, Rousseau claims the injustice he experienced was of a more profound nature than what other children could have experienced themselves for they lacked the fundamental self-knowledge he possessed. Thus, the natural goodness of his childhood enabled him to intuit virtues properly understood in spite of his exposure to their corrupted manifestations. Similar to his discussion on the topic in *Emile*, Rousseau presents his education as an experiential revolt to injustice that, once undertaken, bestows the knowledge of both injustice and justice at the cost of the innocence of childhood made possible only through ignorance.⁸¹

The theme of lost innocence is continued into his first apprenticeship that “completely tarnished all the brilliance of my childhood, brutalized my loving and lively character, and reduced me in mind as well as fortune” by establishing the “master’s tyranny [that] ended by making unbearable to me work that I would have loved, and by giving me vices that I would have hated, such as lying, laziness, and theft.” (I.26) The subjugation of the apprenticeship produced a situation

⁸¹ For comparison, one can turn to the education of Emile and the exposure to his first injustice with the destruction of his bean garden. Rousseau establishes the education of the boy’s virtue through the experience of an injustice as a means to inoculate him from vice. In the text he writes that the way of inculcating the primary notions of justice in children “ought to be more in action than in speeches; for children easily forget what they have said and what has been said to them, but not what they have done and what has been done to them.” (*Emile*, 98) It is quite possible this lesson is drawn from Rousseau own experience as described here.

in which Rousseau committed his first theft, taking asparagus from a neighbouring garden at the request of a friend, and remarks that “good feelings badly directed [...] make children take the first step toward evil.” (I.27) Rousseau is quick to note however that the theft was innocent of malice and moreover should be absolved of any sin insofar as it emerged from the “desire to be obliging.” (I.27) He insists the intent guiding his actions was noble in its desire to please others and was therefore rooted in goodness even if the outcome was less than salutary. These first thefts are framed similarly to his earlier mischiefs as they are not motivated by cruelty but by an innocent playfulness. The theft of asparagus promoted by his friend is worthy of mention because, aside from demonstrating the purity of his intent, “it opened the door to others.” (I.27) Rousseau explains that he began to steal items that excited his envy and, upon reaching the age of sixteen, states in a manner reminiscent of Augustine that he found himself “restless, discontent with everything and with myself, without the tastes of my station, without the pleasures of my age, devoured by desires whose objects I did not know, crying without any reason for tears, sighing without knowing what for; in sum, tenderly indulging my chimeras for lack of seeing anything around my worthy of them.” (I.35) Nevertheless, Rousseau maintains his innocence of any malicious intent and instead blames his subjugation as the cause for the adverse outcomes of his actions.

It is with similar logic that Rousseau approaches the explanation for his theft of the pink ribbon in Book II. Remarkably close to the analysis of the pear theft from Book II of Augustine’s *Confessions*, Rousseau begins by stating that the particular item in question did not have any inherent value to him, for it was “already old,” and there were “many other better things” (II.70) within his reach. But unlike Augustine, where the theft of pears serves as a profound mystery to the inner workings of the soul within time, Rousseau is quite certain as to the cause of the theft. Once caught in possession of the ribbon and under interrogation from the servants of the

household, Rousseau accuses Marion, a young girl who had been recently made household cook, of stealing the ribbon and giving it to him. Her feeble protests were no match for his resolute tone and the master of the house finds her to be the guilty party. In his defense, Rousseau claims that “never has wickedness been farther from me than in that cruel moment” and sees that “friendship for her was the cause” (II.72) of him framing her. Admitting he had desired to give the ribbon to her, in the heat of the moment he reversed the roles and publicly impugned his motivations on her. Under the scrutiny of the master of the household, seeing only the “horror of being detected, declared publicly [...] a thief, liar, calumniator,” (II.72) Rousseau committed himself to the lie and ruined Marion’s reputation.

Asserting that he would have reverted course had he been “allowed to return to myself,” (II.72) Rousseau provides an account of the consequences to his understanding of natural goodness in his reflections on the theft. In particular, although burdened with a lasting shame over what transpired, he rationalizes his actions as an outcome of his age and deems the event a success in the pursuit of his own education.

“I had hardly left childhood, or rather I was still in it. In youth genuinely heinous acts are even more criminal than in maturity; but what is only weakness is much less so, and at bottom my fault was hardly anything else. Therefore its remembrance afflicts me less because of the evil in itself, than because of the one it must have caused. It has even done me the good of protecting me for the rest of my life from every act tending to crime because of the terrible impression that has remained from the only one I have ever committed. Furthermore I believe I feel that aversion for lying comes to me in great part from the regret of having been capable of committing such a black one. If this is a crime that can be expiated, as I dare to believe it is, it ought to be by so many misfortunes that overwhelm the end of my life.” (II.72)

The above explanation is not without contradictions. Presented in a manner similar to his punishment for the broken comb, where the injustice of the comb fortified him with a knowledge of justice, Rousseau’s comparable claim that the ribbon theft inoculated him from lying is dubious considering that if the former were true it would seem to deny the possibility of the latter happening at all. If Rousseau’s experience of injustice had truly established within him a sense of justice to

the extent that “when I read the cruelties of a ferocious tyrant, the crafty foul deeds of a cheat of a priest, I would willingly set off in order to stab those wretches, even if I was obliged to perish a hundred times in doing so,” (I.17) it begs the question how he could come to commit such a heinous fraud on Marion given his moral zeal and, even after reflecting on his actions, defend them. Furthermore, his claims of youthful indiscretion born of ignorance appear insufficient considering Rousseau’s earlier presentation of his abnormally sensitive soul. It is treated as a mark of distinction that, in perceiving the suffering of the downtrodden, he instantly became a defender of the weak and dispossessed.

The explanation rests on Rousseau’s belief in his natural goodness. Like the theft of asparagus, Rousseau stole the ribbon under the noble pretenses of friendship and the desire to be obliging. As such, taking the ribbon was at worst mischievous and made defensible by the virtuous intent motivating the act. Furthermore, blaming Marion when caught continued to reflect his sentiment of friendship towards her and was, again, rooted in noble intent. Absolved of any ill will, the evil that emerges and stains his actions can be understood in three correlating factors. First, the “violence” of the interrogation confronted Rousseau with the possibility of shame and, in his view, forced his actions. The lie was initially innocent insofar as it simply reflected Rousseau’s internal virtues of friendship to Marion but the imposition of the master’s public interrogation produced the possibility of shame that subsequently encouraged Rousseau’s continuation of the fraud. While he claims his intentions were noble, the structure of the interrogation corrupted them. Second, Marion’s presumed destitution and Rousseau’s aversion to shame are both consequences of the public and the inability of external perceptions to grasp the internal content of a person. Had Rousseau been able to reveal the intentions behind his actions, or Marion to escape the stigma of theft that assuredly followed her afterwards, the theft would have been entirely without victim.

Thirdly, the ribbon itself was worthless, it was “already old” (II.70) and without value, but given that it was located in the master’s home it was his property regardless of its worth. As such, Rousseau’s theft of a meaningless item was transformed into an incident of profound moral implication.⁸² Ultimately, the ribbon theft provides a hint concerning the consequences of Rousseau’s doctrine of natural goodness whereby he is absolved of the guilt corresponding to the outcomes of his actions. Given that his intentions were noble and that he was born good, any evil to befall his efforts is a product of his subjugation and therefore beyond his control. Evil is thus an imposition brought about by the external world that threatens the internal goodness of man.⁸³

Concluding the first section on youth, Rousseau broaches the concept of boredom and frames it as an idleness lacking purpose.⁸⁴ He argues it is a state of being that “cannot be described and one that few men can even imagine” and claims that most have experienced the anticipation

⁸² The absurdity of the interrogation relative to the value of the item stolen is never explicitly discussed but should not be overlooked. Rousseau is quick to distance himself from others in high society in terms of his near complete disregard for money and items of value. While he recognizes the necessity of the means to purchase basic goods, Rousseau consistently shows himself forsaking the expensive for the rustic. If nothing else, the episode of the ribbon theft subtly demonstrates the debasing influence of property into a demented impulse to horde items of little to no financial value or utility at the cost of people’s virtue and noble sentiment.

⁸³ As Roger D. Masters notes: “to understand Rousseau’s view of human nature, it is necessary to make two fundamental distinctions: first, the passive responses characteristic of the pure state of nature came to be supplemented by active, other-directed feelings and thoughts; second, these active or “moral” feelings can be either positive, producing pleasurable bonds with others, or negative and competitive. The latter, as a ‘combination produced by reflection,’ is unnatural; it is also the source of pride, competition, and moral evil.” (“Rousseau and the Rediscovery of Human Nature,” 115)

⁸⁴ Rousseau’s distinction between boredom and idleness is much too large to be adequately addressed here but deserves mentioning nonetheless. While Rousseau claims that idleness is a fulfilling experience, such that he is free to reflect and explore his internal self, boredom is a terrible burden, for it is devoid of purpose, occurring when one lacks the ability, through ignorance or blunted soul, to pursue internal reflection. To give examples of the extent to which this distinction has been influential beyond Rousseau’s *Confessions*, one can look to either Kant or Dostoevsky. In the former, drawing from Susan Shell’s article, one can see that “Rousseau convinces Kant that the end of reason lies not in knowing nature (a task that is, as Kant already suspected or feared, beyond our powers), but in striving morally to reform or transcend it.” (“Rousseau, Kant, and the Beginning of History,” 54) Boredom emerges as a consequence of man ignoring his duties of moral striving, while idleness is the state of being which facilitates such efforts. In the latter, boredom emerges from the nihilistic rejection of God, in a sense forsaking the internal world of the self and its exploration, thus forcing Dostoevsky’s characters, perhaps best shown in Krilov’s speech from *The Possessed*, to choose between false equivalents in a bid to re-impose meaning on their lives. Boredom, while not nihilism itself, is the product of a lack of purpose, located in the development of the self, which, in the delusions of absolute freedom, becomes nihilistic. At the core of this discussion is the recognition that Rousseau’s concept of idleness is purposive and, as a consequence, provides an engine to drive man, even when alone on a lake in reverie.

and simultaneous torment of living life that “gives a foretaste of enjoyment in the intoxication of desire.”(III.74) Unlike most men, Rousseau’s youth remained largely innocent of pleasures beyond reading and consisted of unstructured play such that he reached adolescence without knowledge of the vices typically associated with the age. For example, Rousseau elaborates on a point in time where he began to flash women from a culvert and when caught pretended to be “a young foreigner of high birth whose brain was deranged.” (III.75) Yet over the same period of time, he abstained from pursuing women by any other means. At another point, while travelling the countryside he faked the composition of an orchestra piece to a predictable result but did not seek financial gain from the adventure. (IV.124-125) A third time, Rousseau impersonated a Parisian and offered a speech before the Senate of Berne on behalf of a so-claimed Greek Prelate while eschewing all advantages granted someone of his assumed identity. (IV.130) In all the above cases, even though “there [were] times when I am so little like myself that I would be taken for another man of a completely opposite character,” (III.107) Rousseau’s adventures consistently lacked both foresight, as a condition of living exclusively in the present moment, and vice, as his innocence remained largely intact from earlier childhood. Confident in his ability to convey the goodness of his intentions, Rousseau happily reveals his most shameful experiences because they do not reflect the substance of his inner self. Made most explicit in his presentation of the ribbon theft, though governing the overall discussion of his youth, Rousseau’s earliest mischief, regardless of the consequences to those around him, reveal above all the “development of first causes” so that the reader of *Confessions* “might be able to judge by himself about the principle which produces them.” (IV.147)

Turning to Book V, the second section of Rousseau’s narrative moves to the accumulation of external burdens that begin to obscure his natural goodness but, unlike the previous section,

start altering the structure of his internal freedom. Beginning with Mme de Warens, his ‘Mamma’ and first significant love interest, Rousseau loses his virginity and is bestowed with the knowledge of desire and an awareness of time in relation to acquiring subsequent desires.⁸⁵ His consciousness of time is further developed when he begins overseeing Mamma’s financial affairs and later on in Paris with his expanding appetites. Not coincidentally, from those initial events the focus of *Confessions* shifts to an analysis of Rousseau’s expanding amour-propre by touching on honor, prostitutes, nationalism, and philosophy in an attempt to convey the changing structure of his internal freedom as a consequence of his exposure to heretofore unknown worldly desires. Finding himself systematically altered, whereby “real beings clouded over imaginary beings,” (IV.137) and losing sight of himself, Rousseau’s presentation of his developing amour-propre lays the foundation for the conversionary experience that distinguishes Book VIII.

Although he mentions meeting Mme de Warens earlier on and being immediately smitten with her, it is not until their reunion in Chambery and becoming aware of her lover Claude Anet that Rousseau’s possessiveness of Mamma took root. Even though he did not see her intimately at the time, once Mamma saw “to rescue me from the perils of my youth” (V.162) he became enthralled by “imagination, need, vanity, curiosity,” which joined together “to devour [Rousseau] with the ardent desire to be a man and to appear to be one.” Tellingly, Rousseau argues that teachers “wishing to make young people attentive to what one wants to say to them” by resorting

⁸⁵ One could compare this event with both the Biblical fall from Eden and the falling out of the state of nature in the *Second Discourse*. In the Biblical account, Eve, having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, turns to Adam and convinces him to partake as well. In this interpretation, Eve, like Mamma, is the more knowledgeable and seeks to corrupt Adam in a seemingly predatory manner. If one remembers Augustine’s account, where the burden of sin rested with Adam for he chose the fruit in light of the consequences made evident through Eve, Rousseau offers an entirely opposite account where the woman is to blame for the fall of man. By contrast, the *Second Discourse* reveals a more nuanced account whereby Rousseau, prior to Mamma, was “limited merely to the physical aspects of love, and fortunate enough to be ignorant of those preferences which stir up the feeling and increase the difficulties in satisfying it” (*Basic Political Writings*, 56) but became aware of them with her and, as a consequence, became enthralled to his chimeras.

to “showing them an object that is very interesting for them at the end” (V.163) err by distracting the students from the lessons in the present with the promises of future pleasures. In a manner strikingly similar to the ribbon theft, where Rousseau was denied the ability to explain himself in private given the voracity of the investigation, he found himself unable to assess the wisdom in bedding Mme de Warens before the act. Instead, “not able to govern my desires and imagination enough to remain master of myself,” (V.164) Rousseau committed to an action that, upon reflection, he might not have pursued had things been otherwise. Rousseau’s sexual encounter with Mme de Warens is fundamentally different from the ribbon theft in that the subjugation that forced his decision originated from within himself opposite the earlier external tyranny of the investigation.⁸⁶ While the incident with the ribbon rested on the master’s inquisition that imposed the possibility of shame on Rousseau, the decision to become a man rested exclusively on his desire to become one. Never before experienced, Rousseau’s natural goodness turned on itself in the pursuit of an external desire.

This event marks a fundamental shift in the narrative of Rousseau’s *Confessions* concerning early life as it turns to topics that are more bourgeois in nature and culminates with the realization that “desires and fears alternately devoured me.” (V.184) For example, with the death of Claude Anet Rousseau found himself the master of Mamma’s estate, in charge of the book keeping among other things, and quickly came to worry about her financial future. He remarks it was during this time period that he began to experience “the inclination to avarice” as the product of “a very noble motive; for in truth I thought only of saving some resources for Mamma in the catastrophe I foresaw.” (V.173) Fearing that Mme. de Warens would go bankrupt, Rousseau began

⁸⁶ Rousseau does make note that, much like the injustice of the incident with the comb and the ribbon theft, his time with Mme. de Warens succeeded in “protect[ing] me from other women and [made] me proof against temptations,” again reiterating the point that exposure to a vice inoculates one against future temptations of that vice. (V.164)

looking for work as a means to ward off an indeterminate future disaster. Based on an external attachment in the concern for her wellbeing, Rousseau willingly sought out the subjugation of work he previously abhorred and found his timelessness, a product of his preoccupation with living in the present, shifting towards a future oriented consciousness. In addition to his relationship with Mamma, Rousseau also reveals his first experience of nationalistic sentiment by writing that he began “to think about public matters” and to “read the gazettes for the first time.” (V.153) National sentiment “became so rooted in my heart, that when I later played the anti-despot and proud republican at Paris, in spite of myself I felt a secret predilection for that same nation that I found to be servile, and for that government which I affected to criticize.” (V.153) Rousseau even admits to contemplating a mistress in an effort to unburden himself of his newly acquired chimeras. And, while the comment that he was “burning up with love without any object” (V.183) could well have been written by a world weary Augustine, Rousseau quickly reminds the reader of the differences between the two.

At the opening of Book VI, Rousseau comments that the happiness he experienced with Mamma had “given me the right to say that I have lived” (VI.191) and provides the first proof for the claims made in the *Confessions*. Believing himself to be near death due to an unknown illness and Mamma receiving income from a new benefactor, thus freeing the household from financial necessity and Rousseau from the concerns born of an uncertain future, he found himself in an epoch whereby he was free “to occupy myself with more noble efforts.” (VI.191) Remarking that Mamma was much more useful to him than “all the theologians would have been,” Rousseau turned to a study of religion and came to realize that her inability to address evil in the world was due to the fact “that scripture was explained too literally and too harshly.” (VI.192) More perplexing, while living with Mamma and “finding in her all the maxims needed to protect my

soul from the terrors of death and its consequences,” (VI.192) Rousseau experienced true happiness which “cannot be described” for “it is felt [and] is felt all the better when it can be described least, because it does not result from a combination of facts, but is a permanent condition.” (VI.198) And yet, although having been in the thrall of “calm enjoyments [with] the serenity of the ones of paradise” at the time, Rousseau remained in contradiction due to the “fear [of] living in order to suffer.” (VI.204) Finding himself in a position to compare the Scriptural claims of suffering to the existential realities of happiness, Rousseau came to realize that he had “never been so close to wisdom” (VI.204) and, by extension, never more able to confront Catholicism’s denial of temporal happiness. Confronted with the concept of Hell and unable to reconcile eternal punishment, which the Jansenists assured him was imminent, with his present happiness, Rousseau concluded his predicament by reducing the mystery to an outcome of chance. Specifically, he made a sort of prognosis to calm his anxiousness by aiming a rock at a tree where “if I hit it, sign of salvation; if I miss it, sign of damnation.” (VI.203) With a “trembling hand and with a horribly beating heart,” Rousseau threw the rock and struck the tree. From that point onwards he “never doubted [...] salvation again.” (VI.204)

This seemingly glib treatment to the question of damnation masks a more profound element to Rousseau’s text. In particular, Rousseau’s claim that he was truly and completely happy with Mamma at that point in time runs contrary to not only Augustine’s presentation of sin as an inescapable product of a temporal existence but Rousseau’s own understanding of happiness that is developed through Book XII. It is this experience of near timelessness, as a product of his stable finances and presumed imminent death, that Rousseau first comes to experience a similitude of happiness and recognizes it in contradistinction to the derivative moments of satisfied desire that he had previously mistaken for authentic happiness. Placed opposite Augustine’s treatment of his

miserable restlessness due to loving temporal objects, Rousseau's experience of "divine calm" (VI.204) unsurprisingly proves to be yet another chimera. Happiness as a product of a relationship with objects outside of the self necessarily lead to a fleeting happiness. On this specific point, Augustine shows no objection; man, as a temporal being, cannot be truly satisfied with temporal things for both will inevitably come to pass. Similarly, both philosophers continue to spiral into deeper restlessness and despair until their conversions of Books VIII. While Augustine finds that temporal objects are insufficient, for they are inadequate representations of Truth, Rousseau's dissatisfactions emerge from an object's inability to adequately address the truth of his internal self.

Rousseau differentiates himself from Augustine by the types of things that distract him. While Augustine was seduced by Manichean philosophy, finding it a false reprieve from his disordered existence, Rousseau found solace in Mamma and her corrupted philosophy. Commenting that "the morality she constructed for herself spoiled the one her heart dictated to her" (V.165) and "although she proceeded well when her sophisms did not lead her astray [...] she could do evil while deceiving herself" even when "she could not want anything that was evil," Rousseau nevertheless found a balm in her personal sentiments for a time. (V.167) The proof of the transitory nature of externally created things revealed itself to Rousseau when, upon returning from working as a tutor in Lyon, he found that Mamma had taken a new lover. Quickly realizing that his "former happiness [was] dead forever," (VI.226) showing that his time with Mamma was yet another disordering desire, Rousseau comes to find the household unbearable and leaves for Paris. Once there, any doubt of a lasting effect of their intimacy is disillusioned through an ever more depraved procession of prostitutes, child abandonment, and validation by public acclaim. While his sexual misadventures are some of the most salacious passages in *Confessions*, they in

many ways simply repeat the observation that the experience of amour-propre creates a structure of consciousness whereby Rousseau is brought to live outside of himself, to appear different from who he is, and are roughly synonymous with passages in Augustine's text that offer a similarly itemized account of his many indiscretions.⁸⁷

More important to the development of Rousseau's argument is his turn to the public for validation of his new musical "System." Upon arriving in Paris, he set a meeting with the Academy to discuss his System but quickly discovered "with as much certainty as surprise that if learned people sometimes have fewer prejudices than other men, in return they hold on even more strongly to the ones they do have." (VII.239) Stinging from the perceived slight of dismissal, Rousseau then "shut myself up in my room and worked for two or three months with an inexpressible ardor to recast the memorandum that I had read to the Academy into a work intended for the public" (VII.240) and eventually published his dissenting opinion under the title *Dissertation on Modern Music*. Although the publication received mixed reviews, the endeavour highlights the depth of Rousseau's debasement as a consequence of his enflamed amour-propre. Dismissing the opinion of the Academy's elite, even if "not one of [them] knew music, at least enough to be in a position to judge concerning [his] project," (VII.239) and turning to the public for validation reveals the demagogic impulse of a politics predicated on the imagination. Up until this point in the narrative Rousseau sought reflections of himself in objects outside of himself and when they failed to deliver

⁸⁷ Providing an interesting attempt to explain the implications of Rousseau's presentation of his sexual adventures, James O'Rourke echoes Christopher Kelly's argument that Rousseau relies on the language of "virtues" to explain the possibility of altruistic behaviour regardless of circumstances while ignoring the action that takes place but seeks to present Kelly's work in the context of ethics proper. Of particular concern, cites O'Rourke, is Rousseau's notable omission that "there exists a degree of virtue that enables us to behave ethically in the face of temptation." (*Sex, Lies, and Autobiography*, 192) Perhaps revealingly, O'Rourke is unable to provide an alternative schema and omits some of the more troubling passages of Rousseau's life, although it might be difficult to derive an ethical treatise from Rousseau's account of finding the Venetian prostitute Zulietta with a malformed nipple and thus resolving that he "was holding in my arms only a sort of monster, the outcast of natural men and love." (*Confessions*, 270) For further interest, please see: James O'Rourke, *Sex, Lies, and Autobiography: The Ethics of Confession*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 17-62.

the desired outcome he fell back into himself in solitude. For example, when he was falsely accused of breaking the comb in childhood or cornered with the theft of the ribbon, Rousseau stood resolute in the knowledge that he was virtuous. After his experiences with Mme. de Warens however, there is a shift in *Confessions* such that Rousseau is no longer satisfied by his own noble intentions and needs them affirmed through others. At its most explicit, with the Academy's rejection and no longer able to sustain his own self-image, Rousseau is compelled to seek the public's approval instead. Redolent of the *Letter to Beaumont* and the chastisement of Augustine for suggesting men speak of the Trinity to avoid saying nothing, implying that making truth-claims, although knowingly insufficient are better than silence, Rousseau takes the mantle of preacher upon himself to make manifest the image he holds of himself through contact with the public.

The reality of a careening amour-propre and the subsequent loss of self is crystalized in the conversion scene of Book VIII. The event itself is offered quite modestly. Having grown tired on his walk to Vincennes, Rousseau sat down under a tree by the side of the road and “fell upon the question proposed by the Academy of Dijon for the prize for the following year: ‘Has the progress of the sciences and arts tended to corrupt or purify morals?’”⁸⁸ He proclaims that: “at the moment of that reading I saw another universe and I became another man.” (VIII.294) Rousseau again draws the reader’s attention to correspondences outside the text, referring to his four letters to M. de Malesherbes, and argues that readers should turn there for a more detailed account. Given that Rousseau names the letters, it appears to imply their importance to understanding the event and, as such, the letter reads:

“If anything has ever resembled a sudden inspiration, it is the motion that was caused in me by that reading; suddenly I felt my mind dazzled by a thousand lights [...] Oh Sir, if I had ever been able to

⁸⁸ Kelly draws attention to the fact that in this restatement of the question, Rousseau has rephrased it in such a way as to give “precedence to corruption and in dat[e] the progress rather than the restoration of the sciences and arts.” (*Confession*, 642) When writing his answer in 1749 Rousseau similarly rephrased the original question ‘has the restoration of the sciences and arts tended to purify morals?’ to include the possibility of corruption.

write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, how clearly I would have made all the contradictions of the social system seen, with what strength I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is from these institutions alone that men become wicked. [...] I was able to retain [some] of these great truths which illuminated me [...] That is how when I was thinking about it least, I became an author almost in spite of myself. [...] I abruptly made my decision with enough courage, and I have kept it up well enough until now with a firmness whose value is felt by me alone, because I am the only one who knows what obstacles I had and I still have to combat every day in order to hold out ceaselessly against the current.”⁸⁹

In that moment of clarity, Rousseau catches sight of the unadulterated version of his natural self and the effects leading to and causing his present distortions. He becomes another man because, while he returns to the concrete image of himself that he held in childhood, Rousseau is now consciously aware of it by the consequence of returning to it.⁹⁰ The unreflective self-image of childhood is rediscovered but is now imbued with new meaning for it had been lost through the obscuring experiences of amour-propre. Perhaps there is no better evidence of this revelation than Rousseau’s method of recording his thoughts immediately following in the prosopopeia of Fabricius, a type of rhetorical flourish where a dead man speaks. Rousseau’s previously “dead” self-image comes powerfully to the fore and reasserts itself on him.

With his discovery of the natural self, Rousseau, with Diderot’s encouragement, submitted the *First Discourse* and when the Academy released a following question wrote the *Second*. Although claiming it was in the moment on the side of the road to Vincennes that he became “lost forever,” (VIII.295) Rousseau comments that it was not until it was announced that he had won the prize for the *First Discourse* that he discovered “all the ideas that had dictated [the essay] to me [...] finished setting in to fermentation in my heart that first leaven of heroism and virtue which

⁸⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Appendix I: Letters to Malesherbes” in *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*, trans. Christopher Kelly, (Hanover: University of New England, 1995), 575-576.

⁹⁰ A simplistic reduction of Rousseau’s conversion would suggest that the essential revelation was: “I’m not wrong, the world is.” But, stripped of its emotional flourishes, that is largely the premise of his argument. Remembering the earlier discussion in Book XII and his persecutions, where Rousseau saw himself a “fugitive on the earth” (XII.497) and a victim of a “world gone mad,” (XII.495) it is not a stretch of the imagination to see the effects of believing oneself to be the only sane inmate of the madhouse.

my father and my fatherland and Plutarch had put there in my childhood.” (VIII.298) Moreover, “this favor of the public, in no way courted and for an unknown Author, gave me the first genuine assurance of my talent which I had always doubted until then in spite of the internal feeling.” (VIII.305) That the reforms of his soul, which succeeded in uprooting “everything that still depended on the judgement of men, everything that could turn [him] away from what was good and reasonable in itself out of fear of blame,” (VIII.306) came as an outcome to the widespread public acclaim would appear to stand in contradiction to his project thus far presented in the text. It is paradoxically through the sentiment of public esteem that Rousseau is able to confirm his decision to abandon the pursuit of public esteem.

The importance of the public’s applause did not depend on amour-propre’s enjoyment of being recognized, although that likely did not hurt, but on the similarity between Rousseau’s image of himself and the public’s image of ‘Jean-Jacques.’⁹¹ With the success of his two discourses, Rousseau saw in the public’s esteem the image he held of himself and believed the two were one and the same. By writing about the authentic self without regard for public sentiment, Rousseau succeeded in conveying his authentic self. The observed consistency between the public and private versions of Rousseau validated his adherence to the conversionary experience. This radically new sense of freedom later came to justify Rousseau’s refusal to accept the King’s pension, viewing it as a burden through obligation, and his decision to abandon his children,

⁹¹ This stands exactly opposite Rousseau’s formulation of the Bourgeois in *Emile*. While amour-propre, in reaching its philosophic conclusion, would hollow out a man of all independent substance such that a bourgeois would see in himself only what others saw of him and become governed wholly by public sentiment, Rousseau of the *Confessions* has done the opposite and made the public reveal to him the image of how he sees himself. As Bloom notes in his introduction to *Emile*: “Rousseau’s solution to amour-propre, which would seem inevitably to lead to conflict among men- their using one another as means to their own ends and the need for government and law – is, as with the fear of death, to prevent its emergence at least for a long time.” (11) Rousseau’s conversion, as the recognition of the damaging effects of amour-propre, fundamentally alters his relationship with the public such that, far from the people being tool at his disposal, they willingly and freely join with him under the image of the great intellectual ‘Jean-Jacques.’

claiming they too would be a burden on his freedom.⁹² It is in this freedom that Rousseau creates his “great system” (VIII.309) that, through “the study of man and of the universe,” revealed the “final causes and the intelligence that directs them.” (VIII.329) As a result, “the reading of the Bible and above all the Gospel to which I had applied myself [...] made me despise the base and foolish interpretations given to Jesus Christ by the people least worth of understanding him.” (VIII.329) In short, experiencing the revelation of his natural self and coupled with a freedom from family and king, Rousseau committed himself to revealing the corrupting influences that ruin mankind.

Rousseau tells the reader that the particular object of his confessions is to make his “interior known exactly in all the situations of my life [...] and to write it faithfully I need no other memories: it is enough for me to return inside myself. (VII.234) Therefore, this section has provided an analysis of Rousseau’s childhood to demonstrate the underlying assumptions guiding his discussion of his most depraved acts. In particular, by relying on the intent behind his actions Rousseau differentiates between the virtues of his efforts and his observed behavior. The dichotomy is perhaps best demonstrated by his desire to be friendly with Marion while simultaneously framing her for his theft of the ribbon in Book II. Later on, his introduction to and relationship with Mme de Warens serves as the transition in the narrative from Rousseau’s innocent childhood to corrupted adult life. These changes are charted in terms of the external influences on his behaviour to the internal experience of amour-propre. As a consequence, realizing that “there [were] times when I am so little like myself that I would be taken for another

⁹² In defense of his actions, Rousseau cites Plato’s *Republic* and comments that a true Citizen releases his children to be raised by the Republic. Drawing his argument from Book VIII of *Republic*, Rousseau then goes on to argue that his children, had they remained with him, would have been “brought to hate, possibly to betray their parents. (VIII.300) Using Plato’s explanation of the Kallipolis’ fall the declining generational instances of father-beating, Rousseau determined to place his kids with the state so they could not know who their father was in a bid to prevent the corruption of his philosophy.

man of a completely opposite character,” (III.107) Rousseau comes to a conversionary experience in Book VIII that reveals to him an image of his forgotten natural self and provides him with new purpose. Imbued with the knowledge of man’s fundamental goodness and the resulting supremacy of the natural self, Rousseau, in a manner similar to Augustine, turns to the public and reveals himself as he is in an effort to awaken others to the realities of their corrupted existence.

The Public Intellectual as Solitary Walker

The last section of the *Confessions* to be discussed spans Rousseau’s time in the Hermitage to when he flees France and covers the publication of all his major non-autobiographical works. Books IX-XI can be seen to encapsulate his time as a public intellectual before the scandals, both real and imagined, alter the focus of Rousseau’s work to one of apology.⁹³ Central to this discussion is how Rousseau frames the duties of a public intellectual in contradistinction to Augustine’s presentation of the preacher. Although Rousseau comes to write his greatest works in near isolation between the Hermitage and the chalet of Mme. Luxembourg, he believes the focus of his efforts to be exclusively towards the public good. While Augustine’s treatment of man as a temporal being necessarily requires that the preacher’s duty be fulfilled in the city, as truth-claims made in isolation are without meaning for they are beholden to their historical construction, Rousseau similarly invokes an obligation to the city but does so through the moral affirmation of the internal self. Opposite Augustine’s denial that man has the ability to fully comprehend Truth in time, therefore reducing the duty of the preacher to an inescapably uncertain effort, Rousseau predicates the activities of the solitary walker on a completed self-understanding made manifest by the successful mirroring of his internal image of the self through the accolades of a receptive

⁹³ Commenting at the beginning of the second part to *Confessions*: “I do not fear that the reader will ever forget that I am making my confessions and thereby believe that I am making my apology; but he ought not to expect me to keep silent about the truth either, when it speaks in my favor.” (VII.234) To be clear, Rousseau’s statement implies the use of the Socratic apology where the author provides an account of his actions.

public. Rousseau's account of his time as a public intellectual serves as the capstone to the *Confessions* because it highlights the political consequences to his belief in a natural goodness and the moral necessity to reveal that understanding to the world at large for, upon completion of the act, it becomes the validation to the authenticity of the solitary walker's self-image in return.

Rousseau arrives at the Hermitage and comments that his first concern was to abandon himself to the surrounding "rustic objects" where the "solitary, rather than wild, place transported me to the end of the world." (IX.339) He later justifies the impulse by arguing that "unless one is a man of intrigues, if one wants to dedicate books to the true good of the fatherland, one must not compose [their works] in its bosom."⁹⁴ (IX.341) Although his conversion revealed to him an independent selfhood, which was then corroborated by the general public's repetition of it with the success of the two *Discourses*, Rousseau's retreat to the Hermitage acknowledges the unsustainability of an authentic self-image in the city by implying the necessity of his isolation to the production of his major works. Even further, Rousseau admits that beyond resting in solitude he similarly came to "cast my books into the public with the certainty of having spoken for the common good without any concern for the rest." He came to reject the need for the future approval of his work which again speaks to the solidity of his conversionary experience. (IX.338) As a result, the opening to Rousseau's discussion of the Hermitage admits the limitations of the public intellectual and frames himself as a solitary walker who, in the interest of maintaining his sense of self that ultimately enables his philosophizing in the first place, necessarily rejects the burdens of city and fatherland in the interest of being of benefit to them.

Almost immediately after settling at the Hermitage, Rousseau tells the readers of

⁹⁴ This comment was likely fueled by personal experience. After converting back to Protestantism for the love of Geneva, Rousseau dedicated his *Second Discourse* to the "citizens of Geneva" only to receive a stilted welcome. (VIII.331) Geneva's coldness towards his efforts affected Rousseau so much that he altered his plans to retire near the city and instead moved to the Hermitage.

Confessions that he started to write *Political Institutions* of which the only surviving part is *The Social Contract*. In particular, reflecting on ideas that began in germ years prior with his time in Venice as an aide to the French ambassador he comments that:

"I had some occasion to notice the flaws of that so vaunted Government. Since then, my views had been much more extended by means of historical study of morality. I had seen that everything depends radically on politics, and that, from whatever aspect one considers it, no people ever would be anything other than what it was made into by the nature of its Government; thus this great question of the best possible Government appeared to me to be reduced to this one. What is the nature of Government suited to forming a people that was the most virtuous, enlightened, wise, in sum, the best, taking this word in its most extended sense. [...] What is the Government which by its nature keeps itself closest to the law? From that, what is law? [...] I saw that all this was leading me to great truths, useful to the happiness of the human race, but above all to that of my fatherland, where on the trip I had just made I had not found them forming what I thought to be sufficiently precise and clear concepts about the law and freedom and I had believed that this indirect way of giving them these concepts was the one most suited for sparing the amour-propre of its members." (IX.340)

From the above one can draw many comparisons with Augustine. Chief among them is Rousseau's claim that "everything depends radically on politics" and by extension a people are made into what they are by the nature of their Government. While Augustine is equally ambivalent to the nature of a regime insofar as its laws do not come into conflict with a subject's ability to meditate on God's eternity, he nevertheless maintains an inelasticity to human nature whereby the desire to know God is paramount. With such a claim, Augustine is able to explain how he came to seek God while living without Him in the city. Rousseau, by contrast, affords himself no such freedom. By arguing that man is made through the laws of his Government, Rousseau establishes not only the necessity to flee the city in order to offer an appraisal of it but similarly suggests he could not have come to know that insight from within the city in the first place. The elasticity of Rousseau's understanding of human nature, while granting a radical, although not total, sense of freedom to what the composition of a fatherland could be, greatly restricts the ability of one to come to such insights and be of use to the city by insisting on an isolated figure - the solitary walker - who looks into the city but merely offers commentary from outside.

Furthermore, given the capacity of law to make a people according to the dictates of

Government, Rousseau's desire to be of use to his fatherland cannot be predicated on the people, as with Augustine, but instead with the rulers. Considering that Augustine believes the nature of man to be one that seeks God, a preacher's success comes from his ability to persuade that masses of the Truth found within themselves. Augustine's politics is a democratic politics insofar as the preacher relies on a corrected form of demagoguery by virtue of willing what God wills. Opposite the bottom-up politics of Augustine, Rousseau's solitary walker functions top-down through the act of establishing laws which then remake the people into a reflection of the newly imposed image. Noting that his observations of Government were "most suited for sparing the amour-propre of its members," Rousseau demonstrates the latent authoritarianism of his thought. Whereas Augustine can rely on mass movements because each individual finds within himself the desire to know God and therefore all men are equally beholden to each other in the recognition of their insufficient understandings of Truth, Rousseau needs a founder as a means to avoid the latent factionalism, as a outcome to their enflamed amour-propre, that comes to drive their differing interpretations of the law. While Augustine's preacher can incrementally reshape the city from within, Rousseau implicitly admits that the city must be completely re-founded from outside.⁹⁵ As a consequence, Augustine's preacher is allowed to remain profoundly human, living within the temporal restrictions of Creation, while Rousseau's solitary walker becomes quasi-divine, in a sense overcoming the restrictive boundaries of time to "labor in one age and find enjoyment in another."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ What is implied in the *Confessions* is made explicit in *The Social Contract* with the discussion of the legislator. From the text: "Discovering the rules of society best suited to nations would require a superior intelligence that beheld all the passions of men without feeling any of them; who had no affinity with our nature, yet knew it through and through; whose happiness was independent of us, yet who nevertheless was willing to concern itself with ours." (*Basic Political Writings*, 162) Moreover, "the legislator is incapable of using either force or reasoning, he must of necessity have recourse to an authority of a different order, which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing." (164-165) In sum, to establish a new people, one must come from outside the city and impose uniformly, through force of will, an order that is beyond interpretation.

⁹⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract," in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress,

In this regard, it is clear that Rousseau's solitary walker, opposite the likes of Augustine's preacher, is furthest from Aristotle's formulation that man is by nature a political animal. While both the preacher and the solitary walker look within themselves for the affirmation of their philosophy, with Augustine finding God in memory and Rousseau finding the authentic self through natural goodness, the former goes to the people to reveal the God that resides within their minds while the latter seeks the image he holds of himself in the reflection of the people. As a result, Rousseau's materialism, where he claims that people "depend on the prior impression of external objects, and that – since we are continuously modified by our senses and our organs – in our ideas, in our feelings, in our very actions we carry the effects of these modifications without being aware of it," (IX.343) should come as a no surprise for it emerges from his restructuring of Augustine's preacher. That is to say, Augustine's reliance on man's temporality, in the understanding that it restricts all truth claims to the period in time in which they emerge, requires the preacher to understand the time in which he lives. It is an observation that demonstrates the necessity to pursue politics within the city. Alternatively, Rousseau's authentic self, as a creation of the imagination influenced by the "external objects" that continuously modify our senses, is ahistorical whereby it is the product of experience and will remain the authoritative representation of the man known as 'Jean-Jacques' for all time. Although God is eternal, the ways in which the preacher expresses his particular truth-claims in recognition of Him are contextualized within time and, like the laws that governed Moses, are unknowable in their totality to men in other times. By contrast, Rousseau's version of himself, although shaped by the impressions of external objects on his organs and producing the understanding of himself within time, establishes a timeless image which extends beyond his particular epoch. Like a painting, any man can look upon it and will see

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 163.

the same image regardless of historical context although he may focus on different details depending on the tastes of his particular time. Put in relation to their political proscriptions, Augustine's ambivalence towards any one regime type can be seen as a product of his recognition that different times will require different measures. For example, man will always express himself through art. By contrast, Rousseau's questioning on the nature of the best Government attempts to discover an image of fatherland that is suitable for all time. Rousseau seeks to find a painting perfected.⁹⁷

Although *Political Institutions* proved to be too large a project and was eventually edited down to a smaller treatise, Rousseau draws a parallel with his novel *Julie* in that the public's impressions gathered from reading *the New Heloise* "persuaded that one could not express so vividly feelings that one had not experienced at all, nor depict the raptures of love this way except after one's own heart." (XI.458) Rousseau admits that "in this [the people] were right and it is certain that I wrote this novel in the most burning ecstasies; but they were wrong when they thought that real objects were needed to produce them; they were far from conceiving to what extent I can catch fire for imaginary beings." (XI.458) Placed in context with his discussion of the solitary walker, Rousseau's assertion that one can create within themselves imaginary beings that come to replace experiences in the world is problematic. However, his earlier criticism that the Comte de St. Pierre who, "having wished to make men similar to him, instead of taking them as they are and they will continue to be [...] worked only for imaginary beings while thinking that he was working

⁹⁷ The above metaphor borrows from Ann Hartle's discussion on the topic. She compares Augustine's *Confessions* to music as a means to emphasize the temporal dimension of his thought, for one cannot hear a song all at once, and Rousseau's *Confessions* to painting, to promote the ahistorical facet of the image of 'Jean-Jacques.' (*The Modern Self*, 132-135) While a fitting metaphor, the choice between music and art seems to incorrectly suggest that Augustine and Rousseau are creating fundamentally different arguments instead of debating the differences in process.

for his contemporaries,”⁹⁸ (IX.355) complicates the issue at hand. Rousseau’s ability to dismiss the Comte while contradictorily excusing his own imagination can again be shown to draw from Augustine.

Arguing that “perfect beings do not exist in nature and their lessons are not close enough to us,” (IX.366) Rousseau borrows the structure of Augustine’s understanding of Eternity such that man’s knowledge of his temporality comes through the comparison to God and is something entirely beyond himself. Rousseau predicates the political figure of the solitary walker on similar grounding. By using man’s natural goodness to establish the worthiness of imagination, claiming that because man is good the use of his imagination when removed from the corrupting influences of amour-propre reveals man as he actually is, allows Rousseau to further argue that man’s understanding of a perfected image, when experienced in the unadulterated state of natural goodness, is a suitable foundation for a new image of fatherland. Nature does not provide the example of perfection but man’s imagination in its natural state reveals the possibility of perfection properly understood. Therefore, the Comte’s attempts to change man are inexcusably vulgar to Rousseau because they depend on an image of what *should* be. It is evidence of a sentiment developed under the influence of amour-propre. By contrast, Rousseau is able to imagine what *could* be for his imagination stands free of the sentiments in isolation from the city. Much like Augustine’s conclusion that man is a temporal being within the eternity of God, Rousseau’s ability to make these claims required a conversionary experience whereby it was revealed to him that man as he knew it was corrupted by contrasting the world as it was with the world as it could be otherwise.

As a consequence, much like Augustine’s assertion that man cannot know himself in time

⁹⁸ Rousseau echoes this criticism in *The Social Contract* where he argues that men should be taken “as they are and laws as they might be” (*Basic Political Writings*, 141) rather than according to an imaginary standard of perfection.

for only God in his eternity has the capacity to know all that man is, Rousseau's argument suggests man does not know himself. He only knows his imagined version of himself. Prior to the distortions of amour-propre man is unreflective on the question of who he is for he is complete in nature much like Rousseau's presentation of his earliest childhood in Book I. But that completeness comes of ignorance and does not encapsulate all that man can be. It is not until the conversion of Book VIII that Rousseau is made aware through reflection that he had become so unlike himself as to appear as another person to himself. Presented the revelation of man perfected through the use of the imagination, the vision did not correspond to a man in the world but rather the possibility of man properly understood. Rousseau's understanding of man in his best form cannot exist in the world but only in the imagination and, as such, is the basis for his claim in the Preface of the work that "here is the only portrait of a man, painted exactly according to nature and in all its truth, that exists and that will probably ever exist." (Preface, 3) Similarly, Augustine contends that a man cannot fully understand himself for God resides in his memory and, thus, his interiority is paradoxically bigger than he is due to the link to eternity found within. Perfect beings do not exist in nature; they exist as concepts in the minds of men. Therefore, Rousseau's argument contends that the imagination produces in the minds of men an image of its own perfection but, given that it will never be existentially experienced as reality precludes perfection, man is unable to fully know himself.

Complicating the issue and what provides the basis for making distinctions among men is the realization that not everyone is created equal. Some are more adept than others in developing their imagination, as Rousseau argues, or exploring the depth to their soul, as Augustine claims. Along that line of reasoning Rousseau, in speaking of *Julie*'s reception across Europe, professes his surprise at the novel's success in France and relative disappointment in Switzerland. He goes

on to further elaborate:

“Do friendship, love, virtue, reign at Paris more than elsewhere then? No, without a doubt; [...] neither morals nor virtues exist in Europe any more; but if some love for them still exists, one must look for it in Paris. Through so many prejudices and factitious passions one must know how to analyze the human heart well in order to disentangle the true feelings of nature in it. One must have a delicacy of tact, which one acquires only in the education of high society, in order to feel – if I dare to speak this way – the subtleties of heart with which this work is full. [...] If *Julie*] had been read only in the Provinces, [the] whole value would never have been felt. Thus one must not be surprised if this Book’s greatest success was at Court. It abounds in lively but veiled features which ought to please there because the people at Court are more practiced at penetrating them. Nevertheless, one must make another distinction here. This reading is assuredly not fit for that sort of witty people who have only guile, who are subtle only for penetrating evil, and who see nothing at all where there is only good to see. If, for example, Julie had been published in a certain country I am thinking of [Rousseau likely means Geneva], I am sure that no one would have finished reading it, and that it would have died at birth.” (XI.456-457)

Commenting that the French court was superior in its appreciation of *Julie*’s subtly reveals that there is something profoundly useful in their attention to detail for Rousseau’s project of aiding his fatherland from afar. Returning to the metaphor of the painting it would appear that, while the painting does not change, there are certain audiences that not only appreciate it more by seeing the tiniest details on the canvas but are therefore better equipped to understand it. The Spartan citizens of Geneva, in contrast, could not even be bothered to look. These observations not only speaks to the culture of a fatherland but the education received in one. Unlike Rousseau’s presentation of his own education, where his unstructured reading coupled with his sensitive disposition was claimed to have inoculated him against the earliest pangs of amour-propre thereby presenting him as unique in a marriage of natural disposition and formative education, the French as a people are raised such that they are brought to sensitive dispositions. Moreover, there are distinctions to be made between the education of men of wit, like Voltaire whom Rousseau feels on sees shades of evil and writes that “I respect your genius but I hate you [...] you ruined my country,” (XI.453) and those likeminded with Rousseau who, although taking men as they are, still understand their natural goodness even though it is obscured by amour-propre. Thus, for all its obfuscation of man’s natural born goodness amour-propre and civil society more generally, presented in its clearest form by

Paris and her citizens, unexpectedly establishes a world of men that is best situated to understand and possibly implement Rousseau's philosophy born of the solitary walker.

Fittingly, on the topic of education and as a nod to his earlier claim that his body of work is "a great system," (VIII.309) Rousseau concludes this section of *Confessions* by turning to the *Emile* and the calumnious revolt against him that brought about the end to his time as a solitary walker. Near the end of Book XI, commenting that his "talent was to tell men useful but harsh truths with sufficient energy and courage," (XI.462) Rousseau laments that it "not only caused my destiny for the rest of my life, but will perhaps decide my reputation among all posterity." (XI.463) The resulting subjugation from an enraged public where "the idea of my memory being dishonored after me in my worthiest and best book was so frightening to me" brought Rousseau to discover that he "believed that if I had died in those circumstances, I would have died in despair." (XI.468) With the public uproar surrounding *Emile* fueled by an elite sensitive to the subtleties of his work Rousseau could no longer simply "cast [his] books into the public with the certainty of having spoken for the common good without any concern for the rest." (IX.338) The act had ultimately cost him his freedom to write as he pleased and his solitude.

His period as a public intellectual concludes with his return home and him remarking that "upon entering the territory of Bern I had the coach stop; I got out I prostrated myself I hugged I kissed the earth and shouted out in my rapture: 'heaven protector of virtue I praise you I touch a land of freedom.'" (XI.492) Believing himself to be scrutinized the world over, Rousseau was forced to flee France. Finding that he has lost his solitude with the return to the city and presuming the move will come at the cost of his ability to be of any further use to the fatherland, Rousseau is compelled to turn his attention to the image of the public intellectual 'Jean-Jacques.' By writing the *Confessions*, Rousseau is attempting to create an image of himself to accompany his

philosophic writings in an effort to provide an account of how they came to be. Opposite Augustine's *Confessions* that reveal his progression from sinner to Christian in a bid to encourage the same in his readers, Rousseau's work provides a type of codex in the image of 'Jean-Jacques' such that the reader can come to understand how Rousseau understood himself.

Summary

This chapter provided a commentary on Rousseau's *Confessions* in a manner similar to the previous chapter with the goal of demonstrating the consistencies between the construction of the two narratives as a means to elaborate the relationship between the political proscriptions made by the characters of Augustine's preacher and Rousseau's solitary walker. To accomplish this Book XII was dealt with first. It was argued that Rousseau's mention of the *Letter to Beaumont* in the text provided an account to understand his interpretation of original sin as overtly deterministic and established the foundation for his own profession of faith. Making note of his use of Augustine's Scriptural criticism, where they both claim that one cannot know what Moses intended when writing Genesis for he lived in a different time, it was shown that Rousseau, like Augustine, relied to an interpretation of Genesis to provide the epistemological argument for the *Confessions*. From there, the chapter turned to Rousseau's presentation of his early life where he offers his education and uniquely sensitive disposition as the explanation for the delay in his exposure to amour-propre. Rousseau relies on this privileged understanding of an unobscured natural sentiment to elaborate on his distinction between intended virtuous behavior and the corrupted outcome as the imposition of external violence on his internal goodness. Once exposed to amour-propre in adolescence due to his sexual encounters with Mme de Warens, the narrative transitions to internal impositions on his freedom as a consequence of gaining awareness to future oriented desires. As with Augustine's *Confessions*, although established on the competing epistemological

claims between Rousseau's natural goodness and Augustine's original sin, the text follows a linear degeneration into ever greater corruption until the conversionary experience of Book VIII where Rousseau sees the image of himself perfected. With the public accolades from the *First Discourse* "this favor of the public, in no way courted and for an unknown Author, gave [him] the first genuine assurance of [his] talent" (VIII.305) and, once revealed, cemented the image of himself free from the disorders of amour-propre as the fundamental truth to his philosophy. Finally, taking upon himself the role of public intellectual as discussed in Books IX-XI, Rousseau leaves polite society as a way to protect his understanding of his authentic self and, like Augustine's retreat into his memory to find God, plumbs the depth of his internal being for the philosophic insights necessary to be of use to his fatherland. Ultimately, Rousseau's philosophy as a continuation of Augustine's work that seeks to transform the city through the actions of an individual governed by their will becomes the imposition of a timeless image on the city at large.

Conclusion

Unfree will is mythology: in real life it is only a question of strong and weak wills.
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*⁹⁹

The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate Rousseau's indebtedness to Augustine's narrative style of the *Confessions* and, more importantly, the political figure of the preacher. In particular it was argued that, while Rousseau attempted to supplant Augustine's autobiography, he succeeded in pulling elements of Augustine's thought into modernity. Under the rubric of the solitary walker as the new political figure, what was previously a politics of the will restrained by the temporal horizon of man became unleashed as the imposition of the imagination onto reality writ large. Lacking the restraint of doubt as a product of Augustine's central claim that man cannot fully know God and is therefore unable to know himself, Rousseau acknowledges the claim but circumvents it. By taking the image of the natural self he discovered on the road to Vincennes as authoritative, Rousseau opens the door to the possibility that, if man cannot know himself in the world, the images he produces can be treated as knowledge itself.

To reach that conclusion Rousseau had to first go behind Augustine and dismantle his epistemological claims built off his treatment of Genesis and original sin. Using the *Letter to Beaumont* it was argued that Rousseau demonstrated the incongruity between the theology of free will, where man has the freedom to choose to sin, and Augustine's concept of time, whereby man's lack of knowledge of the whole will necessarily lead to sin as a product of imperfectly ordered desires within time. By rejecting original sin as deterministic, Rousseau consequently argues that for man to be free he must be born good. What the theologians had presented as original sin is reshaped into an external imposition on the internal freedom of men. That man is born internally good and corrupted through external forces suggests that if man can create while in a state of

⁹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 51.

goodness his creations will also be good. Remembering Augustine's discussion of the creation of objects of desire within the self when he claimed to have suffered "being in love with love," (III.I.1) one can see that on a fundamental level Rousseau accepts that argument as a consequence of living in the city but rejects it's presentation of human nature for incorrectly privileging the consequences of amour-propre as the definitive account of man's estate. Thus, as Augustine spirals into unending disorder, given that man can come to desire his desires leading to an infinite regression into the self where "man is a great deep," (IV.XIV.22) Rousseau merely finds that the internal self is compressed under the weight of external burdens.

The ensuing conversionary experience comes at the breaking point for both Augustine and Rousseau. Realizing that there is no bottom to his despair, Augustine is brought to God as a means to stop the plummet inwards. By contrast Rousseau, buckling under the subjugation of interpersonal relationships and future-oriented desires, comes to reject the external world and finds the authentic self as a means to oppose the impositions of the temporal world of men. Whereas Augustine believes God to be a matter of faith as temporal creatures cannot come to know Truth within time, Rousseau is able to claim certainty on the nature of the authentic self. Augustine's faith is dependent on the soothing of suffering while Rousseau's understanding of the truth in his self-image is proved by suffering the injustices of the public's competing view of him. Augustine's development from lost soul to converted Christian serves as a public teaching that implores others to follow suit. Rousseau's *Confessions* serves to correct a misguided public on their views of him. Ultimately, Rousseau reshapes the narrative of the reformed sinner to serve his philosophy and does so by demonstrating the timeless consistency of his internal being.

By way of conclusion, one can turn to Nietzsche. While Augustine's reliance on a metaphysics of time precludes the ability to speak authoritatively about anything within time,

man's temporality saves him from a tyranny of his own design. Man is unable to know himself in time and must respect that competing truth-claims may in fact be equally valid as men are “unable of their own observation to compare the conditions of past ages and foreign nations which they have not experienced with those which they have experienced.”(III.VII.13) Alternatively, Rousseau establishes the primacy of the imagination but does not comment on what is to happen when two images contradict each other. Augustine, uncertain of all but his uncertainty cannot dismiss a competing truth claim; Rousseau cannot accept the existence of one. While Augustine presents his *Confessions* as a politics of the will, offered by the figure of the preacher, it is Rousseau who smashes the mould and starts on the path of truth in the imagination as a precursor to the will to power.

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