

Richard Taryn Whittington  
Baylor University  
1825 S. 5<sup>th</sup> St.  
Waco, TX 76706  
Apt. 20  
[Richard\\_Whittington@baylor.edu](mailto:Richard_Whittington@baylor.edu)

### **Augustine, Nietzsche, and the Modern Quest for Freedom**

If modernity's longing for unlimited freedom corresponds to humanity's ancient desire to become like God, as Pope Benedict XVI argues, it must also correspond to a cosmology that makes limitless freedom possible.<sup>1</sup> Wishing to become like God, humanity cannot accept a cosmic order that precedes and circumscribes human thought and action; any check on humanity's ability to create nullifies its divinity, relegating it to the role of co-creator. On the flip side, the presumption of order frustrates the demonic urge to destroy absolutely. To obtain unfettered freedom either to create or destroy, modern humanity must embrace an ontology of disorder; put differently, it must view reality as chaotic rather than cosmic. No one understands or articulates this requirement more clearly than Friedrich Nietzsche. The conditions of his insight, however, long precede his appearance on the scene. Indeed, the elements of his philosophical revolution exist already in ancient Christian thought, specifically St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In this paper, I argue that Nietzsche's atheistic thought reproduces – and inverts – the cosmology of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In making this argument, I draw upon Pope Benedict's insight into modernity and also explore the deep connection between two works that have fallen into unfortunate neglect among contemporary philosophers: Books XI and XII of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

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<sup>1</sup> I allude to the passage from Benedict XVI that appears on Notre Dame's call for papers.