

Augustine Confessions 1.7.11

exaudi, deus. vae peccatis hominum! et homo dicit haec, et misereris eius, quoniam tu fecisti eum et peccatum non fecisti in eo. quis me commemorat peccatum infantiae meae, quoniam nemo mundus a peccato coram te, nec infans cuius est unius diei vita super terram? quis me commemorat? an quilibet tantillus nunc parvulus, in quo video quod non memini de me? quid ergo tunc peccabam? an quia uberibus inhiabam plorans? nam si nunc faciam, non quidem uberibus sed escae congruenti annis meis ita inhians, deridebor atque reprehendar iustissime. tunc ergo reprehendenda faciebam, sed quia reprehendentem intellegere non poteram, nec mos reprehendi me nec ratio sinebat: nam extirpamus et eicimus ista crescentes. nec vidi quemquam scientem, cum aliquid purgat, bona proicere. an pro tempore etiam illa bona erant, flendo petere etiam quod noxie daretur, indignari acriter non subiectis hominibus liberis et maioribus hisque, a quibus genitus est, multisque praeterea prudentioribus non ad nutum voluntatis obtemperantibus feriendo nocere niti quantum potest, quia non oboeditur imperiis quibus perniciose oboediretur? ita inbecillitas membrorum infantilium innocens est, non animus infantium. vidi ego et expertus sum zelantem parvulum: nondum loquebatur et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu conlactaneum suum. quis hoc ignorat? expiare se dicunt ista matres atque nutrices nescio quibus remediis. nisi vero et ista innocentia est, in fonte lactis ubertim manante atque abundante opis egentissimum et illo adhuc uno alimento vitam ducentem consortem non pati. sed blande tolerantur haec, non quia nulla vel parva, sed quia aetatis accessu peritura sunt. quod licet probes, cum ferri aequo animo eadem ipsa non possunt quando in aliquo annosiore deprehenduntur.

1.7.11

exaudi, deus: [Ps. 54.2](#), `exaudi, deus, deprecationem meam, et ne despexeris precem meam: intende mihi, et exaudi me'; en. Ps. 54.4,

`satagentis, solliciti, in tribulatione positi, verba sunt ista. orat multa patiens, de malo liberari desiderans.' Cf. [Ps. 60.2](#), [Ps. 63.2](#). In *conf.* 17x where God is the subject (approx. 183x in Vg. OT, 7x in NT, almost always with God as subject); in CL, only poetic in this sense and not common. [Knauer 71n.4](#): `wohl antwortend auf [1.6.10](#) "confiteor . . . terrae." See on [1.15.24](#).

vae peccatis hominum!: [Is. 1.4](#), `vae genti peccatrici, populo gravi iniquitate, semini nequam, filiis sceleratis'; [Mt. 23.13](#), `vae vobis scribe et pharisaei, hypocritae.' en. Ps. 130.2, `“vae eis qui trahunt peccata velut restem longam.” [[Is. 5.18](#)] illi autem trahunt peccata sicut restem longam, qui addunt peccata peccatis'; sim. at en. Ps. 139.9. Though in Latin, *vae* may be a general imprecation without a specific forboding implication (as Gk. ou)ai/ [in [Mt. 23.13](#), just cited]), for A. the word seems always to have the force of `alas for [usu. dative object], *because* evil [perhaps specified] will befall you.' The effect is thus more compassionate than angry. Hence in *conf.*, [1.4.4](#), [1.16.25](#), [2.9.17](#), [3.6.11](#), [6.16.26](#), [9.13.34](#), and esp. [10.28.39](#) (`vae prosperitatibus saeculi semel et iterum. . . . vae adversitatibus saeculi semel et iterum et tertio').

et homo: See on [1.1.1](#), `et laudare te vult homo' for parallel.

commemorati: With the personal accusative: `unusual' (G-M, who instance mag. 1.1, `ut commemoremus vel alios vel nos ipsos'); perhaps influenced by the use of the passive in scriptural texts ([Gn. 19.29](#) apud Tyconius, *reg.* 7, and [Gn. 42.9](#) apud A. qu. hept. 1.138, and [Sirach 49.11](#) [= LXX 49.9]--in each case translating Gk. e)mnh/sqh).

nemo mundus: [Job 14.4-5](#) (VL), `quis enim erit mundus absque sorde? nec unus quidem, etiamsi unius diei fuerit vita eius super terram.'

A.'s mature doctrine of original sin was far from inevitable in 397.

From the vast literature, most pertinent and interesting here is A. Sage's study at *REAug* 13(1967), 212-248, though many would differ with some details of his reconstruction; the case for greater continuity and less development is made by P. Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's 'Confessions'* (Ottawa, 1987). More venturesome is the attempt of P. F. Beatrice, *Tradux peccati* (Milan, 1978), to affiliate A.'s doctrine in second century Encratite teachings; such a context helps explain the intensity of the reaction A. stirred up. The shifts over time are perhaps more clearly visible when looked at in a less theological way: see W. Eborowicz, *Studia Patristica* 14(1976), 410-416. A. himself speaks in defense of the consistency of his position, but he is unlikely to convince the most careful readers of his own works: c. Iul. 6.13.39, 'nam ego per unum hominem in mundum intrasse peccatum, et per peccatum mortem, et ita in omnes homines pertransisse, in quo peccaverunt omnes, ab *initio conversionis meae* sic tenui semper ut teneo. exstant libri quos adhuc laicus recentissima mea conversione conscripsi, etsi nondum sicut postea sacris litteris eruditus, tamen nihil de hac re iam tunc sentiens, et ubi disputandi ratio poposcerat dicens, nisi quod antiquitus discit et docet omnis ecclesia.' The *term* 'original sin' enters A.'s writings in div. qu. Simp. 1.1.10-11, expounding [Rom. 7.18-20](#) (2x; at 1.1.11, 'quod perficere bonum non est in potestate, ad meritum pertinet originalis peccati'), recurring next at *conf.* [5.9.16](#), and infrequently thereafter until the Pelagian controversy.¹² A useful comparandum for div. qu. Simp. is lib. arb. 3.20.55 (prob. 395), where everything *but* the term is already present.

On infant baptism, see J.-C. Didier, *REAug* 2(1956), 109-129; there is no suggestion of the practice in *conf.* (A. was himself as infant only registered as a catechumen: see [1.11.17](#)). In quant. an. 36.80, there is credulous incomprehension: 'iamvero etiam puerorum infantium consecrationes quantum prosint, obscurissima quaestio est, nonnihil tamen prodesse credendum est. inveniet hoc ratio, cum quaeri oportuerit'; at lib. arb. 3.23.67 (written as priest),

`etiam illud perscrutari homines solent, sacramentum baptismi Christi quid parvulis prosit, cum eo accepto plerumque moriuntur priusquam ex eo quicquam cognoscere potuerint. qua in re satis pie recteque creditur prodesse parvulo eorum fidem a quibus consecrandus offertur. et hoc ecclesiae commendat saluberrima auctoritas'. By 411/12, he has discovered and accepted the encouragement of Cyprian (pecc. mer. 3.5.10 quotes Cyp. ep. 64.), even as he doubts infants guilty of actual sin; cf. pecc. mer. 1.17.22 and 1.35.65, concluding (in rhetorical question): `nihil mali commiserint infantes, qui propter hoc vocantur ab omnibus innocentes? nonne tanta infirmitas animi et corporis, tanta rerum ignorantia, tam nulla omnino praecepti capacitas, nullus vel naturalis vel conscriptae legis sensus aut motus, nullus in alterutram partem rationis usus, hoc multo testatior silentio quam sermo noster proclamat atque indicat?' He shows himself more tolerant of infant iniquity than one might expect from the present passage: pecc. mer. 1.35.66, `vellem tamen quisquis hoc sapit diceret quod peccatum viderit vel putarit infantis recentis ab utero, cui redimendo fatetur iam baptismum necessarium, quid mali in hac propria sua vita per animum proprium corpusve commiserit. si forte quod plorat taedioque est maioribus, mirum si hoc iniquitati non infelicitati potius deputandum est. an quod ab ipso fletu nulla sua ratione, nulla cuiusquam prohibitione compescitur? at hoc ignorantiae est, in qua profundissima iacet, qua etiam matrem, cum post exiguum tempus valuerit, percutiet iratus et saepe ipsas eius mammas, quas, dum esurit, exigit. haec non modo feruntur, verum etiam diliguntur in parvulis, et hoc quo affectu nisi carnali'. He seems there to have in mind opponents who would claim that infant baptism is needed only because of actual sins, and not for original sin, and *hence* he forces the distinction and recovers his tolerance.

But the Job text is prominent in 411: pecc. mer. 1.24.34, `porro si a salute ac vita aeterna hominem nisi peccata non separant, per haec sacramenta non nisi peccati reatus in parvulis solvitur, de quo reatu

scriptum est neminem esse mundum “nec si unius diei fuerit vita eius.” unde est et illud in psalmis: “ego enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum et in peccatis mater mea me in utero aluit.” [[Ps. 50.7](#)]’ Noteworthy here are the liturgical frame of reference and the link--here mediated by the text from Ps. 50 (the juxtaposition recurs at c. ep. pel. 4.4.4 and 4.10.27)--between the culpability of the newborn infant and the culpability of the procreative process. The same link has been forged already by Jerome, as A. himself quotes at pecc. mer. 3.7.13, where from the *adv. Iov.* 2.1, [Job 14.5](#) appears with [Ps. 50.7](#), in a nest of proof-texts (for the interpretation in this context of [Ps. 50.7](#), see below on [1.7.12](#)); cf. pecc. mer. 2.10.14-15, 3.6.12. By 415, A. can quote Pelagius' disciple Caelestius (at perf. iust. 11.23) as thinking that [Job 14.4-5](#) is a common (but, Caelestius thinks, ill-chosen) proof-text of the enemies of free will; Caelestius seems to think [Job 12.4](#) an adequate response: ‘iustus enim vir et sine querela factus sum in derisu.’ A. counters that Caelestius misunderstands a figure of speech, ‘non intellegens posse dici hominem iustum, qui perfectioni iustitiae plurimum accessit, ita ut ei proximus fieret: quod multos etiam in hac vita potuisse, in qua ex fide vivitur, non negamus.’ ([Job 14.4-5](#) quoted with a frequency to confirm Caelestius: gr. et pecc. or. 2.32.37, nupt. et conc. 2.29.50, civ. 20.26, and c. Iul. 1.3.10, 5.13.49, 6.26.83, etc.)

uberibus inhiabam plorans: The infant's avidity at the breast can also be positive: c. acad. 1.1.4, ‘philosophia est enim, a cuius uberibus se nulla aetas queretur excludi. ad quam avidius retinendam et hauriendam quo te incitarem, quamvis tuam sitim bene noverim, gustum tamen mittere volui; sim. at util. cred. 1.2.

reprehendi: [reprehendi C D2 G2 O2 edd.:](#) [reprehendendi D1 G1 O1 S](#)

ratio: Can be both the faculty ([10.6.10](#) [‘iudex ratio’], [10.33.49](#) [‘dum rationi sensus non ita comitatur’], and [13.24.37](#) [‘et

dominatur ei ratio') and (more classical and more frequent, as here) the substance of its function ([5.3.6](#) ['et occurrebat mihi ratio . . . et non mihi occurrebat ratio']; [9.9.19](#) ['rationem facti sui reddebat']). The evidence of the senses might inspire anger and reprimand, but by an odd collusion, ordinary human weakness and a superior human faculty conspire to hold it in check.

nam extirpamus: cf. [Jn. 15.2](#), 'omnem [palmitem] qui fert fructum, purgabit [pater meus] eum, ut fructum plus afferat.'

indignari: Recalls [1.6.8](#), 'indignabar'; the verb specifies anger directed at another apart from any action taken to give the anger force--cf. [9.4.8](#). As with the first smiles (see on [1.6.8](#)), A. oversteps himself by failing to distinguish observation from interpretation. For him an infant is a small adult, lacking various powers but experiencing the world just as an adult would. He cannot speak or make his *indignatio* efficacious, but he is capable of all the emotions and the velleities that arise from them. Such a view of the infant is eminently compatible with a doctrine of infant baptism, but is philosophically problematic.

dicunt: In the absence of exact parallels, it is unclear whether some particular superstition is implied; the use of *expiare* leads in that direction. Of 91x in A., only here is expiation in any sense trivial; the only passage even remotely comparable in weakness of offence is ep. 167.6.20, 'peccata cotidiana, sine quibus hic non vivitur, cotidianis remediis *expiantur*'). The ordinary mode of 'expiation' is sacrifice, often in OT contexts, and sometimes contrasted to the regeneration of baptism: e.g., nat. et or. an. 2.15.21, 'nec abluendas baptismo nec *expiandas* Christi corporis et sanguinis sacrificio et in aeternum damnandas'; though baptism can have 'expiatory' effect as well when the contrast is not being emphasized: e.g., ep. 157.3.13, 'a quo delicto parvuli per baptismum *expiantur*'. Thus it is likely that the nurses found the infant behavior disturbing and used means to 'expiate' that it were

some form of 'pagan' ritual. (The one 'pagan' practice to which A. applies the word elsewhere is at en. Ps. 57.4, 'respondet forte aliqua dura et mala mathematicus; curritur ad aruspice[m] ut *expietur*; respondet haruspex non se posse *expiare*; maleficus quaeritur.' There the sacrificial implication is probably also present; cf. *conf.* [4.2.3](#), where consulting a *haruspex* implies consenting to sacrifice.) Cf. en. Ps. 30. en. 2 s. 2.12, 'forte utiliter et in malum incidisti quem bonum putasti, ut in ubere quasi materno amaritudinem invenires, et ea offensione repellereris, et ad cibum validiorem invitareris. faciunt enim hoc nutrices mammothreptis, ut aliqua amara ponant in papillis suis, quibus offensi parvuli ab ubere resiliant et ad mensam *inhient*.' (The same lore at s. 311.17.14.)

nisi vero et ista innocentia est: In cataloguing the errancy of boyhood, he comes to the same ironic phrase: [1.19.30](#), 'istane est innocentia puerilis?'

licet probes: The generic second person is rare in *conf.* (here a momentary lapse in the nominal address of the whole text to God), and here with the only occurrence of *licet* governing subjunctive in a main clause (but *licet* only 5x in *conf.*).