This week we will be looking at both Augustine and Boethius. There will be NO written assignment for Section IV, but be sure to do your reading and come to section with deep philosophical revelations about life and religion. Use the discuss questions below to guide your search for inner truth, or at least for a greater understanding of *Confessions* and *Consolation*!

**Please print this assignment and bring it to section!**

**But first, a little background on our authors:**

**Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy***

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born into a Christian aristocratic family, learned Greek and translated many works into Latin, wrote books on arithmetic, geometry, music, and theology, and achieved high political office. In 523, shortly after his appointment as *magister officiorum*, Boethius was imprisoned for treason by Theodoric. Boethius wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy* while in prison, and he was executed approximately a year after the work was completed. *Consolation* was the among the most widely circulating works of secular literature in Europe--translated into Old English, Old French, and Middle English, by Geoffrey Chaucer, and is enjoyed in its modern English version by Harvard students everywhere!

**Augustine, *Confessions***

St. Augustine of Hippo, the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, was born in 354 CE in North Africa. He began his education at sixteen in Carthage, and went on to not only travel extensively, but wrote prolifically—including 113 books, 200+ letters, and 500 sermons. His *Confessions*, in particular, made a lasting literary mark on philosophy and Christian theology. *Confessions*, written in 397 CE, is a spiritual autobiography, cast as a prayer to God, and including self-analysis, autobiographical narrative, and self-questioning. Augustine, known as the father of autobiography, uses the vehicle of his own life experiences to try to convince his readers of the significance of his conversion and Christianity’s role as the ‘true’ faith. And he may be given credit for inspiring such future self-serving autobiographies as Paris Hilton’s *Confessions of an Heiress* and Bill Clinton’s *My Life*.

**The Authors**

- How does the *character* Boethius differ from the *narrator*?
- Discuss the role of companionship in Augustine’s intellectual development.
- What are the intellectual milestones in Augustine’s life and why? In telling the tale of his life—what does he omit, and why? Why do you think he choose the included
episodes?

- Consider the intellectual and spiritual journeys Augustine and Boethius describe. How do their journeys compare to those described in our previous readings? Why do you think the theme of a journey is such a popular narrative tool?

The Audience

- What were the motivations of Augustine and Boethius for writing these works? Who were their intended audiences, and how, if at all, do they differ? From a historical perspective, what can we learn from *Confessions* and *Consolation* about the society in which our authors lived?
- *Consolation* was in wide circulation after the author's death, yet the work is not mentioned by any of Boethius' contemporaries. Why would *Consolation* be ignored by his peers--yet reach considerable popularity thereafter?
- What is the relationship between Augustine and readers? What is the effect of putting the readers in the position of eavesdroppers? What does Augustine want us to learn from his experiences? Why do you think *Confessions* was popular throughout the Middle Ages?

*Confessions*

- Re-read the story about the theft of the Pear. What is the purpose of this story? What particularly disturbs Augustine about his theft of the pears? How does he account for his motives in the theft? What Biblical parallels are evoked? What allegorical meanings can you discern? Note Augustine's imagery, particularly his metaphors for sin.
- Augustine discusses the *Aeneid* (pp. 15-17 (I.xiii.20-22)). How does he view the *Aeneid*, and why does he include this discussion in *Confessions*? Augustine professes to reject the seductive contents of the *Aeneid*, but does his account of his own quest have any commonalities with Vergil's epic? What other important parallels can you identify? What light do they shed on the literary relationship between Augustine and Vergil?
- In his *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine wrote: If one rejects giving birth to children as the reason why woman was created, I do not see for which other help the woman was made for the man. (Gn. litt. 9.5.9) Is this consistent with his description of the role of women in the *Confessions*?
- As you read the *Confessions*, note the passages that describe Augustine's conception of the female and the role of the Christian woman. How is Monica the model of a Christian mother and a Christian wife? Does she deserve credit for Augustine's conversion? Is she a different sort of Christian than Augustine? Does she struggle with sin as Augustine does? Are there any parallels between her wine drinking and Augustine's theft of the pears? Is there something feminine about her faith?
- What role does Augustine's concubine play in his long journey of conversion? What kind of a wife is she? Why does he leave her? Why doesn't he mention her name?
- How does Dido function as an image of the feminine? Is she a model or foil for the character of Monica or the unnamed concubine?

*Christianity*
Consider how each author addresses Christianity. Why do you think the two authors differ on their take of Christianity? What role does Christianity play in their lives, and in their decisions?

In the eighteenth century questions arose about the author’s Christian allegiances, do you think Boethius was a Christian? Does it matter?

Considering that Augustine was educated, well-read, and considered highly intelligent—Why did it take so long for Augustine to convert to Christianity?

*Consolation of Philosophy*

- What role does mythology play in *Consolation*? Why would Boethius incorporate elements of pagan literature into his work?
- How does Boethius describe the Lady Philosophy? Why do you think he chooses to represent philosophy in this form? What is the nature of their relationship? How does he represent Fortune and his relationship with her?
- How does Philosophy diagnose Boethius’ problem? Philosophy tells Boethius that misfortune is actually better than good fortune. Why?
- What criticisms does she make of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy?
- How does Boethius’ discussion of his own life compare to that of Augustine?
- During his imprisonment Boethius seems to find more solace in philosophy than in religion. What role does religion seem to play in Boethius life and how does he discuss it?
- Is *Consolation of Philosophy* fiction? Why or why not?