

Conference Report

Modern Restlessness, from Hobbes to Augustine

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Abstract: Only with difficulty do modern readers grasp the full import of Augustine’s confession, “Restless is our heart, until it rests in you”, or seriously consider that it might be true. An unexpected remedy is to be found in reading Thomas Hobbes, who introduces and defends the view of happiness that is now commonly accepted without argument. According to Hobbes, human beings find their happiness not in a single, supreme good but in many objects, the securing of which requires a lifelong quest for power. But this teaching, influential and revealing though it is, fails to satisfy. Meditating on that dissatisfaction is a first step towards more serious engagement with Augustine.

Keywords: Augustine; Hobbes; happiness; restlessness; modernity; interdisciplinary education; pedagogy

1. Introduction

Why read Augustine “across the curriculum”¹—in courses that do not settle in any particular specialty, but sojourn among them all? One answer would note the many discoveries to be made in a variety of disciplines. When students encounter a mind as incisive and fertile as Augustine’s, they are bound to learn something, not only in theology but likewise in philosophy, psychology, political science, history, and literature. True as that reply may be², however, I see an even more important reason for

¹ This essay began as a paper presented at the conference “Augustine across the Curriculum”, Samford University, Birmingham, AL, USA, 2–4 October 2014.

² For numerous examples of how Augustine fruitfully intersects with many different disciplines and themes in the academy, consider the series *Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* [1].

including Augustine in certain interdisciplinary courses. When students study Augustine alongside the seminal thinkers of modernity, they can begin to question the assumptions and preoccupations that prejudice most modern readers against him, and they can turn, or return, to Augustine with the urgency and care needed for understanding his writings and the truth found in or through them.

This thesis is based on more than ten years' experience as a teacher of beginners and as a beginner myself. My discussion here will draw on that experience and will often be anecdotal or personal in its argument. If that approach is unusual among scholars, it is likely to be helpful for teachers whose students are finding their way to the *Confessions*.

2. Struggling to Read Augustine

Villanova is a Roman Catholic institution founded by the Order of Saint Augustine. The importance of Augustine for undergraduate education at our university is clear in the “Augustine and Culture Seminar”, a two-semester course required of every student. In the first semester, “Ancients”, students read books of Greek and Roman antiquity alongside the Bible, and they see how these influences came to intersect in Augustine and the medieval tradition after him. The spring semester, “Moderns”, begins with a play of Shakespeare and ends with a book of recent memory. By year's end, students have not only thought about Augustine's critical reflections in his own time, they have the opportunity to proceed with his work: examining key texts of modern times with an abiding concern for justice and truth, and in relation to a Catholic intellectual tradition that still, in many ways, hearkens back to Augustine.

One might expect students reading *Confessions* in this context to praise Augustine as a model of faith, and that is indeed what they often do. They also notice, however, that Augustine's self-assessment is far more critical. Saving his praise for the God who made him and everything good in his life, he claims for himself only the sins that he committed from the day he was born. “Why is he being so hard on himself?” my students always ask, although they are themselves rather shocked to learn of his extracurricular activities in Carthage. Shocked, but also curious, for they would rather talk about the sin that surprises them than the faith that they expected all along.

In neither case, however, does the conversation go far on its own. Many are the motives that can persuade bright first-year students to read a few pages of Augustine, but careful reading at length requires a different kind of concern. Augustine's narrative in the *Confessions* describes his youth as a time spent running away from his own happiness, and this perversity remains in many ways a mystery to him. In prayer he asks God literally hundreds of questions, longing to understand his wretchedness and the conversion that he failed to accomplish on his own. That Augustine should take a keen interest in this intensely complicated dialogue is unsurprising, but why should others care as he does? Nothing is more tedious than to hear a man go on about his personal problems.

I have learned to expect this resistance and offer the following explanation: Augustine's quest and questions are more than merely personal. In confessing to God, “Restless is our heart, until it rests in you”³, Augustine speaks not only for himself but for “us”—that is, for all humanity. This observation by no means ends students' misgivings, however; it only exposes the stumbling block underlying them

³ I have supplied my own, more literal translation of this crucial line from the *Confessions* (1.1.1); otherwise, all quotations in this paper are from the Boulding translation [2].

all. How could Augustine presume that his readers find their happiness only in God—“my God”, as he often says? Is it not obvious that people seek many things and have every right to do so? Even those who believe in Augustine’s God have no choice but to juggle many priorities while struggling to live a happy, successful life, do they not? These objections point to a conclusion that most students are too polite to say, even if they should happen to think it. Augustine’s book reveals a great deal about him—his own preoccupation with God, his view of people as wretched sinners—but little that applies to us, whatever Augustine himself may think.

Now, anyone who holds that opinion might read *Confessions* as a requirement for graduation, which in turn is needed for a secure future—but not as something to be taken seriously, wrestled with, remembered long afterwards, returned to, and learned from. Reading Augustine truly begins, therefore, when students no longer ask the above questions rhetorically, but do so with heart and mind open to the possibility that he is right about happiness. There are, in fact, many ways of inviting them to read Augustine in that spirit. So ingrained is the presumption against him, however, that much time and effort can still be lost in that first reading.

The problem does not appear to have escaped the notice of Augustine, who was once a resistant reader himself. In *Confessions*, Augustine tells the story of reading the Bible for the first time and finding it unworthy compared with the refined and urbane writing of Cicero ([2], 3.5.9). As for his own readers, Augustine touches more than once on the subject. In Book II, he says that he is telling his story to “my own kin, the human race, however few of them may chance to read these writings of mine” ([2], 2.3.5). In a later passage, however, Augustine expresses hope for not just any reader, but for those who will read his book with love and “a brotherly mind” ([2], 10.3.3–10.4.5); his confession is made “in the ears of believing men and women, the companions of my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me” ([2], 10.4.6). However these statements are to be read in relation to one another, their apparent tension highlights the challenge of teaching the *Confessions* to modern students, many of whom do not share Augustine’s faith or see themselves joining him on pilgrimage.

For this reason, I have found it helpful to pursue a longer road in the spring semester, when our seminar turns to modern texts. My syllabus has always included *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, a book that strikes modern readers as immediately plausible in the very respect that the *Confessions* seems alien. In particular, it is Hobbes who teaches us to seek happiness in many objects of desire rather than in one greatest good.

One might expect that such a book would only stiffen the resistance, but that is not what I have found with my own students, at least. It is true that they recognize much of themselves in Hobbes, but the reflection leaves many of them puzzled and uneasy about what they see. In what follows, I would like to describe their encounter with Hobbes, identify what I think their dissatisfaction is, and suggest how it encourages a new openness to Augustine.

3. Our Hobbesian View of Happiness

No one needs to read Hobbes in order to believe that people seek happiness in different ways and have every right to do so. The conviction comes from everywhere, so to speak: it belongs to the popular culture of modern democracy. That culture can be traced to Hobbes by way of philosophic

successors like John Locke and then to philosophically educated statesmen like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. What matters most for students' education, however, is that Hobbes makes the original *argument* for opinions generally held even without argument.

Hobbes's best-known teaching on happiness is found in chapter 11 of *Leviathan*. [3] Oddly enough, however, Hobbes declines to use the word "happiness" in this context; he speaks instead of "felicity"⁴. Felicity had previously been defined in chapter 6 as "continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say continual prospering". But as Hobbes immediately adds, he means "the felicity of this life", not the next life. "What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour Him, a man shall no sooner know than enjoy, being joys that are now as incomprehensible as the word of school-men *beatifical vision* is unintelligible" ([3], 6.58). That is the particular negligence to be avoided: allowing unknowable, religious-metaphysical visions of happiness to confuse an otherwise rigorous account of the "continual prospering" available here on earth.

Now since we are talking about the felicity of *this* life, one thing follows, according to Hobbes. Felicity means success in getting the things that we desire, and those things are many and diverse. Hobbes denies that there is any one good that can satisfy all human beings in common, or even any individual for an entire life. Such a good simply does not exist. "For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers" ([3], 11.1).

But why should one think that life has no ultimate purpose? Hobbes's initial explanation is this: if we wanted one thing in life, attaining that object would complete all change, all movement, all desire. In that case, however, all life would cease as well. "Nor can a man any more live, whose desire is at an end, than he whose senses and imaginations are at a stand." Felicity of this life must be defined in accordance with this insight, as "a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter" ([3], 11.1; see also 6.58).

The argument quickly succeeds in persuading many students, especially when they reflect on the fact that what they want now, as 18- or 19-year-olds, is different from what they wanted at 6 or 12, and it is also different from what they are likely to want at 30, 42, or 90. A youth may be nostalgic for days wholly devoted to Legos, but he is unlikely to find them endlessly satisfying now. A young woman who would be terrified to hear that she is pregnant today might move mountains for a baby when she is 40. A middle-aged man might spend a sleepless night brooding about the promotion he missed or the cough that never seems to go away: such are not the anxieties of the typical 18-year-old.

On further examination, however, the argument is less convincing. Life may be impossible without motion of *some* sort, but that motion need not come from changes in what is desired most. It is possible that human beings make mistakes about what truly satisfies, and when this occurs, they have no choice but to keep searching for it. Even when they do not make mistakes, the greatest good may be difficult or impossible to attain completely. Or again, even if they do attain it, their happiness might be an *ongoing activity* rather than a goal to be accomplished only once. That is to say, human existence may

⁴ I suggest that this is because Hobbes recognizes "how necessary it is for any man that aspires to true knowledge, to examine the definitions of former authors, and either to correct them where they are negligently set down, or to make them himself" ([3], 4.13). In this case, the very word must be upgraded. "Happiness" does appear in the *Leviathan*, but only six times, and always in the context of discussions of religion. See ([3], 12.24, 31.9, 36.19, 38.4, 38.15, 44.4).

culminate in a certain *way of life* that, when discerned correctly and practiced well, satisfies our deepest desire as completely as possible, for as long as it lasts. These ideas essentially comprise the view of happiness offered by Aristotle, one of the “Old Moral Philosophers” dismissed in this passage (see *Nicomachean Ethics* [4], 1097a15–1098b19). Perhaps those codgers still have some kick in them?

Nevertheless, Hobbes, who certainly knew his Aristotle, does deny that there is a greatest good. Since this claim is not *necessarily* true, it requires further explanation, which Hobbes does in fact provide. In a second argument, he explains why felicity consists in “continual progress” of the desire from one object to another:

The cause whereof is that the object of man’s desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions and inclinations of all men tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life, and differ only in the way; which ariseth partly from the diversity of passions in divers men, and partly from the difference of the knowledge or opinion each one has of the causes which produce the effects desired. ([3], 11.1).

Why does each of us go through life wanting different things, different not only from what *other* people want, but from what *we ourselves* want, in times past and future? The reason—“*the cause*”—is that we expect the future to be precarious and know we must work make it secure.

The connection needs to be spelled out, and doing so brings a flash of self-recognition. At 18, my students are already looking ahead to life after college. Immediately they will need to pay rent; soon afterwards, some will want to buy a house. Many will have very large student loans that need to be paid off. Some will start a family. Falling sick, they will all need doctors, which requires health insurance. Retirement is of course a long way off, but even that must be provided for. None of these things will take care of themselves; all of them require forethought and preparation if they are to happen well.

What then does it mean to live always preparing for the future? As students know well, it means *wanting a host of things that they otherwise would not have wanted*. Last year, instead of indulging their childhood fascination with mummies, playing in a rock band, or dancing in musical shows, they found themselves caring about the SAT exam and getting into a highly rated college. Now that they are here, however, the SAT means nothing; instead they are double majoring, interning, and otherwise credentializing themselves with their eyes on graduate school. When they are 30, the internships, entrance exams and GPAs will mean nothing. Lawyers had better be with a good firm and moving up in the ranks; academics must be done with their Ph. D. and pumping out three articles a year. Securing the future is a lifelong project for us all.

The crucial point for Hobbes is psychological. Moving from one activity to another shapes our very desires; what we no longer seek, we *stop wanting*. If I put off my pleasure reading because of my busy schedule, I will miss it at first, but not for long; my desire moves on to different objects. Indeed, even before my desire moves on, it is already limited by my awareness that I will soon need to seek other things. Whatever I happen to want now is less important to me than the assurance that I will keep getting what I want in the future. As Hobbes says, “not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire” is “*the object of man’s desire*” ([3], 11.1, emphasis added). To be thus is nothing; but to be safely thus!

Human desire does have a single object, then, but only in this sense: the capacity to get what we desire, *whatever* it might be, is always desirable. It follows that what we always seek, more than any single satisfaction, is power.

So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that man hopes for a more intensive delight than that he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power, but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath presently, without the acquisition of more ([3], 11.2).

Let us be clear on what this pursuit of power is and what it is not. All mankind seeks power, in Hobbes's view, but *not* because everyone delights in lording it over other people. There is such a delight, of course—Hobbes calls it “glory”—but that passion motivates some more than others, and as a leading cause of quarrel it ought to be suppressed by a healthy dose of fear (see especially [3], 13.14, 17.1–2). But the pursuit of power *as such* can never be suppressed, for it is a reasonable response to the insecurity that humans face all their lives. Instead, Hobbes wants to *enlighten* the pursuit of power by teaching his readers, first, to admit that power is indeed the object of their desire, and second, to seek power more effectively by maintaining peace and unity with others, so far as it is possible to do so.

Thus, for Hobbes, the need for power keeps us always in motion. Unattached to any single thing, we seek first one object, then another, and another. Power is the one object that we do desire all our lives, but there can never be enough of power. We seek it in new quantities, new places, new forms, reinventing our very selves to gain a bit more assurance that we will have what we desire in years to come.

4. Restlessness, Reconsidered

It remains to be seen, however, whether this account of happiness gets to the heart of the matter, for as Hobbes himself insists, what people say and appear to be doing is often misleading: “The characters of man's heart, blotted and confounded as they are, with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erroneous doctrines, are legible onely to him that searcheth hearts” ([3], intro. 3). Anyone who does not have the power to search hearts must limit himself to examining his *own* thoughts and passions, but in such a manner as to read in them “not this or that particular man, but mankind”. That is just what Hobbes claims to have done, and now that he has set down his reading, “the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himselfe. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration” ([3], intro. 4).

To read the *Leviathan*, therefore, is to join in an experiment that began with the book's first publication in 1651. My own students have been participating for several years now, and at first glance, their march to professional success could seem to be just as Hobbes describes. Few of them appear to be Genghis Khans or Lady Macbeths, but by their own testimony they do feel obliged *to gain control over a precarious future*. One cannot understand the “professionalization of the university” today apart from Hobbesian anxiety.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether Hobbes has accomplished the demonstration that he hopes for. Even as Hobbes presents, with startling clarity, the reasons that effectually govern their life-choices,

students say that they are uncomfortable with his account of human happiness, and that discomfort seems to me to be genuine.

To illustrate, I would now share a story that I always relate while teaching *Leviathan*. It is designed to show, as faithfully as possible, what is entailed in Hobbes's teaching.

Imagine a young couple who fall in love and get married. It's a beautiful wedding and lovely honeymoon, but afterwards it is time to worry about the future. They know they will want to pay off their loans, buy a house, and start a family, which of course will take a lot of money. This being the case, they agree that both of them need to work long hours and climb the ladder in their respective professions. So that is what they do. They work for weeks, months, years, making good progress, though of course they are sorry to spend so much time away from home. A few more years, and they notice that they are spending more time with their co-workers than with each other—but for some reason, it doesn't really bother them all that much. It isn't long before they realize that they just don't love each other as much as they once did. So they agree on a divorce. They make their arrangements in a calm and reasonable manner, split up, and then—life goes on. Each of them pursues new goals, new objects, making new friends and allies, moving on once again, always working, never resting, until their striving ends, as it must, in death.

After telling the story of my imaginary couple, I offer a Hobbesian interpretation of it. For Hobbes, it is the story of two happy people. Their decision to work long hours is entirely reasonable, in his view. Granted that it was hard on their marriage, but would it have been any easier for them to endure poverty, illness, and failure? Then, when the passion of love has ceased and no other advantage requires them to stay, the marriage is no longer good for either of them. Each one has every reason to get on with maximizing his or her ability to gain the objects of desire, for that is what it means to be happy—and in that endeavor they are both successful.

But even though I present my Hobbesian reading as eloquently as I can, students receive the story rather differently. They do agree that working long hours would help provide financial security, and they also admit that it can have the consequences that I describe; most are reluctant, however, to concede that a life lived as I have described should be considered happy. Shuttling from one object to another, competing for position, moving ahead but never reaching any destination except the grave, seems to them "pointless" and "depressing". The latter word is revealing, for it implies that they are imagining the unhappiness as their own.

As we have seen, Hobbes questions whether one can know that this is what my students feel in their hearts. It is possible that, despite their testimony to the contrary, they embrace a life spent enjoying the objects of particular, temporary desires and struggling to avoid—or eventually, to medicate—the terror and pain of death. What seems more likely, however, is that they do feel dissatisfied with the all-too-Hobbesian life that stretches before them, even if they are also reluctant to give up its advantages or to face the dangers of abandoning it.

Like all humans, my students want to be happy, not miserable, and any sign of coming distress is bound to make them restless, just as Hobbes says. That is not to say, however, that a life spent acting on that restlessness deserves the name of happiness. It is worth highlighting three areas of dissatisfaction.

1. *Love and friendship.* Although students do seek power, the empowerment they seek is not always their own. Indeed, they immediately care about the couple in my story because they suppose them to be working and even sacrificing for one another, as a family. And while my students agree that desire can move to new objects, they are uncertain how to judge that change in the case of friends, lovers, or spouses. Hobbes does not ignore the phenomena of love and friendship, but he reduces the former to one desire among many ([3], 6.33) and the latter to an “instrumental power” ([3], x.1). These formulations seem to describe incomplete, broken, or perverse relationships, not love and friendship as they ought to be.
2. *The promise of beauty.* Love and friendship also inspire hope. When students find my illustration of Hobbes to “depressing”, they imply that they were *expecting* an alternate ending, and finding it otherwise is a disappointment—including, somehow, for themselves. How is that expectation understood by Hobbes? Hobbes defines hope as an appetite “with opinion of attaining” the object desired ([3], 6.14). What then is the opinion, and where does it come from, where love and friendship are concerned? A passage that deserves most attention is his definition of *pulchrum*, a Latin word that means “beautiful” (whether in appearance or in manners or morals). For Hobbes, *pulchrum* is “that which by some apparent signs promiseth good” ([3], 6.8). Beauty, therefore, is what promises that love, friendship, and other things will prove to be good in some way, beyond their evident pleasure and utility at this time. But while this thought is revealing and deserves further consideration, it is hard to consider it further with the help of Hobbes, who seems intent on cutting the phenomenon of beauty down to size or avoiding it altogether.
3. *Longing for eternity.* As we have seen, Hobbes observes that human beings desire to enjoy more than once and for an instant of time. Once again, students do not reject Hobbes’s claim simply, but they do wonder whether it should be interpreted, with Hobbes, as a desire to be gratified through the accumulation of power in this life. The problem comes to a head in Hobbes’s formulation that “the object of man’s desire” is “to assure *forever* the way of his future desire” ([3], 11.1). For if, as Hobbes apparently assumes, desire hits a dead end when earthly existence concludes, its path cannot possibly be assured forever, not even by the greatest of visible powers. “Forever” is the one thing that Hobbes can never promise. It is promised by the things that move us profoundly by their beauty.

One should not even assume that Hobbes has nothing further to say about the restlessness provoked by his account of felicity. After all, in the very next chapter of *Leviathan*, he compares anxiety for future time with the suffering of Prometheus, who every day had to endure it when an eagle pecked away as much of his liver as had grown back in the night; this anxiety, in Hobbes’s view, is a natural seed of religion ([3], 12.5 and context). In sum, reconsidering the “perpetual and restless desire of power after power that endeth only in death” provokes another kind of restlessness, one that continues despite attempts to obscure, distract, entice, mock, scare, argue, or define it out of existence.

5. Restless Hearts

As I now hope to show, the peculiar unease that one feels in reading Hobbes helps prepare students for more serious reading of the *Confessions*.

Beset by deepening doubts about their own quest for empowerment, students can follow Augustine with interest as he grows weary of a career that by worldly standards was wildly successful. They can understand why he would confide to his friends that a drunken beggar whom they happened upon was happier than they were, for while the beggar was joyful and carefree, they were anxious and preoccupied with all the labors demanded by their overweening ambition ([2], 6.6.9–10). And having identified with Augustine at that time, they will also understand why his conversion would lead very soon to his abandoning the career that had grown so burdensome to him ([2], 9.2.2–4).

With a sharpened awareness that they do *not* view friends merely as props of their power (see [3], 6.43, 10.2), students recognize themselves in Augustine as he delights in the company of friends, especially in the passage on how they spent their time reading books and conversing together ([2], 4.8.13). They also notice how power distorted his passionate but dysfunctional relationship with an unnamed friend, and their own dissatisfaction with temporary goods can help them see why Augustine would see death *everywhere* when his friend has gone ([2], 4.4.9). All of this prepares them to ponder Augustine's confession that friendship is true "only when you bind fast together people who cleave to you through the charity poured abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us" ([2], 4.4.7).

Those who suspect that Hobbes somehow reduces away the phenomenon of beauty are likely to sympathize with Augustine in his wanderings, which spring from a similar dissatisfaction. Love affairs in Carthage are fascinating for Augustine, as they are for his readers—but only temporarily so. Augustine tires of the beauty that only promises to gratify some particular desire, because the beauty, the desire, and the gratification, being tied to bodies, all rise and fall, live and die with them. His true longing, he discovers, is for that which neither comes into being nor passes away, but *is* eternally.

For some time Augustine seeks that *summum bonum* through the writings of the "Platonists", which describe an intellectual ascent that bears a family resemblance to the ladder of love in Plato's *Symposium*⁵. But these efforts, even when they are drawn onwards by divine beauty, give Augustine no more than a glimpse of "that which is", for they too are hobbled by "carnal habit"—the habit of clinging to mortal, created things instead of moving among and beyond them to eternal being ([2], 7.23). The restlessness of the human heart—the restlessness that one feels in response to Hobbes's explicit teaching—cannot be satisfied through human philosophy. Augustine's teaching is that happiness exists in this life only in hope, the great blessing enjoyed by citizens of the City of God during their sojourning on earth (see *City of God* [6], 19.20). What is missing from the writings of the Platonists—to say nothing of Plato himself—is Christ, "the mediator" who connects mortal humanity with God, because he is not only a man born of a woman, but God as well ([2], 7.18.24).

One sees the difference made by Augustine's conversion and baptism in Book IX. When staying in the port city of Ostia, Augustine attempts another ascent to *that which is*, but now he makes it with his mother just days before she is to fall sick and die. Together Augustine and Monica try to discern how God is experienced eternally by the saints in heaven. Instead of summarizing their progress from a distance, as he had done when speaking of his solitary efforts in Book VII, Augustine here relates

⁵ Diotima asserts in Plato's *Symposium* that everyone wants the good things for themselves, not for a time but always, and erotic lovers seek out beauty as the occasion for finding that "always" by giving birth to offspring beyond their mortal selves ([5], 206a–c). Above all, immortality is promised by the investigation of "beauty itself", the contemplation of which allows production of examples of true virtue (210e–212c).

some approximation of the thoughts expressed in their conversation ([2], 9.10.23–26). In a passage that opens with “Then we said...” ([2], 9.10.25), he drops any distinction between what he said with his own lips and what Monica said with hers. Does he imply that they spoke in unison? However that may be, this moment more than anywhere else offers readers a glimpse of what it means to be bound fast by the Holy Spirit.

Ostia is, of course, the very model of the “beatifical vision” that Hobbes excludes from his definition of happiness, complaining of its unintelligibility. One can hardly expect to render it intelligible, when Augustine himself laments how little they were to express what they saw in “the noise of articulate speech” ([2], 9.10.24). Nevertheless, the experience stands as a peak of the *Confessions*. Would Hobbes be hasty to deny that it could possibly be the *summum bonum*?

6. An End and a Beginning

That is how I would sketch the beginning of a more searching encounter with Augustine, made possible by students’ reading of Hobbes. It is necessary, however, to say something more about how that encounter actually happens for my students. We do not, of course, read *Confessions* all over again in the spring semester. There is simply no time, nor would it be advisable in a course devoted to modern thought.

My general approach while we study Hobbes is to consider from time to time how our current reading compares with *Confessions* in the previous semester. Several opportunities for making that comparison come in chapter 6 of *Leviathan*. For example, someone usually directs our attention to Hobbes’s definition of religion as “*fear* of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publically allowed”; as for superstition, it is the same thing, but when the tales are “not allowed” ([3], 6.36). It takes a few minutes to tease out what this statement asserts about religion—that its defining passion is fear, that it has no necessary connection to reality, and that religion in one place will be superstition in another. Then I ask how Hobbes’s definition compares with religion as Augustine seems to practice it in *Confessions*. Other occasions for comparison in the chapter include his definitions of the beautiful as “good in the promise” ([3], 6.8), of love as an appetite, the object of which happens to be present ([3], 6.3), and of felicity as “continual prospering” ([3], 6.58).

A more sustained comparison comes after our line-by-line examination of the account of felicity in chapter 11 (see Sections 3 and 4, above). If an insightful student has not already raised the issue, I first invite them to consider whether what Hobbes says about the “the books of the old moral philosophers” ([3], 11.1) applies to Augustine as well. Students usually notice that when Augustine confesses, “Restless is our heart until it rests in you” ([2], 1.1.1), he is asserting that God is, indeed, the *summum bonum*. The question to ask, therefore, is whether Hobbes’s argument actually refutes Augustine. Simply by returning to the beginning of *Confessions*, students can make a number of important observations, the most important of which is that *praising* God is, for Augustine, an activity that continues to be good for us humans for as long as we walk the earth. “You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy”, Augustine declares ([2], 1.1.1).

After we finish Hobbes, my classes read a recent author who illustrates how the Catholic intellectual tradition and its fellow-travelers have continued Augustinian thought in the midst of modern culture. This spring, for example, we are reading T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. Eliot resonates

deeply with Augustine in the restlessness that he expresses and induces in his poetry. By showing us our “strained time-ridden faces”, Eliot forces us to reconsider our struggle to provide for the future without truly living in the present ([7], 1.100), and he draws us into serious consideration of how our finitude may be baptized in “a further union, a deeper communion” ([7], 2.206).

Still, *Four Quartets* is not the *Confessions*, and I do want students to have a last look at Augustine as the spring semester concludes. I am asking them to compare the last poem in *Four Quartets* with a passage from much later in the *Confessions*, a prayer-poem that further illustrates what the *summum bonum* means for Augustine. It shows an Augustine who is not preoccupied with future threats and promises, but immersed in a relationship that is utterly present yet fully active with the highest pitch of longing.

Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new,
 Late have I loved you!
 Lo, you were within,
 but I outside, seeking there for you,
 and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong,
 I, misshapen.
 You were with me, but I was not with you.
 They held me back far from you,
 those things which would have no being
 were they not in you.
 You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
 you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
 you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you;
 I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;
 you touched me, and I burned for your peace.

7. Concluding Remarks

What I have sought to do in this essay is to show how Hobbes, despite his own intentions, can induce students to question their habitual assumptions about happiness and thus to entertain the possibility that Augustine truly understood our restless humanity. Students may gradually discover that they long for the same divine truth that Augustine seeks in *Confessions*, and in seeking it they may also find it. If Hobbes does not himself teach the lesson, he can still offer a surprising introduction to a book written “so that whoever reads [these writings] may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry unto you” ([2], 2.3.5).

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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