THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

BELATEDNESS: AUGUSTINE ON TRANSFORMATION IN TIME AND HISTORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

SEAN MICHAEL HANNAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2016

For Joshua Casteel.

Contents

Acknowledgments

This dissertation could not have been completed without ample support from sources both institutional and personal. I mean that less as a dichotomy than as a spectrum. Accordingly, I will aim to work my way from one end of the spectrum to the other, roughly speaking.

Without the generous assistance provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, I would never have been able to make it from the green pastures of the University of Alberta all the way down to the Grey City. Even before that, without the previous assistance of Student Aid Alberta, I would have had much difficulty making the geographically shorter but conceptually longer (much longer) trek from Vegreville to Edmonton. Once I reached the more advanced stages of my doctoral work, I was fortunate enough to receive further support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the University of Chicago Divinity School's own Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion. After that, when I entered into the eschatological stage of dissertating, I was very happy to have the honor of working as an instructor in the College and the Graham School, as well as at Saint Xavier University. To me, the funding of higher education has been not so much a matter for idle chatter as an indispensable lifeline.

All of the institutional backing in the world would mean very little for a project, if there were no actual human beings around to help shape and reshape it as it develops. My advisor, Willemien Otten, has always been in my corner, ever since I showed up on campus as a greenhorn in the Autumn of 2007. She has had, by far, the most decisive effect on my education and my thinking over the intervening years. If not for her feedback, I would have scarcely been able to refine what I wanted to say about Augustine and time in this dissertation. I owe her many a bottle of Riesling (never Chardonnay). The same must be said of the comments submitted by

my readers, Jean-Luc Marion (who taught me the meaning of phenomenology) and David Nirenberg (who taught me the meaning of research).

Yet the final stages of the dissertation process would themselves be impossible if not for more fundamental steps taken much earlier. Already at the University of Alberta, I had the good fortune of getting to think through the troubles of temporality under the supervision of John Kitchen, with whom I expect to enjoy a glass of sherry soon. I also have to single out the supererogatory pedagogy of Andrew Gow and Dennis Sweeney, without whose careful stewardship of reading groups I would not know how to really read (whether in a group or otherwise). Through my coursework, examinations, and teaching at the University of Chicago, I have been challenged in the best possible way by Susan Schreiner, Ryan Coyne, Richard Rosengarten, Margaret Mitchell, Lucy Pick, Bruce Lincoln, and William Schweiker. Special thanks are also due to those who made up the conversational cohort during my Junior Fellowship at the Marty Center, as well as to the seminar leaders (Clark Gilpin and Wendy Doniger) and senior fellows (Susan Shapiro and Betty Bayer).

As we reach the other end of the spectrum, I realize that I probably have too many friends and family to acknowledge, at least if I want to do them any justice. It is, I will admit, a good problem to have. And so I will just say thank you to everyone who played a part in raising and educating me, whether in the wild hinterlands of Canada or in the wild metropolis of Chicago (with metonymic nods to Hyde Park, Noble Square, Ukrainian Village, and Humboldt Park).

Chapter 1: Introducing Time in Antiquity

Augustine was not the first to be troubled by time. The questions he asks and the paradoxes he confronts in Book XI of the *Confessions* had a history. Much of the conceptual framework he brought to his discussion of temporality was shaped by the mix of philosophical notions he inherited through his ascent up the ladder of late antique Roman education. In this way, arguments worked out in the texts of Plato or Aristotle found their way into his worldview. Of course, centuries of reinterpretation and reformulation meant that these arguments had taken on new meanings and diverse uses. Often it took a commentator like Alexander of Aphrodisias to pursue a path that was pointed out but left untrodden by Aristotle, or a more original thinker like Plotinus to shift the grounds of the debate in subtle yet significant ways. Discussions about temporality in late antiquity played out through these chains of reception and recalibration. If we want to understand how Augustine's approach was shaped by all this talk about time—and also how he broke out of that inherited discourse—it will be necessary to sketch out the problem of the present as it reared its head in Plato, Aristotle, and their followers.

Yet even as we do this, we should not make the mistake of thinking that Augustine saw himself primarily as entering into a philosophical debate. In the great majority of his works, he was trying to make sense of a quite different textual lineage. More authoritative for him than the *Timaeus* or the *Physics* were those books he had come to recognize as divine Scripture. His thoughts about time found their expression not in the form of pure speculation, but in the genre of exegesis. In the last three books of the *Confessions*, what is explicitly at issue is the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis. These books amount to an essay on creation. Book XI, for its part, is rife with references not just to Genesis but to Isaiah, the Psalms, and the letters of Paul. In Paul, specifically, we find a certain understanding of temporality at work in several key

passages. His approach to time is certainly not 'philosophical' in the sense that the investigations of Plato or Aristotle were. Instead, this kind of temporality is shaped by Paul's messianic and eschatological message. What is important for Paul is the experience of what it is like to live in the time between the messiah's death and his return. The Pauline sense of being stretched out between crucial occasions (*kairoi*) would go on to influence Augustine's way of talking about temporal experience, just as those philosophers had helped Augustine to think about what time itself might be.

In order to properly appreciate Augustine's distinctive encounter with the paradoxes of time, then, we ought to read him in the context of both philosophical speculation and scriptural exegesis. Rather than categorizing Book XI as an exercise in either Neoplatonic meditation or Christian exegesis, we should let it guide us to a discussion between interpretations of Plato and readings of Paul. This is not to deny that the authority Augustine attributed to the Bible far outweighed his respect for the theoretical tools he picked up during his philosophical training. Such an asymmetry does not mean, however, that he is solely explicable in terms of that recognition of Scriptural authority. Nor, then, are his texts. And beyond the question of categorizing Augustine's works, we should recall that our goal here is to let ourselves be challenged by the questions he raises. If that is our task, then we can lose nothing by exploring—however briefly—the history of those questions as they were asked by his predecessors, whether Christian or otherwise.

Eleatic Puzzles

As with so many topics, it has long been conventional to link the discussion of time back to a primordial source in the dialogues of Plato. The most obvious such source is the definition of time given in his crowning work on cosmogony, the *Timaeus*. There we find the much cited

claim that time is the "movable image of eternity."[1] Rather than merely contrasting this view of time to that of Augustine, however, we would do better to linger with Plato for a while, in order to find out what kind of time is really at issue in the *Timaeus*. As we do so, it will become clear that the *Timaeus* is not the dialogue we should be looking at if we want to trace a more complex conversation about time from Plato, through Aristotle, to the philosophers of late antiquity.

The discussion of time in the *Timaeus* hinges on the difference between being and becoming. According to this distinction, some things 'are' in such a way that they are never in the process of becoming, while other things 'become' in such a way that we can never pin down the moment when they 'are.'[2] Everything in the phenomenal world of change and motion seems to fall into the latter category. Yet, for Plato, in this flux of becoming there is always a tendency back towards some prior stability. If the *Timaeus* was going to give an account of the cosmos and its generation, then, it had to come up with some way of mediating between what always is and what never is (because always becoming).

In temporal terms, we can say that Plato had to explain the relationship between eternity (*aiōn*) and time (*chronos*). Eternity here does not have to mean 'utter atemporality;' rather, we can gloss it merely as that which everlastingly persists in self-identity. It is, quite simply, the *aiōn* —the always (*aei*) being (*ōn*). According to the *Timaeus*, the demiurgic Father of the cosmos first created an eternal life of the intellect, which would serve as the pattern for the mutable world that was next to come. The universe was thus made to approximate this

---

[1] Plato, *Timaeus*, Loeb 234, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929), 37C-D (cited more extensively below).

[2] *Tim*. 27D-28A: "What is that which is existent always and has no becoming? And what is that which is becoming always and never is existent? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent." / τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν, τὸ δ᾽αὖ δόξῃ μετ᾽ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν.

everlasting principle of order. Yet the very mutability of that universe made it most unlike its source, which was always the same and never changed. And so the demiurge did the best he could, instituting 'time' as that which allowed the mutable world to approach the everlasting sameness of what came before it. It is in that sense that time is the "movable image of eternity," or an "eternal image, moving according to number."[3]

But what is it that makes the time of becoming like the everlastingness of being? The introduction of temporality in the *Timaeus* is counter-intuitive, since it brings in time as the solution for the mutable world's estrangement from immutability, whereas it might seem more obvious to say that this estrangement is acted out in the very distinction between time and the everlasting. The strangeness of this argument should cause us to reflect on what is meant by 'time' here. We are given a clue by Plato's introduction of "number" into his definition. Why must time move "according to number?" If we read on in this section of the *Timaeus*, we see that the discussion immediately turns to the relationship between the heavenly bodies and the time of the calendar. "Simultaneously with the construction of the Heaven," the demiurge "contrived the production of days and nights and months and years, which existed not before the Heaven came into being. And these are all portions of time [*merē chronou*]."[4]

The heavenly bodies are, for Plato, the highest and most primordial of the mutable things. Their supremacy is made manifest to us by their regularity. They approach the sameness of what

---

[3] *Tim*. 37C-D: "And when the Father that engendered it perceived it [the Universe] in motion and alive, a thing of joy to the eternal gods, He too rejoiced; and being well-pleased He designed to make it resemble its Model still more closely. Accordingly, seeing that that Model is an eternal [*aidion*] Living Creature, He set about making this Universe, so far as He could, of a like kind. But inasmuch as the nature of the Living Creature was eternal [*aiōnios*], this quality it was impossible to attach in its entirety to what is generated; wherefore He planned to make a movable image of Eternity, and, as He set in order the Heaven, of that Eternity which abides in unity He made an eternal image, moving according to number, even that which we have named time." The Greek for the last clause is: εἰκὼ δ᾽ ἐπενόει κινητόντινα αἰῶνος ποιῆσαι, καὶ διακοσμῶν ἅμα οὐρανὸν ποιεῖ μένοντος αἰῶνος ἐν ἑνὶ κατ᾽ἀριθμὸν ἰοῦσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα, τοῦτον ὃν δὴ χρόνον ὠνομάκαμεν.
[4] *Tim*. 37E.

is everlasting by moving in predictable patterns and always returning to their original locations, even if that happens to take millennia.[5] With reference to this regularity, we humans are able to demarcate and enumerate the 'parts' or spans of time through which we organize our lives. The "number" in Plato's definition of time can be explained by way of these "generated forms of time, which imitates eternity and circles round according to number."[6] According to the *Timaeus*, this numerical regularity bridges astronomy to ethics and even physiology: the regularity of a controlled soul or of a healthy body echoes that of the stars.[7]

Plato's *chronos*, at least in the *Timaeus*, is thus the time of the calendar. The circularity and mathematical consistency that are supposed to belong to 'time' actually belong to the celestial motions by which we measure 'the times.'[8] The mobile icon of the *aiōn* is not time but the heavenly bodies.[9] This distinction may seem subtle, yet it will prove crucial. Moreover, we need not think that Plato was ignorant of the difference between time and the times. To find a Platonic discussion of temporality that does not ground itself in astral motion, though, we have to venture into the more turbulent waters of the *Parmenides*.

In this dialogue, Socrates is pitted against the titular Eleatic and the latter's vocal supporter Zeno. Here what is under consideration is not an account of the creation of the cosmos, but the idea of the 'one' which would be the source (and perhaps the ultimate identity) of the differential multiplicity that makes up that cosmos. Since it would be unwieldy to recount all of the twists and turns of such a tortuous debate within the confines of this chapter, we should

---

[5] On this regularity and the world-year, see *Tim*. 39D.
[6] *Tim*. 38A.
[7] On astronomy and ethics (or more precisely: the effort to stabilize oneself psychologically and intellectually), see *Tim*. 47A-C; on health as the regularization of physiological rhythms, see 90C-D.
[8] As Richard Sorabji helpfully clarifies in his collection *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2005), vol. 2 (Physics), 197: "When there is talk of circular time in Greek thought, it is usually not time itself, but events, which are described as coming round in a circle, like the seasons."
[9] *Tim*. 38 and 39 go on to discuss the 'celestial clock,' by which discriminate bodies are used to measure time by numbering it out. In 39D, the possibility is broached that the planets themselves might even "be" time.

restrict ourselves to two paradoxes that had an especially long afterlife.[10] The first has to do with how difficult it is to describe change that is undergone by the 'same thing' using the language of becoming. The second has to do with the impossibility of pinpointing a moment in which any kind of change could properly be said to be taking place.

The first Parmenidean paradox is related to the linguistic tenses we use when we talk about things as past, present, or future. When we speak of change or differentiation, we can obviously do so with reference to these three temporal designations. If we are merely pointing out a state of difference between things, we can use the verb 'to be' according to its three tenses. We can say: Augustine was different from Monica (say, by straying from his faith); or Augustine is different than Monica (simply because they are distinct people); or Augustine will be different from Monica (say, when he will be made bishop). But what about when we want to talk about differentiation as it happens to one thing? What happens when the same thing is changing—that is, becoming different from itself? Here is where the language gets murkier.

'Augustine is becoming different from himself'—what would this mean? Our formulation here might be too stilted, so we should shift to the example of this kind of process which is given in the *Parmenides*: aging. 'Augustine is growing older' means that Augustine is growing older than himself. But what is shocking about this dialogue is that it goes on to say that Augustine is also thereby becoming younger than himself. Why? It is because the relationality of change implies two terms which come into relation. By this logic, if there is an Augustine who is becoming older than his younger self, then there is an Augustine who is becoming younger than

[10] Throughout the *Parmenides*, the referent is usually 'the one,' although the analyses laid out would often apply to anything whatsoever. This is because the one is being subjected to every possible mode of being and becoming, to see whether it makes more sense to say that 'the one is' or 'the one is not.' The text as a whole ends in aporia. Along the way, however, there are many incisive reflections on the general nature of time and change, and that (rather than the final status of the one) is what has been emphasized here.

his older self. The consequence is that if Augustine differs from himself in this way (by aging, by changing), he is somehow being stretched apart and split up into two. And this strikes us as a paradox, since it seems absurd to posit that one thing is simultaneously performing two contradictory actions.[11]

The point of this paradox is not to deny the reality of change, any more than Zeno's paradox conclusively proves that motion does not occur. Rather, our attention is being called to the awkwardness of our language about temporal change and becoming. We seem to have no trouble saying 'Monica is older than Augustine' or even 'Augustine is now older than he was,' but when we want to say that 'Augustine is becoming older than himself'—then our vocabulary seems somehow inadequate. This use of the present tense comes with some baggage, which keeps us from seeing clearly what it means for something to simply 'become.'

---

[11] Plato, *Parmenides*, Loeb 167, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1926), 141A-D: "'And can the one exist in time at all, if it is of such a nature? Must it not, if it exists in time, always be growing older than itself?' 'It must.' 'And the older is always older than something younger?' 'Certainly.' 'Then that which grows [or becomes] older than itself grows at the same time younger than itself, if it is to have something than which it grows older.' 'What do you mean?' 'This is what I mean: A thing which *is* different from another does not *have to become* different from that which is already different, but it must *be* different from that which *is* already different, it must *have become* different from that which *has become* so, it *will have to be* different from that which *will be* so, but from that which *is becoming* different it cannot have become, nor can it be going to be, nor can it already be different; it must *become* different, and that is all.' 'There is no denying that.' 'But surely the notion "older" is a difference with respect to the younger and to nothing else.' 'Yes, so it is.'" The first speaker here is Parmenides; the second is his youthful interlocutor Aristoteles. The italics are mine, and they are intended to show that the problem here has something to do with the awkward relationship between the three tenses and the process of becoming. There is no denying the difficulty of this passage, and it is even hard to say whether any kind of argument is given for the claim 'that which becomes older than itself also becomes younger than itself.' The above interpretation is offered with some hesitancy and in light of the reception of this paradox in both antiquity and modernity. For the former, see Sorabji, *Commentators*, 199; for the latter, see Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), 1-3, and the elaboration of *aiōn* and *chronos* in 58-65, 148-153, and 162-176. Sorabji cites Proclus (*in Parm.* 1226.26-1228.26), who offers two levels of explanation. The first and more superficial possibility is that 'becoming older and younger' refers to the circularity of the planets—as they progress in their orbits (i.e. 'get older') they approach their starting point (i.e. 'get younger'). But Proclus is quick to suggest that there is a wider and therefore more unsettling application of the claim: "How it comes about that everything that becomes older than itself also at the same time becomes younger than itself will be explained by means of two mean terms by the Second Hypothesis [cf. *Parm.*, 153], which discovers the necessity of the separable coexistence of these in the case of all things that partake in time, and not only in the case of those which move in a circle."

Perhaps the awkwardness of our language here is less a matter of tense than of aspect. The nature of temporal becoming is hidden not so much by the present tense as by the non-progressive aspect of our way of talking about it. When we speak of change, that is, our language is far too punctual or punctiliar. We speak as though there were a point at which change or self-differentiation 'is,' but the progressive aspect of change means that it cannot be frozen into such a static phase. If we speak too carelessly of a moment of change, we risk overlooking the distinction between being and becoming.

The second Eleatic puzzle thus builds off the first. In a later section of the *Parmenides*, the discussion turns to this question of the possibility of an instant of change. We can speak of something having changed or being about to change, but can we temporally isolate some phase when it simply 'is' changing? At what time does change occur? In the words of the dialogue:

> 'when does [a thing] change? For it does not change when it is at rest or when it is in motion or when it is in time.'
> 'No, it does not.'
> 'Does this strange thing, then, exist, in which it would be at the moment when it changes?'
> 'What sort of thing is that?'
> 'The instant. For the instant seems to indicate a something from which there is a change in one direction or the other. For it does not change from rest while it is still at rest, nor from motion while it is still moving; but there is this strange instantaneous nature, something interposed between motion and rest, not existing in any time, and into this and out from this that which is in motion changes into rest and that which is at rest changes into motion.'[12]

The instant—the "suddenly" (*to exaiphnēs*)— cannot be allowed to occur in time, yet we seem to have to presume it if we want to talk about change at all. It serves the function of demarcating or

---

[12] *Parm*. 156C-E. This concisely summarizes the whole problem of the instant. The Greek for the last paragraph is: τὸ ἐξαίφνης. τὸ γὰρ ἐξαίφνης τοιόνδε τι ἔοικε σημαίνειν, ὡς ἐξ ἐκείνου μεταβάλλον εἰς ἑκάτερον. οὐ γὰρ ἔκ γε τοῦ ἑστάναι ἑστῶτος ἔτι μεταβάλλει, οὐδ' ἐκ τῆς κινήσεως κινουμένης ἔτι μεταβάλλει: ἀλλὰ ἡ ἐξαίφνης αὕτη φύσις ἄτοπός τις ἐγκάθηται μεταξὺ τῆς κινήσεώς τε καὶ στάσεως, ἐν χρόνῳ οὐδενὶ οὖσα, καὶ εἰς ταύτην δὴ καὶ ἐκ ταύτης τότε κινούμενον μεταβάλλει ἐπὶ τὸ ἑστάναι καὶ τὸ ἑστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ κινεῖσθαι.

limiting processes of transformation. Without the idea of an instant, we could not make much sense of the beginning or the end of any kind of movement or transition. Moreover, the *exaiphnēs* would be the turning point that links together the 'before and after' of any change. But for all that, it remains somehow atemporal.[13] The kind of punctuality needed for there to be instants seems to be lacking from time. The *Parmenides* refers to this as the "absurdity" of the sudden.[14] But where would we be without this absurdity, which enables us to talk of those decisive turning points that seem to articulate the ups and downs of temporal life?

Aristotle and After

Aristotle brings this Parmenidean paradox of the instant of change to bear upon the status of the 'now' in general. To understand how he does this, it will be necessary to sketch out his claims in the *Physics* about the relationship between a point and a continuum. The now (*to nun*), in Aristotle's eyes, is a limit that must be posited to make sense of the world of time and change, much like the *exaiphnēs* above. Yet Aristotle's version of the instant has no more place in the flow of time than did its predecessor. Only after we trace out this question of the now will we be able to return to Aristotle's proper definition of time, which is as flawed as Plato's, though in its own peculiar way.

In the fourth book of the *Physics*, Aristotle addresses the problem of what time is in a far more direct way than Plato ever did. By asking what time 'is,' he is setting out in search of what

---

[13] Cf. *Parm*. 156E-157A: "'Then the one, if it is at rest and in motion, must change in each direction; for that is the only way in which it can do both. But in changing, it changes instantaneously, and when it changes it can be in no time, and at that instant it will be neither in motion nor at rest.' 'No.' 'And will the case not be the same in relation to other changes? When it changes from being to destruction or from not-being to becoming, does it not pass into an intermediate stage between certain forms of motion and rest, so that it neither is nor is not, neither comes into being nor is destroyed?'" Aristotle, too, will see an incongruity between temporality and the instant, and he refuses to allow any sizeless points into time. See, e.g., *Physics*, Loeb 228 and 255, trans. P.H. Wicksteed and F.M. Cornford (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929-1934), VI.iii, VI.vi, VI.viii, and Sorabji, *Commentators*, 194. A recent appraisal of the problem can be found in Niko Strobach, *The Moment of Change* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

[14] *Parm*. 156E; "absurd" would be another way of rendering *atopos* (given above as "strange").

kind of being time might have. This brings him back to our familiar sequence of tenses. We speak of past and future things, of what was and what will be, but neither of these strictly 'are.' Aristotle here limits being in the strict sense to the present tense—*esti*.[15] If there is some part of time that 'is,' then, it would have to be present time. But what is present time? For Aristotle, it is obviously the now. Yet this now, if it is to be truly different from the past and the future, cannot have duration, since then it would be divisible into past and future. Therefore, the now must be sizeless.

Does that then suggest that time is the agglomeration of sizeless instants? That would seem absurd; for what would it mean to add sizelessness to sizelessness? Aristotle recommends that we think differently about the now's place in time. He offers up the model of the geometrical line, which is discussed at length in Book VI of the *Physics*.[16] A mathematical point, much like a now, is sizeless. No amount of points, arranged side by side, would constitute a true line. This is because a line is defined by its linearity, its pure continuity. The point serves merely to demarcate spans of a line by marking out a beginning and an ending.[17] In a sense, the point must presuppose the continuum which it divides up and measures out. Similarly, the now is a mere limit, a *peras chronou* retroactively projected onto the pure continuity of time.[18] Although we may suppose or even feel that we live in the now, Aristotle shows us that we in fact posit the now only in retrospect.

---

[15] On the problem of the tenses, see *Phys*. IV.x.218a.1. Plato had already noted that the *aiōn* is linked with *esti*, and that *ēn* and *estai* only come onto the scene with time. Aristotle would probably agree, but also sees a deeper problem here: if time is made up of "what has become" (*gegone—ouk estin*) and "what is going to be" (*mellei—oupō estin*), then how can time be (*esti*)?

[16] The whole account is laid out in *Phys.* VI.i. Sorabji, *Commentators*, 190, gives a clear translation of VI.i.231b.6-10: "Yet neither will point be next to point, or instant to instant, in such a way that length or time will be composed of these. For things are next to each other when there is nothing of the same kind between them, whereas between points there is always a line and between instants a time." This logic is applied more explicitly to the now, as a sizeless analogue of the *stigmē*, in *Phys.* IV.x.218a.19-20.

[17] Obviously, in spatial and geometric terms, this beginning and this ending are reversible. Unlike time and its arrow, a line does not necessarily 'flow' in one direction or another.

[18] *Phys.* IV.x.218a.25; cf. IV.xi.219a.15-20, IV.xi.219b.10-16 (*to de nun ton chronon metrei*), IV.xi.220a.1-5.

We can see from all this that Aristotle closely associates time with its measurement. With regard to the now, this is helpful, as he is able to draw our attention to the confusion that arises when it comes to disentangling time from our experience and measuring of it. Yet he himself is not thereby immune from such confusion. His definition of time is that it is the *arithmos kineseōs kata to proteron kai husteron*.[19] Time is the "number [or perhaps: calculability] of movement according to before and after." Aristotle managed to escape mistaking time for that which moves in time (such as the planets), but he still seems to identify it too closely with the human act of enumerating temporal change and motion. It is true that we use the measurement of time to make such calculations, but this presupposes the passage of time within which such motion and its measurement takes place. Something about this definition remains unsatisfying, at least if our interest resides in what time itself might be.

Aristotle's definition lived on in the debates of the various schools of Greek philosophy in the centuries following his death. Many pointed out the apparent circularity of the phrasing: time is explained by way of 'before and after,' both of which seem intelligible only with reference to a prior understanding of before-and-after in time. A stronger criticism was that Aristotle plainly mistook time for its measurement. For ancient interpreters of Aristotle, there was still much to be done in the philosophy of temporality. The question 'what is time?' still had yet to even be successfully asked. We get a rigorous reformulation of the problem in the middle of the third century CE, with the work of Plotinus. In *Enneads* III.vii, he frankly states that "time

[19] *Phys.* IV.xi.219b.2-3.

itself is not a measure."[20] Rather, as we have suggested, the measurement of motion by way of time is only made possible if time is already passing, even if only in the background.[21]

With Aristotle, we learned that the now is a retroactive limit to be used for the purpose of calculating time-spans. But with Plotinus and the other commentators, we are urged to bring this discovery to bear upon time itself, whatever that might turn out to be.[22] What we get when we combine the claims of Aristotle with those of his readers is the position that there is no now or instant in the passage of time itself. Even before the arrival of those we call Neoplatonists, the Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias had laid the groundwork for this line of thinking. "The now," according to him, merely "divides time potentially, that is, for thought."[23] The now does not emerge out of the flow of time, nor is that flow made up of a sequence of linked nows. To think through what time is, we will need to free ourselves from this unjustified presupposition

---

[20] Plotinus, *Enneads*, Loeb 442, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1967), III.vii.12.36-37: *ou gar ho chronos autos metron*.

[21] Plotinus was unsatisfied with accounts of time that described it as being itself movement or even as dependent upon movement. He wanted to explore the consequences of the fact that movement can be stopped while time cannot. See *Enn*. III.vii.7-8.

[22] While Plotinus broadly agrees with the Aristotelian account of how we measure things in time, he points out that this brings us no closer to the deeper question about *ti on esti chronos*. See *Enn*. III.vii.9.46-48: "And here the problem must arise how this abstract number is going to measure (time). Then, even if one does discover how it can, one will not discover time measuring but a certain length of time; and this is not the same thing as time." Time must be 'something else' than measurement; ibid., 12.42-44: "time will not be a measure of movement essentially (*kata to ti estin*), but it will incidentally (*kata sumbebēkos*), being something else first…." And the point is made still more strongly in 13.2-4: "time itself (*chronos autos*) cannot have something 'in which' it is, but it must first of all be itself what it is: that in which the other things move and stand still evenly and regularly." In a similar vein, Themistius, writing in Constantinople in the fourth century, harshly criticized the reduction of time to our "conception" (*epinoia*) of it in terms of measure and number. This denies time's real existence or hypostasis. For "nothing becomes a measure in nature, but measurement and numbering are our handiwork." (*in Phys*., 163.1-7; cf. Simplicius, *in Phys*., 766.13-19; all translated in Sorabji, *Commentators*, 203)

[23] This is a paraphrase of Alexander (who was active around 200 CE) given by Simplicius, perhaps the last of the traditional Greek Neoplatonists, *in Phys*., 748.21-7; Sorabji, *Commentators*, 209. It continues: "because of the flow of time, the parts of time cannot be exhibited separate from each other." Alexander also seems to have written a book *On Time*, which survived only via the ninth-century translation of Hunayn ibn Ishaq and the resulting Latin version made by Gerard of Cremona in the twelfth century. A helpful selection in English can be found in Sorabji, *Commentators*, 209: "The reason that we speak of time as a number, for all that it is single and evenly continuous, is that it is represented as a plurality in the mind. … The present instant is in time as a point is in a line. Yet the difference between them is that the point is in the line in actuality, while the instant is [in time] only by mental projection, not in actuality. … If time is continuous, it is only in the mind that it divides into years, months, and days. … [T]ime is a single in actuality, however divided in potentiality."

that the now is somehow the center of time. In the centuries after Alexander and Plotinus and even Augustine, other readers of Aristotle would make the claim that if the now did happen to exist, time itself would not.[24] So inimical is temporality to the instant.

For Plato, the instant was an absurdity. For Aristotle, it was a useful fiction. For both, it had no place in time whatsoever. A number of philosophers in late antiquity, seeking to integrate the philosophies of these two thinkers, brought this critique of the now to a head by doggedly pursuing the question of time itself. For some this was a fairly abstract discussion, useful mainly in the domains of physics and mechanics. For others, perhaps, the dissolution of the now had more unsettling consequences. Few, though, seem to have been as troubled by this way of thinking as Augustine would prove to be. For him, this confusion about the now was intimately bound up with pressing concerns about the possibility of personal transformation and historical change. But before we lay out exactly how Augustine came to grips with the disappearance of the present from time, there is one more figure from antiquity that deserves our attention.

The Many *Kairoi* of Paul of Tarsus

It would be an understatement to say that Paul comes at the issue of temporality from a different angle than did Plato, Aristotle, or their followers. His perspective is eschatological and

---

[24] In the sixth century, Damascius, one of the last great teachers at Athens in antiquity, and his student Simplicius continued the tradition of rigorously questioning the ways we talk about time. According to Simplicius, Damascius taught that if the present were real, there would be no time: "If you halt the river, the river will no longer exist. … By taking present time separately as being in actuality bounded by the nows on both sides, and stopping it all at once, one would have destroyed the form of time which has its being in becoming, as does process." (Damascius as recounted by Simplicius, *in Phys*., 798.5-26; Sorabji, *Commentators*, 210) Simplicius himself would add that "for things which have their being [*einai*] in coming to be, we cannot take anything all in one go, unless we do so merely in our own thoughts. For what was taken all in one go would have to be taken not as flowing [*reōn*], but as static, and not as coming to be, but as being [*on*]." (*in Phys*., 797.27-36; Sorabji, *Commentators*, 207) The outliers in antiquity were the Epicureans, whose atomism led them to posit some kind of atomized instants in real time. One way to preserve the possibility of a present instant was to posit a minimal time-span, which is either truly the smallest bit of time or merely the least perceptible stretch of time. Sorabji gives a general picture of how this was done in *Time, Creation, and Continuum* (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1983), 17-21, 371-376. These *minima* played a role in the cosmology of Lucretius *in De Rerum Natura*, and they have been critically appraised (in their Lucretian form) relatively recently by Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 266-279.

the purpose of his texts is missionary. He does not seek to give definitions of time or the instant, or to pontificate on possible ways of measuring motion. In his letters, temporality comes into play when the discussion turns to key events that shaped his life and those who believed as he did. His question would not be 'what is time?' but rather 'what time is it?' At stake in such a question was nothing less than the shortening lifespan of the world as we know it. Time, for Paul, was bounded by a definite end: the eschaton, the passing away of the form of this world. Everything else he had to say about time and its events—past, present, and future—was conditioned in advance by this urgent sense of looming finality.

The most crucial word for time in Paul's eschatological vocabulary was not *chronos* but *kairos*. We could define this term in many ways: season, occasion, opportunity, or just 'time.' But the kind of temporality it refers to is not just the empty flowing-away that seems to characterize every aspect of our world. *Kairos* is the appropriate time, the auspicious time, the right time—the 'time for' something. It carries a heavier burden than does *chronos*. Paul uses this more meaning-laden way of speaking about time at key points throughout his letters. For him, there is more than one event that earns the designation *kairos*. He writes of such cases in all three tenses, and at times even suggests ways of connecting past, present, and future *kairoi* together. By taking a look at some of the relevant passages from his letters, we should be able to get a sense of what kind of temporality this word is calling to our attention.

The most obvious example of a past *kairos* is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Paul's messiah. In Romans 5:6, Paul writes that "at just the right time [*kata kairon*], when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."[25] The timing of the death of God's Son was neither accidental nor meaningless. It occurred while humanity was still weak and lost. Paul here uses

[25] Romans 5:6. All citations of Paul in this section will be given in the NIV translation. The SBL edition of the Greek for this passage is: Ἔτι γὰρ Χριστὸς ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν ἔτι κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν.

the notion of the *kairos* to teach his readers that they did nothing to earn the sacrifice of Christ. On the contrary, it was given freely, and whatever improvement they experienced afterwards was only the effect of that event. Related to this use of *kairos* is the Pauline phrase *to plerōma tou chronou*. There is a "fullness" to the auspicious time at which the events of salvation history occur. This can again be contrasted to the relative emptiness of the concept of time as merely passing, without inherent significance. The fullness of time, however, comes along at certain divinely appointed intervals. In Galatians 4:1-5, Paul writes that even before the crucifixion, the very incarnation of Christ signaled the arrival of such a 'kairotic' *plerōma*.[26] Whether or not Paul would have made a firm distinction between the incarnation and the crucifixion as separate kairotic events is unclear, but both would seem to bear the salvific significance that *kairos* is meant to convey.

At the opposite end of Paul's temporal spectrum lay the eschaton. This was the absolute future, that horizon beyond which normal ways of talking about time would no longer make sense. There *chronos* reaches its limit. Yet Paul is not averse to designating the last times by way of *kairos*. In 1 Corinthians, he again uses *kairos* to drive home an aspect of his ethical teaching. If Paul was in many ways a moral reformer, he was also sensitive to the risk of pride and discord that could emerge in any community trying to overhaul its ethical standards. Accordingly, his

---

[26] Galatians, 4:1-5: "What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." / Λέγω δέ, ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ὁ κληρονόμος νήπιός ἐστιν, οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου κύριος πάντων ὤν, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ἐστὶ καὶ οἰκονόμους ἄχρι τῆς προθεσμίας τοῦ πατρός. οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι· ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἱοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν. Cf. the deutero-Pauline Ephesians, 1:9-10: "he [the Father] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." / γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

teaching valorized humility before others and patience with their moral failings. No one should feel entitled to rush to harsh judgments against another. Now was not the time for that. That kind of severe judgment could only be deferred to a time beyond time, when God could hand down his final reckoning. "Judge nothing before the appointed time [*pro kairou*]," was his advice, and "wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time [*tote*] each will receive their praise from God."[27] Here the *kairos* is postponed to the future in the most distant sense. It is the last time.[28]

Between the Christ-event and judgment lay a third kind of *kairos*, which Paul took to still be in effect when he was writing his letters. Here the term might best be translated as 'time of opportunity.' The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection had initiated a season of possibility for those who believed in them. These believers constituted a messianic remnant in this 'current season' or 'time of the now'—*ho nun kairos*.[29] Paul told the Corinthians that they were living in the "time of God's favour" as foretold by Isaiah.[30] In the afterglow of the messiah's arrival, they had an opportunity to repent and be saved which was not afforded to generations of their ancestors. Yet he also warned them not to be overly comforted by their situation, since this was also a time of urgency:

---

[27] 1 Corinthians 5: ὥστε μὴ πρὸ καιροῦ τι κρίνετε, ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος, ὃς καὶ φωτίσει τὰ κρυπτὰ τοῦ σκότους καὶ φανερώσει τὰς βουλὰς τῶν καρδιῶν, καὶ τότε ὁ ἔπαινος γενήσεται ἑκάστῳ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ.

[28] The issue of the apocalyptic *kairos* comes up in the letters to the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, Paul denies particular knowledge about the date of such a *kairos*, writing, "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates [τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν] we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." 2 Thessalonians 6-7 is a bit more ominous: "And now you know what is holding [the Lawless One] back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. [ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ] For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way."

[29] Romans 11:5: "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace." / οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ λεῖμμα κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος γέγονεν.

[30] 2 Corinthians 6:12: "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' [Isaiah 49:8] I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." / Συνεργοῦντες δὲ καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν μὴ εἰς κενὸν τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ δέξασθαι ὑμᾶς· λέγει γάρ· Καιρῷ δεκτῷ ἐπήκουσά σου καὶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σωτηρίας ἐβοήθησά σοι· ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας.

> What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short [*ho kairos sunestalmenos estin*]. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.[31]

The shortness of time and the passing of the world referred this present *kairos* of opportunity to the aforementioned future *kairos* of the eschaton.[32] As Paul wrote to the Romans, it was incumbent upon all to "understand" or "know" the *kairos*, and this meant waking up and becoming vigilantly aware of the finite temporality of the created cosmos.[33] There was much work to be done, but solace could be found in the fact that "our present sufferings [*ta pathēmata tou nun kairou*] are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."[34] All

---

[31] 1 Corinthians 7:29-31: τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν· τὸ λοιπὸν ἵνα καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες ὦσιν, καὶ οἱ κλαίοντες ὡς μὴ κλαίοντες, καὶ οἱ χαίροντες ὡς μὴ χαίροντες, καὶ οἱ ἀγοράζοντες ὡς μὴ κατέχοντες, καὶ οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι· παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

[32] Cf. Galatians 6:7-10: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." / μὴ πλανᾶσθε, θεὸς οὐ μυκτηρίζεται· ὃ γὰρ ἐὰν σπείρῃ ἄνθρωπος, τοῦτο καὶ θερίσει· ὅτι ὁ σπείρων εἰς τὴν σάρκα ἑαυτοῦ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς θερίσει φθοράν, ὁ δὲ σπείρων εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος θερίσει ζωὴν αἰώνιον. τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιοῦντες μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν, καιρῷ γὰρ ἰδίῳ θερίσομεν μὴ ἐκλυόμενοι. ἄρα οὖν ὡς καιρὸν ἔχομεν, ἐργαζώμεθα τὸ ἀγαθὸν πρὸς πάντας, μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως.

[33] Romans 13:11-12: "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." / Καὶ τοῦτο εἰδότες τὸν καιρόν, ὅτι ὥρα ἤδη ὑμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι, νῦν γὰρ ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἡ σωτηρία ἢ ὅτε ἐπιστεύσαμεν. ἡ νὺξ προέκοψεν, ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν. ἀποβαλώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους, ἐνδυσώμεθα δὲ τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός.

[34] Romans 8:18-25, in full: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." / Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς. ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαραδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται· τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκοῦσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ᾽ ἐλπίδι ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ. οἴδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν· οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς

previous history was culminating in this *nun kairos*, the presently experienced turning point between the past degradation of humanity and its dramatic restoration at the end of time.

For Paul, then, the times were already full of meaning. All these events happened precisely when they had to happen, as this was decided by God Himself. The community of believers was bound together in an age of transformation, held in tension between the first and second advents of their messiah. Pauline temporality thus involved a kind of stretching-out in the *nun kairos*, where faith called one back to the events of the past and hope brought one forward to the inevitability of the eschaton. It is in terms of this stretching-out between *kairoi* that we can read Philippians 3, which gives us something like a Pauline account of temporal experience. In this letter, Paul is cautioning the Philippians not to concern themselves with the observances practiced by contemporary Jews. He himself, he writes, has rejected all such traditions. Even the world itself, in its passing-away, has become like refuse in his eyes. That is the mindset his fellow believers should seek to adopt. Now this obviously makes Paul sound rather confident in his own ascetic achievements, and so he is quick to assert in humility that all this remains an ideal for him:

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward [*epekteinomenos*] what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.[35]

What Paul strains toward is the eschaton, when it will finally be time to end time. If it is a straining-forward, it is of course also a straining-upward, as Paul notes. This is because the

---

στενάζομεν, υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν. τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν· ἐλπὶς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς, ὃ γὰρ βλέπει τίς ἐλπίζει; εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν, δι’ ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.

[35] Philippians 3:12-14: Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ’ ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ. ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἐμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατειληφέναι· ἓν δέ, τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος, κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

orientation towards God cannot be relegated to the future alone. In this auspicious age, the believer had to face God in every aspect of temporal experience—in the impending eschaton, yes, but also in the ongoing life of the *ekklēsia*, and even in fidelity to the messiah's having already come and gone. The strangest part of this passage might be Paul's claim about "forgetting what is behind." Surely this could not mean forgetting the incarnation and the crucifixion and the resurrection. In the context of this passage, then, these words probably apply to the observances which Paul had once practiced with care, but now had come to mostly reject. Those were what had to be forgotten. The messianic events, however, would have to remain alive as active influences upon the mind of the believer. In that sense, then, we can read Philippians 3 as expressing what it was like to experience time as the turning-point between one set of world-altering events and the onset of an even more transformative *kairos*.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the intellectual background for Augustine's encounter with time was shaped by everything from cosmogonical mythmaking, through physical speculations about motion and change, to messianic messages of eschatological urgency. Augustine certainly read his Paul, and he probably picked up some Plotinus along the way, too. He most likely did not read vast swaths of Plato and Aristotle, let alone the works of a lesser figure like Alexander of Aphrodisias.[36] Even so, it seemed best to reference the *Timaeus*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Physics*, not to flesh out the character of Augustine's personal development, but rather to let ourselves think through the depths of the paradox of the present. With Plato, we witnessed the

[36] A case could be made that since Plotinus was a reader of Aristotle and of the tradition of commenting upon Aristotle, and since it is uncontroversial to say that Augustine read Plotinus, it is not irresponsible to place Aristotle and Augustine into the same field of discussion. If we are concerned about the historical connections between these authors, then, we might simply have to take *Enn.* III.vii as the (albeit frayed) thread that ties together the Peripatetic and the Bishop of Hippo.

primordial division between being and becoming, and how this led to confusion concerning the possibility of there ever being an instant of change. With Aristotle, we learned of the close association between the measurement of time and the status of the now, which turned out to be nothing but a retroactively posited limit. And with the interpreters of Aristotle, we saw an increased emphasis on the issue of time itself, as opposed to its measurement or the movement that occurs within it. This was a decisive shift, because it led thinkers like Alexander to assert more forcefully that the now was projected on to time, and that we should not let our tendency to mistake time for its measurement blind us to this absence of the present instant. All of these steps should help us to grasp what is happening when, in Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine will raise the specter of the non-being of the present.

With Paul, moreover, we began to get a sense of another dimension of Augustine's encounter with temporality. Here what was at stake was not a conceptual analysis of time itself, but rather an impassioned account of salvation history and temporal experience. Paul's temporality was, as we saw, conditioned by the messianic events to which he was faithful and the eschaton which he awaited in humble patience. Present life could only be some kind of ongoing tension between these two poles. We will be reminded of this tension when we come upon Augustine's lament over the *distentio* that the human soul undergoes in time. The visceral tone of such passages from Book XI owes more to Paul than it does to Plato or Aristotle. For all that, though, the philosophers do not fall silent. Augustine's account strives to preserve the subtlety of the question of time while emphasizing its stakes. For one he needs the books of the philosophers, for the other he needs the letters of Paul, but the text he comes to write is reducible to neither.

Chapter 2: The Force and Nature of Time

Book XI of the *Confessions* certainly does not announce itself as the rectification of ancient philosophies of time with Pauline eschatology. It comes as the third-to-last entry in a sequence of thirteen books, each of which contains Augustine's prayerful reflection on his own life and its place in God's creation. The first nine books tend to use moments in Augustine's personal history to make a broader point about our dependency on a primordial Creator, who has always spoken to us before we even think of speaking back to Him.[1] Augustine does this not by summing up the events of his life as if he were a historian of himself, but by confessing his recollections to the very God he now recognizes as his Creator. Even in the tenth book, which takes us deeper into the more perplexing problems of memory and selfhood, we still find Augustine relying heavily on second-person forms of address.[2] This language of praise, which he offers up to his Lord throughout the *Confessions*, is rife with Scriptural references. Passages from Paul, Isaiah, and especially the Psalms are woven into the text, to the point that it is often difficult to distinguish Augustine's voice from what he is citing.

In this light, we can see Book XI fitting into the overall flow of the *Confessions* quite effortlessly. It, too, is written as a confession of praise to God the Creator. And it, too, approaches its themes by way of a biblical guide. Or perhaps it is better to say that Book XI goes even further than that. With Books XII and XIII it shares the most explicitly exegetical form to be found in the whole work. All three books together interpret the opening lines of Genesis, a fitting project with which Augustine could end his reflections on what it is like to be created. If

---

[1] Jean-Luc Marion has sketched out this motif of *confessio* as response to an absolutely primordial word of God in his recent reading of Augustine, *In the Self's Place: the Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012), 11-55.

[2] James Wetzel, in his "Time after Augustine," *Religious Studies* 31, no. 3 (Sept. 1995), 341-357, nicely expresses the tone of this intermingling of philosophical explication with continuous praise, writing of Augustine as a "philosopher who philosophizes by praying." (345)

we want to begin where he began, then, we will have to join him in seeing what follows from the claim that: "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth."

It is not enough, however, to label Book XI as an exegetical exercise alone. As we shall see, certain questions about the temporal beginning of the universe led Augustine to reflect on themes that are not at all apparent in the first chapter of Genesis. In so doing, he touched upon many of the same problems that had troubled philosophers of time in the preceding centuries, whether he always knew it or not. The acuity he brings to his discussion of the difference between an eternal God and a temporal world allows his account to converse—if only in the mind of the reader—with the subtle speculations of Plato, Aristotle, and their interpreters. All the same, Augustine's questions are in service of grander goals. He wants to unfold the meaning of creation, which for him was a worthy undertaking, since it weighed on his understanding of eschatological salvation. His aims, we could say, remained more Pauline than Platonic.

Only a close reading of Book XI will allow us to attend to the peculiar nuances it brings into the discussion of temporality while, at the same time, preserving its exegetical framework. To see how we get from Genesis 1:1 to such Augustinian touchstones as the threefold present and *distentio animi*, we will need to go chapter by chapter. Starting with Chapters i-ix, we will get a sense of what Augustine understands the 'beginning' (*principium*) of all things to be—namely, the Word or Wisdom of God. From there we will see (in Chapters x-xiii) how misunderstanding the nature of this *principium* can lead to fatal errors in our interpretation of creation. This misunderstanding can only be overcome if we sharpen our distinction between the temporality of the created world and the eternity of its Creator. After first making clear that God's *aeternitas* should be taken as pure timelessness, Augustine then moves on to a long and exacting discussion of what time might be. He pursues his question doggedly from Chapter xiv

on through to a culminating lamentation in Chapter xxix, before ending with a return to the incomprehensible superiority of God's eternity. Throughout Book XI, Augustine strives to show us that, though we may think we already know what time is, our preconceptions stem from some basic confusions. The length of his discussion of temporality can suggest to us how much work is required in sorting these confusions out. Our approach to time, as that passage by which all things arise and fall away, turns out to be all bound up with ideas we have about temporal experience and the measurement of timespans.

This confusion leads us into paradox. The primary paradox that plagues our attempts to think through time is that of the present. In our pursuit of the question of time, we often begin with the triad of tenses: past, present, and future. Augustine subjects all three of these to intense scrutiny, trying to determine the sense in which they can be said to exist or not. While it is not too surprising to read his claims that the past and future 'are' not, it is striking to witness the degree to which he presses the present into non-being. In Chapters xiv-xv, especially, he accomplishes something of a destruction of the present, which is reduced in one chapter to something without being (xiv) and in the other to something without measurable span (xv). Yet, in Chapter xx, he acknowledges that the present seems to remain the core of our lives in time, and he tries to salvage it by way of his scheme of the threefold present. From a certain point of view, this takes the paradox of the present to its breaking point. Augustine first tears the present to pieces, then crowns it as the ruling tense in the temporal hierarchy. Yet, as we will see, Augustine introduces into his account several subtle distinctions between time, temporal experience, and the measurement of timespans. If our close reading pays heed to these distinctions at it goes, we should be able to attend to the way Augustine negotiates the paradox of the present. For all that, of course, Book XI remains an interpretation of Genesis 1. But within

the passages of that exegesis many questions open up, and the goal here is to see where those openings might lead.

Interpreting Creation

After so many books of confessions, Augustine begins the eleventh by acknowledging the absurdity of it all. He is confessing both his sins and his praises to a God who already knows these things in His timeless eternity. That is to say: God does not learn anything from Augustine's speaking and writing in time. Instead, He somehow has knowledge of Augustine's confessions beyond and apart from their temporal utterance. What point is there, then, in continuing to pour out reflections and prayers? Despite this confusing state of affairs, Augustine does not bring his work to an abrupt end. Rather, he asserts that he has confessed because God "wanted" him to.[3] And he will continue to confess, because the will of God can be neither frustrated nor refuted.

Even if it is the will of God to confess to Him and praise Him, does that mean it is wise to use up so many "drops of time" writing down all those confessions?[4] If God does not need to learn through human speech or thoughts, the case will presumably be the same for human letters. Yet Augustine says that he is composing these books in service of "brotherly love."[5] And so he is, in a sense, writing for God, but he is doing so by writing for others. His confessions are to God but for his readers. Augustine therefore 'asks' for the grace which he may or may not have already received, for only by this gift can he hope to unlock the "opaque" passages of Scripture

---

[3] Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.i.1: *ecce narravi tibi multa, quae potui et quae volui, quoniam tu prior voluisti ut confiterer tibi, domino deo meo, quoniam bonus es, quoniam in saeculum misericordia tua*. The corrected Latin is taken from James J. O'Donnell's online edition of and commentary on the *Confessions*, which can be found at: http://www.stoa.org/hippo/. The *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* version (vol. 27), ed. Luc Verheijen (Brepols, 1981), has also been consulted, alongside the archaic Loeb edition, trans. William Watt (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1912). All English translations from the *Confessions* are my own.

[4] For drops of "time" or "times" (*stillae temporum*), see *Conf.* XI.ii.2.

[5] *Conf.* XI.ii.3: *domine deus meus, intende orationi meae et misericordia tua exaudiat desiderium meum, quoniam non mihi soli aestuat, sed usui vult esse fraternae caritati*.

that will help him understand God's message.[6] He has already confessed his sinful delights; now he wants to confess the Law of God as it is communicated through the Scriptures. As usual, Augustine expresses this in an address to God Himself: "Let me confess to you whatever I will have found in your books."[7] This appeal to the divine can occur only through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, so that Augustine and his fellow Christians might begin to comprehend the mysteries of Scripture.

Very early on in Book XI, then, we can see that an exegesis is about to begin. Augustine next makes clear that the specific passage under discussion is Genesis 1. "Let me hear and understand," he prays, "how 'in the beginning you made heaven and the earth.'"[8] Though he makes his request in humility, it must be admitted that his choice of which Scriptural mystery will be revealed is not the humblest possible. He is asking about the creation of all things. With Scripture as his authority, Augustine already believes in God as a Creator. What he does not yet comprehend is 'how' such an account of the making of heaven and earth could be true. He believes but he does not yet understand. In search of understanding, he must try to interpret Genesis according to the standard of truth within him, by which he determines whether claims (in speech or in writing) are true or false.[9] Yet this truth is God, and so Augustine's plea for God's grace is in fact a plea for aid from the truth itself.

---

[6] *Conf.* XI.ii.3: *largire inde spatium meditationibus nostris in abdita legis tuae, neque adversus pulsantes claudas eam. neque enim frustra scribi voluisti tot paginarum opaca secreta*… / "Enlarge the space for our meditations on the secret of your law. Don't close it off against those who knock. For it was not in vain that you wanted so many pages of opaque secrets to be written."

[7] *Conf.* XI.ii.3: *confitear tibi quidquid invenero in libris tuis*.

[8] *Conf.* XI.iii.5: *audiam et intellegam quomodo in principio fecisti caelum et terram*.

[9] Augustine's use of an inner standard of truth here is related to the argument of his earlier dialogue *De Magistro*. There he explored the possibility that, strangely enough, we do not learn anything from others. Rather we are triggered by others to learn according to the truth within ourselves. This holds to some degree for Scriptural truth, as well, at least if we are to believe *Conf.* XI.iii.5. Even if Moses were present, telling us the story of Genesis, we would still have to consult this inner standard in order to determine whether we truly believed him or not. Yet, as Augustine clarifies in XI.viii, the Gospel plays the role of an external word of God, which causes us to go and seek out the word of truth within. Truth is therefore two-sided, and it involves the interplay between the truth that

Having laid out the need for some governing standard of truth, Augustine returns to "the heaven and the earth" in a manner reminiscent of the contemplative vision he shared with his mother at Ostia.[10] This time around, though, his reflection takes its lead from Scripture, rather than from reflective contemplation alone.[11] Again, heaven and earth 'announce' to Augustine that they are made, because they are changeable. How they currently are is not how they used to be. From this, Augustine infers that they could not have made themselves, but that their unstable mutability must be derived from something else:

> See that the heaven and the earth are. They cry out that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whatever is not made, however, and yet 'is' has nothing in it which was not so before (that is what it means to be 'changed' or 'varied'). Heaven and earth cry out, too, that they did not make themselves: "And so we are because we were made. This means that we 'were not' before we 'were,' so that we could not have been made by ourselves."[12]

In other words, heaven and earth were created. They were created, Augustine believes, by God. But since He gave all things in heaven and earth their being, His kind of being could never be the same as theirs. Compared to God, all such things 'are not.'[13] Temporal mutability is a deficient kind of being, at least in relation to its divine source.

So far, Augustine has established to his satisfaction that heaven and earth are created, and that their creator was the God of Scripture. The inquiry then returns to the question of how such

---

happens upon us from without and the truth we seem to find inside. It seems to be the inner Word which here serves as the *principium*—the beginning point on our path of thinking, down which we can wander or err. Yet we can only 'learn' by returning—again through thinking—to this point of departure.

[10] *Conf.* IX.x.

[11] O'Donnell points out this distinction between the two kinds of reflection on createdness in his online commentary on *Conf.* XI.iv.6.

[12] *Conf.* XI.iv.6: *ecce sunt caelum et terra! clamant quod facta sint; mutantur enim atque variantur. quidquid autem factum non est et tamen est, non est in eo quicquam quod ante non erat: quod est mutari atque variari. clamant etiam quod se ipsa non fecerint: 'ideo sumus, quia facta sumus. non ergo eramus antequam essemus, ut fieri possemus a nobis.'*

[13] *Conf.* XI.iv: *nec ita pulchra sunt nec ita bona sunt nec ita sunt, sicut tu conditor eorum, quo comparato nec pulchra sunt nec bona sunt nec sunt*. / "But they are not beautiful or glorious in the same way as you. They 'are' not in the same way as you, their composer, are. Compared to you, they are not beautiful or good. Compared to you, they 'are' not at all."

creation occurred. Augustine rules out the possibility that God, like a human craftsman, took some raw material and made it into something else. There was, in fact, no such pre-existent material with which he could build.[14] Augustine's God was not merely a demiurge; He created heaven and earth *ex nihilo*. And, again, how did He do this? "You spoke, then, and they were made," confesses Augustine, "You made them in your word."[15] God's divine speech somehow allows him to create without needing anything external with which to create.

This, in turn, raises the question of what God's way of speaking could possibly be. In the gospels, Augustine finds a quite plain example of God saying something: "This is my beloved son."[16] But this was heard by human ears. That means it was uttered temporally, with syllable following upon syllable over a certain span of time. Such a scheme, however, presupposes a world of bodies and movements that take place in time. This could not be the kind of speaking that brought all bodies—and their movements, and their time—into being in the first place. Therefore, Augustine holds that this evangelical utterance of God was accomplished by means of a temporal intermediary and is unlike the originary words of God, by which He created the heaven and the earth. God's primordial way of speaking would then have to be in some way atemporal or 'eternal,' unlike speech as we commonly conceive it.[17] Instead of unfolding in time,

---

[14] Augustine does have a kind of 'prime matter,' but he emphasizes that God made this unformed matter, too. In *Conf.* XII, "heaven and earth" can be read, respectively, as the ethereal heaven of heavens (the home of the angels) and this primordially unformed matter. *Informis materia* is discussed at some length from XII.iii to XII.viii. Yet neither of these is at issue quite yet. We must only keep in mind that, for Augustine, even prime matter was created *ex nihilo* by the God of Scripture.

[15] *Conf.* XI.v.7: *ergo dixisti et facta sunt atque in verbo tuo fecisti ea*.

[16] *Conf.* XI.vi.8: *hic est filius meus dilectus*. This phrasing was used twice in Matthew: first at Jesus' baptism, (3:17) then at the transfiguration. (17:5)

[17] *Conf.* XI.vi.8: *et haec ad tempus facta verba tua nuntiavit auris exterior menti prudenti, cuius auris interior posita est ad aeternum verbum tuum. at illa comparavit haec verba temporaliter sonantia cum aeterno in silentio verbo tuo et dixit, 'aliud est longe, longe aliud est. haec longe infra me sunt nec sunt, quia fugiunt et praetereunt; verbum autem dei mei supra me manet in aeternum.'* / "And the exterior ear announced these temporally made words of yours to the aware mind, whose interior ear was lent to your eternal word. The mind, however, compared these temporally sounded words with your word in eternal silence and said, 'One is far, far different from the other. These

syllable by syllable, God's Word is always saying all that it says.[18] Heaven and earth and everything in them are always being said in that Word, even though those things arise and pass away in time.[19] The Word is eternal, but what it creates is not. It is the timeless saying of the form of temporality. But how does the temporal arising and passing away of all things relate to that timeless Word out of which it comes? Augustine acknowledges that this is a hazy area, but he ventures to suggest a connection by way of the imagery of debt and calculation:

> I see it in one way or another, but I do not know how to express it, except to say that everything which begins to be and ceases to be begins to be and ceases at the time when it is thought that it ought to begin or cease. This thinking takes place in the eternal calculation, where nothing begins or ceases. This itself is your Word, which is the beginning, since it also speaks to us.[20]

The timeless Word somehow contains the 'temporal indebtedness' of all things—the time they receive and the time that seems to be taken away from them. It is not just a linguistic *verbum*, but also an account or *ratio*, a reckoning-up of the many things of the world according to their due measure.

---

spoken words are far beneath me. They 'are' not, because they flee and go away. But the word of my God above me remains in the eternal.'"

[18] *Conf.* XI.vii.9: *vocas itaque nos ad intellegendum verbum, deum apud te deum, quod sempiterne dicitur et eo sempiterne dicuntur omnia. neque enim finitur quod dicebatur et dicitur aliud, ut possint dici omnia, sed simul ac sempiterne omnia; alioquin iam tempus et mutatio et non vera aeternitas nec vera immortalitas*. / "And so you call us to understand that word, that god who is in your presence, God. That word is always being said. Through that word, all things are always being said. For in that word, what was said does not come to an end as something else is being said, so that everything can be said. Rather, all things are always said at once. Otherwise there would already be time and change, not true eternity or true immortality."

[19] Augustine has learned about the inevitability of time and change throughout the created world, and this 'learning' has been a painful and profound process, as Augustine's repetitive language seems to suggest; see XI.vii.9: *hoc novi, deus meus, et gratias ago. novi, confiteor tibi, domine, mecumque novit et benedicit te quisquis ingratus non est certae veritati. novimus, domine, novimus, quoniam in quantum quidque non est quod erat et est quod non erat, in tantum moritur et oritur*. / "I have learned this, my God, and I give thanks. I have learned this, I confess to you, Lord God, and whoever is not ungrateful for certain truth has learned this with me and praises you. We have learned this indeed, Lord. We have learned this, since whatever is not what it was 'dies,' and whatever is what it was not 'arises.'" This language of arising and passing away harkens back to *Conf.* IV, and this connection will be pursued in the next chapter.

[20] *Conf.* XI.viii.10: *utcumque video, sed quomodo id eloquar nescio, nisi quia omne quod esse incipit et esse desinit tunc esse incipit et tunc desinit, quando debuisse incipere vel desinere in aeterna ratione cognoscitur, ubi nec incipit aliquid nec desinit. ipsum est verbum tuum, quod et principium est, quia et loquitur nobis*. The use of "*debuisse*" (from *debere*) could imply that temporal beings in some sense 'owe' their beginning and end like a debt. This debt is tallied up in some timeless accounting (*ratio*). "Ought" would here be less 'normative' (they 'should' pass away) than economic (they owe it to pass away).

Still, even after this clarification about the relation between Word and world, Augustine reiterates how confusing the originary and creative saying of God remains for us. That God did create heaven and earth through his Word strikes him as true, even though he cannot fully understand how it possibly could be true. It strikes him as true because wisdom (*sapientia*) has come into him from some kind of interior otherness—that is, it feels like it comes from within himself, yet he is not really conscious of its source. Yet it is there nonetheless. Augustine identifies this wisdom with the *principium* of all things, the stable truth to which we return after wandering down the path of thinking. And this guiding wisdom seems to be the same *principium*—God's Word—through which all things were made: "How magnificent your works are, Lord! You made all things in wisdom!"[21] Augustine thereby recognizes that he is trying to learn about the Word, Wisdom, and Beginning (through which all things were created) by recourse to the Word, Wisdom, and Beginning (through which humans come to learn the truth of whatever they might happen to know).

A More-Than-Eternal Eternity, A Less-Than-Present Present

Augustine has thus far affirmed his belief in Genesis 1:1 and clarified to some degree the role of the Word (as *ratio*, *sapientia*, and *principium*) in creation. He now turns to a conventional criticism against the passage he has been interpreting ever so minutely. There are some, he says, who are so "full of their own oldness" that they stubbornly question this very first sentence of Scripture.[22] In response to the claim that God made heaven and earth "in the beginning," these critics try to get back before this absolute starting-point in order to ask: "What was God doing

[21] Psalm 104:24, cited by Augustine in *Conf.* XI.ix.11. On the *principium* lying at the beginning and the end of the errant path of thinking, see XI.viii, cited above.
[22] The criticism is likely of Manichean provenance, though there are formal parallels elsewhere in ancient philosophy. O'Donnell's online commentary points to an Epicurean criticism of the Stoics that follows a similar tack.

before he made the heaven and the earth?"[23] The short version of Augustine's answer to this is that, since time was created alongside the world, there was no 'before' creation. God does not just direct the seasons; He made time itself.[24] Yet there is also a second, more subtle line of questioning addressed by Augustine here. If creation is an eternal decision in the will of God, and if that means that this creating is always happening (due to God's everlasting activity), then how come the created world is not itself everlasting? If God is always creating, then how come heaven and earth will not always be?

Contrary to some accounts, Augustine does not respond to such questions with mere scorn.[25] To ask about creation is not necessarily to hurl oneself into the pits of hell. On the contrary, Augustine thinks that it is fair to discuss such things, but also that we must be careful and precise as we do so. The problem with the "old men" above is that they speak vaguely, since they do not understand the distinction between the time of this world and the eternity of God. He expresses apparent sympathy for these misguided people, who try to speculate on time and eternity even though they are caught up within temporal instability:

---

[23] *Conf.* XI.x.12: *quid faciebat deus antequam faceret caelum et terram?*

[24] On this, see *Conf.* XI.xiii.15. To God, Augustine affirms: *idipsum enim tempus tu feceras, nec praeterire potuerunt tempora antequam faceres tempora. si autem ante caelum et terram nullum erat tempus, cur quaeritur quid tunc faciebas? non enim erat tunc, ubi non erat tempus*. / "You had made time itself. Times could not pass away before you made time. If, moreover, there was no time before heaven and earth, why is it asked what you were doing then? For there was no 'then' when there was no time." And again in XI.xiii.16: *omnia tempora tu fecisti et ante omnia tempora tu es, nec aliquo tempore non erat tempus*. / "You made all times and you are before all times. At no time was there no time." The phrase "*tempus idipsum*" (from xiii.15) is striking, and suggests that Augustine has something more in mind in Book XI than just the subjective experience of time.

[25] See *Conf.* XI.xii.14, where Augustine says that it is better to ask such questions than to mock those who do with taunts about hellfire: *ecce respondeo dicenti, 'quid faciebat deus antequam faceret caelum et terram?' respondeo non illud quod quidam respondisse perhibetur, ioculariter eludens quaestionis violentiam: 'alta,' inquit, 'scrutantibus gehennas parabat.' aliud est videre, aliud ridere: haec non respondeo. libentius enim responderim, 'nescio quod nescio' quam illud unde inridetur qui alta interrogavit et laudatur qui falsa respondit*. / "Now see how I respond to the one who says, 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' I do not respond in the jokey way that a certain somebody was cited as responding. Evading the blow of the question, he said, 'God was preparing hell for those who probe into such deep things.' To see is one thing; to laugh is another. I do not respond in this way. I would more gladly respond by saying 'I do not know what I do not know' than have he who asks after deep things laughed at while he who responds falsely is praised."

> They don't understand how those things are made which are made through you and in you. Yet they try to know eternal things, but their heart is still flying around in the past and future movements of things. Their heart is still empty. Who will hold it and fix it in place, so that it can stand a little bit and grasp, just a little bit, the splendor of eternity, which is always 'standing?' So that it can compare eternity with the times, which never stand, and see that they are incomparable? So that it can see that a long time does not become 'long' except out of many movements[26] which pass away and are not able to be stretched out all at once? [*simul extendi non possunt*] And that in the eternal, moreover, nothing passes away, but rather the whole is present? That no time is truly present as a whole? [*nullum vero tempus totum esse praesens*] That everything that has passed away is thrown forth out of what will be, and that everything that will be follows out of what has passed away? And that everything that has passed away or will be is created by and runs out of that which is always present? Who will hold the human heart so that it stands and sees how standing eternity, which neither has passed by nor will be, says over and over again[27] both the times to come and those which have passed away?[28]

The questions of the old ones, Augustine is saying, are predicated on a false association between eternity and everlastingness. They presume that the eternity of God's creative Word should correspond to some 'eternity' or everlastingness in what that Word creates. But this is to misinterpret eternity. God's Word is not eternal because it somehow goes on forever. Rather, it is simply timeless. And the created world, as we can see along with Augustine, is not timeless. It is thoroughly pervaded by time. Temporality conditions every aspect of the created. Thus Augustine emphasizes the incessant mobility of all things, including humans and their hearts and

---

[26] O'Donnell and Watt both have *motibus* (movements) here, whereas the CCSL has *morulis* (from *morula*, the diminutive of *mora*; i.e. 'a little span or delay') in order to cohere with a *quae* in the following part of the sentence. O'Donnell is followed here, because Augustine usually takes *morae* to be divisible. The present, if it had a *mora*, would be divisible into past and present, for example. And since the point here is to talk about something that cannot be stretched out, *mora* does not seem to work.

[27] *Dictet*, from *dicto*, *-are*. This is not necessarily 'dictate' in the sense of 'order' or 'command.' Rather, it is more likely 'dictate' in the sense of 'say repeatedly' for the purpose of transcription.

[28] *Conf.* XI.xi.13: *nondum intellegunt quomodo fiant quae per te atque in te fiunt, et conantur aeterna sapere, sed adhuc in praeteritis et futuris rerum motibus cor eorum volitat et adhuc vanum est. quis tenebit illud et figet illud, ut paululum stet, et paululum rapiat splendorem semper stantis aeternitatis, et comparet cum temporibus numquam stantibus, et videat esse incomparabilem, et videat longum tempus, nisi ex multis praetereuntibus motibus qui simul extendi non possunt, longum non fieri; non autem praeterire quicquam in aeterno, sed totum esse praesens; nullum vero tempus totum esse praesens; et videat omne praeteritum propelli ex futuro et omne futurum ex praeterito consequi, et omne praeteritum ac futurum ab eo quod semper est praesens creari et excurrere? quis tenebit cor hominis, ut stet et videat quomodo stans dictet futura et praeterita tempora nec futura nec praeterita aeternitas*?

minds, all caught up in the flux of a time that is never fully present. Even everlasting creation—lasting for the longest of times—would still be made up of a sequence of movements, all of which would pass away just as they arise, without any present extension or the ability to stand still. Motion is here purely fluid, without instantaneous points or stable units. The same goes for the time in which motion takes place. This kind of temporality, then, could never apply to God's timelessness, which lies beyond the everlasting flight of unstable mobility.[29]

Augustine is at this point fairly satisfied that he has revealed his opponents' lack of an adequate distinction between time and eternity. Now, however, he turns his critical gaze on himself. Does he have any firmer a grasp on what time is than they did? Temporality seems quite familiar to him, and yet he cannot lay out precisely what time is or how it works. Here, in Chapter xiv, we find one of the most frequently cited passages from Book XI:

> What, in fact, is time? Who could explain this easily and briefly? Who could comprehend this in thought or offer up a word about it? And yet what do we mention more familiarly and knowingly in speech than time? Of course we understand it when we say it, as we do when we hear it from another. What, then, is time? If no one asks me about it, I know. If I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I don't know.[30]

---

[29] Cf. *Conf.* XI.xiii.16: *anni tui non deficient: anni tui nec eunt nec veniunt, isti enim nostri eunt et veniunt, ut omnes veniant; anni tui omnes simul stant, quoniam stant, nec euntes a venientibus excluduntur, quia non transeunt. isti autem nostri omnes erunt, cum omnes non erunt. anni tui dies unus, et dies tuus non cotidie sed hodie, quia hodiernus tuus non cedit crastino; neque enim succedit hesterno. hodiernus tuus aeternitas*. / "Your years do not run out. Your years do not come and go. Our years, though, come and go until they all come. Your years stand all at once, since they 'stand.' They do not 'go' and are excluded from 'coming,' because they do not pass away. Our years, however, will all be when all will not be. Your years are one day, and your day is not every day but today, because your today does not withdraw to make room for a tomorrow, nor does it come after a yesterday. Your today is eternity." A discussion has formed around this conception of eternity and how it relates to God's ways of knowing (and pre-knowing) what happens in time. See here: Katherin A. Rogers, "Eternity Has No Duration," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), 1-16, and "St. Augustine on Time and Eternity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1996): 207-223, as a critique of Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981), 429-458, who seem to err in the direction of the 'eternity as infinite duration' model in their readings of Plotinus, Augustine, and Boethius. See also William Lane Craig, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will," *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984), 41-63.

[30] *Conf.* XI.xiv.17: *quid est enim tempus? quis hoc facile breviterque explicaverit? quis hoc ad verbum de illo proferendum vel cogitatione comprehenderit? quid autem familiarius et notius in loquendo commemoramus quam tempus? et intellegimus utique cum id loquimur, intellegimus etiam cum alio loquente id audimus. quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio*.

Yet, all the same, he does see that things arise and pass away. Some things are gone, others are still to come.[31] These categories seem to correlate to the temporal tenses of past and future. But neither of these seem to tell us what time 'is,' because neither past nor future things 'are,' and so pastness and futurity also do not seem to have to do with 'being' proper. What then about the present time? Augustine is a bit troubled by this particular category or tense. If present time truly 'is' in a way that past and future time are not, then does that mean it 'is' without arising or passing away? Is it, in fact, pure being or 'is-ness' without any vulnerability to temporal passage? If that were the case, the present would be eternity. Augustine puts the point quite strongly:

> In what way, then, 'are' those two times, past and future, when the past 'is' no longer and the future 'is' not yet? The present, moreover, if it were always present and did not pass away into the past, would no longer be time, but eternity. In order that there be time, then, the present is created for this reason [*ideo*]—in order to [*quia*] pass over into the past.[32] How, then, can we also say that this present 'is,' whose cause [*causa*] for being is that it will not be? That is to say: is it that we cannot say in truth that time 'is,' unless because it tends to not-be?[33]

Arising and passing away reveal to us that there is no eternity to the world we live in. To posit a present quasi-eternity within time would be incoherent. The present, if there is one, would have

---

[31] *Conf.* XI.xiv.17: *fidenter tamen dico scire me quod, si nihil praeteriret, non esset praeteritum tempus, et si nihil adveniret, non esset futurum tempus, et si nihil esset, non esset praesens tempus*. / "Yet in good faith I say that I 'know' about time, because if nothing passed away, there would be no 'past' time. And if nothing came along, there would be no future time. Likewise, if nothing 'is,' then there would be no present time."

[32] A more fluid but looser translation of this line might be: "In order that there be time, then, the present is constituted by its passing into the past."

[33] *Conf.* XI.xiv.17: *duo ergo illa tempora, praeteritum et futurum, quomodo sunt, quando et praeteritum iam non est et futurum nondum est? praesens autem si semper esset praesens nec in praeteritum transiret, non iam esset tempus, sed aeternitas. si ergo praesens, ut tempus sit, ideo fit, quia in praeteritum transit, quomodo et hoc esse dicimus, cui causa, ut sit, illa est, quia non erit, ut scilicet non vere dicamus tempus esse, nisi quia tendit non esse*? This passage poses some difficulties to the translator, especially the line about the present 'being made for the reason that it pass into the past.' The above rendering hews as closely as possible to the *ideo-quia* structure, which most likely means: 'for this reason / namely, the following reason.' This then ties into '*causa*' as cause in the following clause. The 'cause' of the present's 'creation' is quite literally its own not-being. In addition, the closing *tendit* could be given in many ways that would more fully express the imagery at work. Time could be said to 'strive' or 'stretch into' or 'reach out' into non-being. 'Tend' is preserved here in order to highlight the possible connection to other *tendere*-words later on, such as *distentio*, *attentio*, *intentio*, and *extentio*.

to always be passing away in time. In other words, it would always have to be in the process of coming-not-to-be. It is "created" (*fit*) in order to not be. Its "cause" is to not be. Time then seems to be a passage through several modes of non-being, and so the guiding question—what is time?—begins to look incoherent as well. By starting us down this tortuous path, Augustine is marking out present time as a problem for further development later in Book XI.

Time, Measurement, and Temporal Experience

Yet if time plays out as this relation between modes of non-being, why then do we speak of magnitudes of time? How can time be long or short, if it tends not to be at all? Here we come to Augustine's long discussion of the measurement of time, which can draw us in the wrong direction if we do not read it carefully enough. It will turn out that this detailed account of the problems of measuring will ultimately be in service of a broader point about the relationship between time and temporal beings. We should therefore keep in mind the fact that Augustine is going to connect this section to something of greater importance, though we can still learn much about the problem of measurement along the way.

When we speak of short or long times, then, we seem to be speaking of time-spans as if they were beings. 'A time' is long or short. Here we can see the semantic flexibility of the Latin *tempus*, which is not so unlike our own malleable word 'time.' There can be 'time itself,' as the pure passage that we cut up into tenses of past, present, and future; but there can also be 'times,' spans within that overall passage, which we mark out and measure as long or short. Such spans can be as short as a line from a hymn or as long as the circuit of a star. But what, precisely, are we talking about when we assign a short or long time to such motions? Augustine's first goal is to show us that we are not really talking about time proper here, but about the mind's measurement of delineated spans of time. He calls these *morae* or 'delays.' These spans or

delays can only be measured as long or short by way of *memoria*. But why would this be the case?

If we try to look for something like magnitude—length or shortness—in time itself, we come up short. For Augustine, neither the past nor the future can qualify as being long, because (as we saw above) neither of these modes 'are' at all. 'Long' here means 'enduring.' Duration cannot be entirely relegated to the past or the future, because there must be a phase when something is currently enduring. If we want to talk about measuring duration, then, we have to again look to the present. As Augustine puts it: "Let us see, then, human soul, whether present time could be long. For you have the gift of experiencing and measuring spans [*moras*] of time."[34] But after pointing his readers to the present as the only conceivable site of duration, Augustine turns the tables on us. It is here, in Chapter xv of Book XI, that he intensifies his destruction of the present. He starts by calling attention to the relativism involved in all our talk about present spans of time. The present year or month or day or hour can always be whittled down further into smaller and smaller pasts and futures. Within each minute there are always some seconds that are past and some that are to come. From this it is implied that even within one second there will always be possible spans of time that are past or to come:

> Look at how the present time, which we found to be the only thing that ought to be called 'long,' has with difficulty been reduced to the space of one day. But let us break it apart even further. One day is not present as a whole. It is filled out with all twenty-four daytime and night-time hours. The first hour holds the rest as 'going-to-be,' the last as 'having-passed-away,' and, of course, one of the middle hours would hold those before itself to be past and those after itself to be future. Even an hour itself passes by little bits which flee away. Whatever part of it has flown away is past; whatever remains for it is future.[35]

---

[34] *Conf.* XI.xv.19: *videamus ergo, anima humana, utrum praesens tempus possit esse longum, datum enim tibi est sentire moras atque metiri*. It is worth noting here that Augustine attributes the power of experiencing and measuring delays to the human *anima*, whereas later he will formulate temporal experience in terms of the *distentio* of the *animus*. There does not seem to be any meaningful difference between these two words for soul in Book XI.
[35] *Conf.* XI.xv.20: *ecce praesens tempus, quod solum inveniebamus longum appellandum, vix ad unius diei spatium contractum est. sed discutiamus etiam ipsum, quia nec unus dies totus est praesens. nocturnis enim et diurnis horis*

If we want to be rigorous about our definition of the present, then we must not allow ourselves any lazy locutions that treat as present that which is still divisible into past and future. Augustine draws from this the following consequence:

> If we conceive of something temporal which could no longer be divided into any tiny little parts of movements—that alone is what could be called 'present.' And yet it flies immediately from future to past, so that it is stretched out by not even the smallest pause. For if it is stretched out, it is divided between past and future. But the present has no span.[36]

Yet if the present is totally without pause (*morula*, the tiniest delay) or quasi-spatiality (*spatium* or span), then how can it have duration? That is: how can it be long or short? Apparently, it can be neither. This finding about the magnitude of temporal duration is quite in keeping with the previous chapter of Book XI, in which Augustine determined that the three tenses of time referred to multiple modes of non-being. As far as time proper is concerned, there does not seem to be anything like enduring stability in its constitution. In ontological terms, the present is caused by its own not-being. In terms of measurement, the present is nothing that can be measured.

After doubly destroying the present in Chapters xiv and xv of Book XI, Augustine reminds us that we nevertheless do still "experience intervals of time and compare them with one another."[37] Time-spans are still a part of temporal experience, even though they do not seem to

---

omnibus viginti quattuor expletur, quarum prima ceteras futuras habet, novissima praeteritas, aliqua vero interiectarum ante se praeteritas, post se futuras. et ipsa una hora fugitivis particulis agitur. quidquid eius avolavit, praeteritum est, quidquid ei restat, futurum.

[36] *Conf.* XI.xv.20: *si quid intellegitur temporis, quod in nullas iam vel minutissimas momentorum partes dividi possit, id solum est quod praesens dicatur; quod tamen ita raptim a futuro in praeteritum transvolat, ut nulla morula extendatur. nam si extenditur, dividitur in praeteritum et futurum; praesens autem nullum habet spatium*. Henceforth, '*spatium*' will usually be translated as 'span,' since speaking of a 'space of time' makes sense only part of the time in English. In this passage we also find *morula*, the word which Verheijen interposed into *Conf.* XI.xi.13 above. Here, however, the 'briefest of delays' makes much more sense, since it is being used to show how a proper present could not consist even in the most minimal *mora*.

[37] *Conf.* XI.xvi.21: *et tamen, domine, sentimus intervalla temporum et comparamus sibimet et dicimus alia longiora et alia breviora*.

be a part of time. The question of time-spans must then be related to the way we measure such durations as we experience them. Given the lack of a stable or enduring present, this can only happen if we demarcate some time-span as it is "passing away" in our experience. But how would this be possible? Augustine is wading into murky waters, and he confesses as much to his God: "I am asking, Father, not affirming."[38] While the terms 'past' and 'future' do indicate 'not currently being,' it cannot be denied that people talk of past and future things, and that some of these things are held to be truer or more real than others. There must be some way in which past and future things 'are,' even if pastness and futurity can never 'be' in the strict sense, simply in virtue of the mode of temporal non-being they designate. In order to clarify the situation, Augustine points out that even when we speak of past or future things as 'being there' or 'present,' we are speaking imprecisely. What is 'there' is rather an image of what was or will be, not the thing itself. Past things are mediated to us by our memory, future things by our expectations.[39]

Having introduced memory and expectation in order to qualify the way in which past and future things can be said to 'be,' Augustine now works these two aspects of the soul into a triadic structure of temporal experience. This is the vaunted threefold present:

> Neither future nor past things are, and it is not correct to say: "there are three times—past, present, and future." Rather, it would perhaps be more correct to say: "there are three times—the present time concerning what has passed away; the present time concerning what is 'there;' and the present time concerning what will be."[40] These three somethings are in the living soul. I do not see them anywhere

---

[38] *Conf.* XI.xvii.22: *quaero, pater, non adfirmo*.
[39] See *Conf.* XI.xviii. Chapter xix goes on to address the issue of prophecy, which seems to be an especially secure kind of expectation. In such cases, God either gives prophets images about future things, or allows them to see present signs of future things. Augustine is not sure which, but he is sure that prophecy occurs by the grace of God.
[40] This translation has been adopted in order to highlight the experiential dimension to the divisions Augustine is drawing out. In order to think these divisions through, it is helpful to break down the words he is using and to see what kind of connections (between the three tenses and the three kinds of temporal objects) were possible in the Latin. *Praesens*, "present," consists of *prae* (near, by, in front of) and *sens* ('being,' the present participle of *esse*). *Praeteritum*, "past," consists of *praeter* (beyond, away) + *itus* ('having gone,' past participle of *ire*). *Futurum* is the

> else. The present time having to do with past things is memory. The present time having to do with present things is watching-over [*contuitus*].[41] The present time having to do with future things is expectation.[42]

The problematic triad of tenses that has been plaguing Augustine since Chapter xiv can here be seen for what it really is—a categorization of temporal experience, rather than of time itself. The scheme of 'past, present, and future' is not a coherent way of speaking about time proper, because it leads to absurdities about time's non-being. By saying that past, present, and future really pertain only to the 'present' or ongoing experience of the soul, Augustine is not saying that time itself just is the soul. As he already said, time was created along with the universe, and its passage continues according to the wisdom of God. Nor is he saying that there is no distinction between what has yet to arise and what has already passed away. The mutable flux of creation does not collapse into some quasi-eternity of the soul's threefold present. On the contrary, this aspect of Augustine's argument is meant as a critique and qualification of the 'past-present-future' or 'tensed' way of talking about time.[43] In this chapter, he is showing us how such tense-categories apply properly to temporal experience rather than time itself.

---

neuter of the future active participle of *esse*—i.e., 'what is going to be.' By paying careful attention to the constitution of these words in the Latin, we can hopefully avoid falling back into ready-made assumptions about what exactly distinguishes past, present, and future from one another.

[41] *Contuitus* is an odd word for Augustine to introduce here. It could just mean "sight" or something equally benign. Still, Augustine often chooses his words carefully, and so there is always the chance that he is suggesting something more than *visio* here. In *contuitus*, the affix *con-* (with, together) is set before *tueri*, a deponent verb meaning 'to watch, look, guard, protect, keep.' (The word—*con-tueor*, *contuitus*—is built on the same model as *in-tueor*, *intuitus*, intuition.) It remains to be determined what the substantive difference might be between, say, intuition and 'contuition.' Is *contuitus* what emerges after time and the present have been critically rethought? Rather than focusing (*intentio*) or looking-at (*intuitus*), *contuitus* might be a kind of 'seeing' that takes account of the human inability to 'focus,' to direct intentionality towards one thing and hold it there. *Contuitus* would then be a seeing (or watching-over) on the basis of *distentio* (*animi*), as opposed to a totally rehabilitated *intentio*.

[42] *Conf.* XI.xx.26: *nec futura sunt nec praeterita, nec proprie dicitur, 'tempora sunt tria, praeteritum, praesens, et futurum,' sed fortasse proprie diceretur, 'tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris.' sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non video, praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio*.

[43] Michael Futch, "Augustine on the Successiveness of Time," *Augustinian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002), 17-38, has argued against this interpretation. He does not think that Augustine is telling us that humans merely project 'past, present, and future' onto time, which is in itself not segmented. His argument hinges on his claim that time is "anisotropic," which we might gloss as 'asymmetrically linear.' He is saying that, for Augustine, time really does

Once he has established a correlation between the three tenses and the three modes of temporal experience, Augustine is able to return to the possibility of measuring "times as they pass by." This had sounded like a plausible solution to the question of what we measure when we measure timespans. But now Augustine reiterates the problem of the non-being of the three temporal modes or tenses:

> And yet how do we measure the present time, when it has no span? We measure as it passes by. But when it has passed by, it is not measured.[44] For what could be measured would not be. But where is time passing 'from,' 'through,' or 'to' as we measure it? Where is it coming from if not the future? What is it passing through if not the present? What is it passing over to if not the past? Time passes, then, from what is not yet, through what lacks any span, and into what no longer is. But what do we measure if not some span of time?[45]

According to the threefold schema, we would seem to have access to past and future time-spans only by way of the present. But, as usual, it turns out that the present approaches nothing. It simply has no span. Where then could this measurable span come from, if not from the past, present, or future? Even after the introduction of the threefold present of temporal experience, the problem of the nothingness of the present proves resilient.

At this stage, Augustine takes a step back. He wants to remind us of the stakes of this interrogation of temporality. Intensifying his language of intertwined praise and lament, he begs

---

move in one direction, and it is not a human invention to say that the future is at one end and the past is at the other. While he is right to emphasize this linearity in Augustine's description of time, Futch seems to miss what is being said about past, present, and future in Book XI. Even if time is linear, such that there is a non-reversible distinction between earlier and later, that does not mean that 'past, present, and future' are firm categories within the flow of time. It could be the case that humans project a threefold schema onto a temporal flux that is linear but non-segmented in itself. In other words: time is indeed successive, but its successiveness is not delineated into clear stages (e.g., past, present, and future) until experienced by a human mind. This description—though phrased in extremely anachronistic language—seems closer to what Augustine is getting at in Book XI.

[44] There is an awkward switch here between *metimur* and *metitur*/*metiatur*. *Metior* is a deponent verb, which means that attempts to use it in the passive sense (as Augustine seems to be doing here) are befuddling. The CCSL edition notes that some versions repeat "*metimur*" instead.

[45] *Conf.* XI.xxi.27: *praesens vero tempus quomodo metimur, quando non habet spatium? metitur ergo cum praeterit, cum autem praeterierit, non metitur; quid enim metiatur non erit. sed unde et qua et quo praeterit, cum metitur? unde nisi ex futuro? qua nisi per praesens? quo nisi in praeteritum? ex illo ergo quod nondum est, per illud quod spatio caret, in illud quod iam non est. quid autem metimur nisi tempus in aliquo spatio?* The Latin *spatium* would be most literally 'room' or 'extent.' With regard to time, it often means 'span,' 'interval,' or 'period.'

God the Father, through Christ His Son, to give him the delight of uncovering that which he has already been given to love. The delight he seeks is the meaning of Scripture, the search for which has occasioned all these heady reflections on this "tangled-up riddle."[46] His hope for illumination and his confusion concerning the mystery of time are woven together with his lamentation over what it is like to live in time:

> This is my hope. I live for this: the contemplation of the Lord's delight. And look, you have made my days old, and I do not know how. Yet we say time this and time that, times this and times that. "How long ago did he say this?" "How long ago did he do this?" "I haven't seen that for a long time!" "This syllable is twice as long as that simple, short one." We say these things, we hear these things. We understand and are understood. They are the most obvious and usual sayings, and yet they are so concealed.[47]

Lurking behind the confusion of time with times is a whole host of unsettling challenges. The more subtle our distinctions get between time and temporal experience, the more questionable the status of our temporal experience becomes. The specific points Augustine is making in his account of temporal measurement are still bound up with issues of the most pressing urgency, from creation to eschatology. He appreciated the stakes of these just as much as Paul did, and those stakes continue to motivate his inquiries here. Yet Augustine refuses to let the mounting heap of distinctions bring his questioning to a halt. Instead, he prays for the grace that might enable him to carry on and seek just a little further into the mysteries of time.

***Distentio*: The Force and Nature of Time**

Calling upon his God in confession, Augustine hopes that he will have the mental strength to face down these intellectual challenges posed by the question of time. He

---

[46] *Conf.* XI.xxii.28: *implicatissimum aenigma*.

[47] *Conf.* XI.xxii.28: *haec est spes mea, ad hanc vivo, ut contempler delectationem domini. ecce veteres posuisti dies meos et transeunt, et quomodo, nescio. et dicimus tempus et tempus, tempora et tempora: 'quamdiu dixit hoc ille,' 'quamdiu fecit hoc ille' et: 'quam longo tempore illud non vidi' et: 'duplum temporis habet haec syllaba ad illam simplam brevem.' dicimus haec et audimus haec et intellegimur et intellegimus. manifestissima et usitatissima sunt, et eadem rursus nimis latent…*

acknowledges that there were others who tried to walk this path before him, albeit with varying results. He refers most harshly to those who associate time a little too closely with the movement that occurs within time. The first to be criticized are those who define "the times" (*tempora*) as the motion of heavenly bodies.[48] Of course, he must admit that timespans—such as seasons, days, and so on—are indeed measured by way of the sun and the stars. But he refuses to conclude from this that time is reducible to these guiding motions.[49] While motion occurs in time, time is something other than the movements by which we chop it up into measurable spans.[50] He goes on to clarify what he is after: "I want to know the force and nature of time. I am talking about the time by which we measure the motion of bodies and say that that motion is, so to speak, twice as long as some other motion."[51] Invoking Scripture as his authority—in this case, the book of Joshua, in which the sun stands still while time runs on—Augustine is declaring quite strongly his interest in time itself. This is an important distinction, since his discussion of measurement and of temporal experience only makes sense if we grasp that he was talking about time itself in addition to measured spans of time and modes of experiencing time. Any account of Book XI that would reduce it to an account of temporal experience or measurement would then be missing out on what Augustine's stated interest is: the "force and

---

[48] *Conf.* XI.xxiii.29.

[49] This is not always emphasized by readers of Augustine. Many are swayed by certain discussions of the *tempora* in the *City of God*, where Augustine tends to use that term to denote seasonal time-spans or even 'ages' of history. And these calendrical measures are, of course, acknowledged by him to be inextricably bound to the motions of the heavenly bodies. This does not, however, mean that the "force and nature" of time will be so reducible. Still, many scholars have continued to read the plural *tempora* as if it always meant the same thing as *tempus* in the singular, which has led to ongoing confusion about the relationship between time and movement in Augustine. See, e.g., Futch, "Augustine on the Successiveness of Time," 33-34, where he seems amenable to the idea that time is 'made' by motions, and so elides the distinction between *tempus* and *tempora* in his interpretation of a phrase like *tempora fiunt motionibus*. If we distinguish between time-as-time and times-as-seasons, we could admit that the seasons are 'produced' by the motions of the planets, whereas time itself is not produced in such a manner.

[50] Cf. Plotinus on this, who was especially sensitive to the fact that time itself was 'something else' than its measurement or the movements within it. See *Enn*. III.vii.7-8, 12.

[51] *Conf.* XI.xxiii.30: *ego scire cupio vim naturamque temporis, quo metimur corporum motus et dicimus illum motum verbi gratia tempore duplo esse diuturniorem quam istum*.

nature of time." If we want to understand this *vis* and *natura*, as well as our place within it, we will have to be careful to avoid mistaking our own temporal selves for time itself.

Augustine then appropriately cautions himself (and, by extension, his readers) as he introduces his decisive concept of *distentio*. If time is not reducible to movements or measurement, then how are we to talk about it? "I see," confesses Augustine, "that time is some kind of stretching-out [*distentio*]. But do I see it? Or do I appear to be seeing myself? You, light and truth, will show me."[52] He cannot tell if he is getting a look at time itself, or if he is instead conjuring up an image of time on the basis of his own temporal experience. To sort out the difference between "seeing time" and "seeing myself," Augustine will have to consult the truth that God is, both within and without.[53] By his own admission, he is still carrying out his confession throughout this book:

> I confess to you, Lord, that I still have no idea what time is. I confess to you again, Lord, that I know that I say those things in time. I have been talking for a while already, and that 'while' is not a while unless it is a span of time. Yet how do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Perhaps I just do not know how to say what I know? Look at me, I do not even know what I do not know! Look, my God! I am right in front of you! See that I am not lying. What I am saying—this is how it is in my heart. You will light my lamp, Lord. My God, you will shine through my darkness.[54]

---

[52] *Conf.* XI.xxiii.30: *video igitur tempus quandam esse distentionem. sed video? an videre mihi videor? tu demonstrabis, lux, veritas*. Augustine's term *distentio* comes from *distendere*, 'to stretch apart,' which is in turn made up of *di(s)-* ('apart, asunder, in two') and *tendere*, 'to stretch, exert, strain, reach out.' Words based on *tendere* tend to proliferate in Augustine, and especially so here in Book XI, where we have *intentio*, *extentio*, and *attentio*, in addition to this odd yet pivotal use of *distentio*.

[53] See *Conf.* XI.xxiv.31, where Augustine reaffirms that time is not reducible to the motion of a body by saying to his God: *iubes ut approbem, si quis dicat tempus esse motum corporis? non iubes. nam corpus nullum nisi in tempore moveri audio: tu dicis. ipsum autem corporis motum tempus esse non audio: non tu dicis*. / "Do you judge that I should approve if someone says that time is the motion of a body? You do not judge that. For I hear that no body is moved except in time. You say this. But I do not hear that time is the motion of a body. You do not say this." Here we see that Augustine is holding the question of time up to the double standard of the Word: the external Word of Scripture (e.g., Joshua's standing sun) and the internal Word of truth (e.g., his arguments are confirming for him that time is something other than motion).

[54] *Conf.* XI.xxv.32: *et confiteor tibi, domine, ignorare me adhuc quid sit tempus, et rursus confiteor tibi, domine, scire me in tempore ista dicere, et diu me iam loqui de tempore, atque ipsum diu non esse diu nisi mora temporis. quomodo igitur hoc scio, quando quid sit tempus nescio? an forte nescio quemadmodum dicam quod scio? ei mihi, qui nescio saltem quid nesciam! ecce, deus meus, coram te, quia non mentior! sicut loquor, ita est cor meum. tu inluminabis lucernam meam, domine, deus meus, inluminabis tenebras meas*.

For all of his clarifications about measurement and temporal experience, Augustine confesses, he is still no closer to saying what time itself is. He cannot further name its force and nature. We can in no way assume that all of the foregoing arguments about how to measure time have contributed one bit to the grander problem of what time could be, or of what it is like to live in the wake of the dead present.

Despite this, Augustine soldiers on with his inquiry into measurement. If time is not motion, then the measure of time must be something other than the measure of motion. Yet if spatial extension is not what is at issue here, there must be something that is being temporally 'stretched out,' with the result that measurement of something becomes possible. Such 'stretching-out' would be what Augustine calls *distentio*. "On these grounds," he writes, "it has become clear to me that time is nothing other than a stretching-apart. But I do not know what 'thing' is being stretched apart, if it is not, strangely, the soul itself!"[55] Here, then, we stumble upon the much-discussed *distentio animi*. We should not rush to read this *animi* as a subjective or possessive genitive, in which case *distentio* would somehow belong to the soul.[56] Temporal

---

[55] *Conf.* XI.xxvi.33: *inde mihi visum est nihil esse aliud tempus quam distentionem; sed cuius rei, nescio, et mirum, si non ipsius animi. quid enim metior, obsecro, deus meus?*

[56] The prevalence of this 'subjective genitive' reading of *distentio animi* can be seen in the diverse range of interpretations that have taken *Conf.* XI as a subjectivist or psychological account of time. We cannot simply attribute this psychologizing to either philosophical appropriators or Augustine specialists. The error has been made by both sides. On the part of the philosophers, Richard Sorabji, in his otherwise careful collation of ancient philosophies of time, absent-mindedly attributes Augustine's "psychological" approach to a "more thoroughgoing idealism" about time than his Greek predecessors. (See *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 29-30.) Bertrand Russell's brief take, in *Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 212, offers us a similarly shallow characterization. Yet more intensive readers of Augustine, who were more broadly attuned to the orientations of his thought, have also rushed too quickly to the subjective interpretation. Subjectivism about time is attributed to Augustine by Etienne Gilson in *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York: Octagon, 1960), 189-196, and by R.A. Markus, "Marius Victorinus and Augustine," *Cambridge History of Late Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge UP, 1967), 402-405. John M. Quinn, in "Four Faces of Time in Augustine," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 26 (1992), 181-231, hedges his bets by cleanly separating out distinct kinds of temporality—e.g., subjective, physical, historical—in Augustine's works. His attention to subtle distinctions is well warranted, but he may have been too liberal with his scalpel. If we detach these characterizations of time too fully, we risk losing sight of how the theme of temporality runs throughout much of Augustine's oeuvre, providing us with a way to read his diverse works alongside one another.

stretching-out is not so much the project or achievement of the soul as it is the way the soul must live, since it lives in time.[57] *Distentio animi* is perhaps better read along the lines of an objective genitive. *Distentio* happens. It is the force and nature of time. What is the thing [*res*] it happens to? The soul—*animus* is the object of this transitive force.

If *distentio* were to be the subjective achievement of the soul, this would contradict Augustine's earlier demonstrations on a number of fronts. First of all, it would be difficult to rectify this with his affirmation that time and the universe were created simultaneously.[58] If time is reducible to the projective expansion of a soul, then would we not need some soul whose expansion would constitute the time of the universe? And would the multiplicity of human souls, each accomplishing *distentio* and therefore 'making' time, lead to a multiplication of times throughout the world? Only with great effort can such questions be forced on to Book XI, and they often lead to speculative connections between Augustine's account of time and the

---

[57] Variations on the reading of *distentio* as a project of the soul can be found in a range of different approaches to Augustine interpretation. Michael Mendelson, in his "*Venter Animi* / *Distentio Animi*: Memory and Temporality in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2000), 137-163, takes *distentio* to be the mind's "attempt" (152-153) to spread out and take in the flux of the world, so as to "digest" it in a process of spiritually transformative consumption. An Hadotian attempt to highlight the practical potential of reading Augustine can be found in Mateusz Strozynski, "Time, Self, and Aporia: Spiritual Exercise in Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009), 103-120. Strozynski's blatantly subjectivist reading of *Conf.* XI paints it as a spiritual guidebook, leading us towards the cultivation of some kind of meditative state; see p. 119: "Augustine, therefore, leads the reader to leave entirely the stream of thoughts and perceptions, along with time, and stay, with God's help, in a stable, attentive presence (*contuitus*), which can only see present reality." Common to approaches such as these is a sense that Augustine is giving us some kind of comforting solution. But, while his account of time is not utterly destitute of optimism, it is coloured by a pervasive tone of lamentation. And even though there is hope in this lament, it would be too much to say that Augustine intends for everything to be 'all right' at the end of Book XI.

[58] This tension is articulated nicely in Donald L. Ross, "Time, the Heaven of Heavens, and Memory in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991), 191. Unfortunately, the tension might be more an invention of the current scholarship than a concern intrinsic to Augustine. This possibility has not prevented the publication of a number of articles attempting to rectify this 'contradiction' in Augustine, often by recourse to intriguing but sometimes outlandish conceptual frameworks (both ancient and modern). Ross, 191-192, has done the service of arranging some of these earlier attempts into five categories, most of which try to offer novel ways of balancing out the subjective and the objective in Augustine's account of time. He places Gilson and Markus firmly in the subjectivist category. As examples of 'objectivist' readings of Augustine, he names Wilma Gundersdorf von Jess, "Augustine: a Consistent and Unitary Theory of Time," *New Scholasticism* 46 (1972), 337-351; Robert Jordan, "Time and Contingency in St. Augustine," *Review of Metaphysics* 8 (1955), 394-417; and Hugh M. Lacey, "Empiricism and Augustine's Problems about Time," *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968), 219-245.

possibility of a world-soul[59] or the anteriority of angelic consciousness (serving as the Christian proxy for such a world-soul).[60] More important for our purposes, though, is that taking *distentio animi* as an objective genitive fits more smoothly with Augustine's claims—made earlier in Book XI itself—concerning the non-being of the three modes of time, which would seem to afford the soul no firm platform or time-unit upon which to collect itself and project its present outward. If we instead adopted the subjectivist reading, there would have to be some kind of stable now-unit from which the soul could initiate the expansion of its own presence, and this would contradict the results of the reflections found in Book XI. But there is no indication here that Augustine intends such a possibility, and so we need not posit a contradiction where none seems necessary. Reading *animi* as an objective genitive thus allows us to fit his articulation of *distentio* in with his earlier destruction of the present, which has in no way been overcome here.

Returning to the problem of measurement, Augustine makes a surprising discovery. Having thoroughly established that the soul does not measure time-spans that are past, future, or

---

[59] The world-soul thesis is put forth most expressly in Roland Teske, "The World-Soul and Time in St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983), 75-92. Teske returned to this theme in his *Paradoxes of Time in St. Augustine* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1996). Criticism of Teske can hardly be rooted in any attack on his erudition; he is a skilled reader of ancient texts, Augustine included. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any reliance on a world-soul in Augustine's works on time, and so it would be difficult to ground *Conf.* XI on that particular concept.

[60] The best formulation of this argument for angelic consciousness as the prime temporal mover can be found in Katherin A. Rogers, "St. Augustine on Time and Eternity." Rogers, 215, begins with a contradiction between two supposedly Augustinian claims: (1) that time is merely the spreading-out of the soul, and (2) that time is produced by some motion. This contradiction would have to be spurious, if it turns out that time is instead (1) that which stretches the soul out and (2) not produced by motion but created simultaneously with it. Rogers, however, presses on with her argument by positing that it is the angelic mind which, like a world-soul, initiates temporal movement with its thoughts in some primordial stage of creation. As support, on p. 216-217 she brings in some not inconsequential passages from *Conf.* XII (on the *caelum caelorum*, the stable quasi-temporality in which the angels unvaryingly praise their maker) and *De Genesi ad Litteram* I.ix.17, where Augustine seems to grant the angels some kind of mediating role in creation. On p. 217, she makes clear that her angelic model is intended to supplant Teske's world-soul model: "Augustine's position becomes clearer when we recognize that on the question of the origin of time Augustine ascribes to his Heaven of Heavens exactly the role Plotinus gave to the World Soul." Ultimately, Rogers' goal is to defend what she takes to be Augustine's main claim—namely, that *distentio animi* (taken in the subjective sense) quite literally 'creates' time. (see p. 219-222) For reasons discussed above, this does not seem like a tenable reading. Rogers' work does point to some intriguing aspects of Augustine's angelology, but the claim she is ultimately trying to defend cannot be found in Book XI. Futch, 37, makes the similar claim that "time is the discursivity of angelic thought and is therefore grounded on a distention of mind," although he disagrees with Rogers on other aspects of Augustine's account of time.

present (i.e. span-less), Augustine now also argues that we cannot measure times 'passing' either. This is because proper measurement needs a beginning and an ending: "we measure the interval itself, from some beginning up to some end. On account of this, a voice which has not yet come to an end cannot be measured."[61] This *inter-vallum* must lie between two 'walls' or limits, and the second limit can only be demarcated if whatever is being measured (e.g., a voice) has come to an end. This means that measurement can only be retroactive. But, as Augustine said, this does not mean that we measure 'past times,' properly speaking, because those timespans are simply gone. Rather, we measure impressions (*affectiones*) of whatever took up such a span, as they are retained in our *memoria*.[62] Our access to timespans is thus always mediated by this delayed effect of affective memory. Augustine reiterates this point about retroactivity again and again, here using the example of spoken syllables:

> How could I measure the long [syllable] itself while it is present, when I can only measure what has ended? But its ending is a passing away. So what is it that I measure? 'Where' is the brief syllable by which I measure the long? Where is the long one that I am measuring? Both have made a sound, flown away, passed away—they no longer are. Yet I measure them and I respond confidently (however much the stimulation of the senses can be trusted) that this one is twice

---

[61] *Conf.* XI.xxvii.34: *ipsum quippe intervallum metimur ab aliquo initio usque ad aliquem finem. quapropter vox quae nondum finita est metiri non potest*. Augustine's assertion that measurement must be a retroactive demarcation of an *intervallum* (a 'camp,' that is, a 'between-the-walls' or '-boundaries') is reminiscent of Aristotle's discussion of the measurement of time in Book IV of the *Physics*. The measuring of time must presuppose two limit-points (two 'nows,' if we follow Aristotle in characterizing *to nun* as a *peras*), but these limit-points cannot themselves be parts of time, since temporal continuity allows for no real points. The measurement of time thus appears to be the projection of something onto time, and is thus of dubious value when it comes to determining 'what time is,' as Plotinus points out. We thus cannot measure time-spans as we live through them, since we do not in any way live through the 'limit-points' which would demarcate a measurable amount of time.

[62] *Conf.* XI.xxvii.36: *in te, anime meus, tempora metior. noli mihi obstrepere, quod est; noli tibi obstrepere turbis affectionum tuarum. in te, inquam, tempora metior. affectionem quam res praetereuntes in te faciunt et, cum illae praeterierint, manet, ipsam metior praesentem, non ea quae praeterierunt ut fieret; ipsam metior, cum tempora metior. ergo aut ipsa sunt tempora, aut non tempora metior*. / "I measure times in you, my soul. Do not drown me out with your noise! That is: do not drown yourself out with the disturbances of your feelings. Let me repeat: I measure times in you. When I measure times, I measure the feeling which passing things make in you. When those things have passed away, this feeling stays. I measure this present feeling, not those things which have passed away so that this feeling might come. Therefore, either 'times' are this feeling, or I do not measure times." Again, we should not draw the conclusion from that this that *tempus idipsum* is nothing more than one's feelings. Only measurable time-spans turn out to be affectively mediated, due to the retroactive nature of temporal experience as here described.

> as much as the other, that is, in its time-span. I can only do this because they have ended and passed away. And so I do not measure that which no longer is, but rather something which remains fixed in my memory.[63]

This passage should remind us of Aristotle's account of temporal measurement and its reception in later antiquity. There we found that spans of time could only be demarcated through limits that were projected onto the temporal continuum by the mind. The now itself was reduced to just such a retroactive limit. Even though he probably never read Aristotle's *Physics,* Augustine is making a formally similar move here, in that he emphasizes both the present's lack of a span and the retrospective nature of temporal measurement.

Memoria, of course, works in concert with *contuitus* and *expectatio*. Yet it seems to bear the brunt of the labor when it comes to temporal measurement, given the necessity there of a retrospective view.[64] But if we take temporal experience in general into view, then we can see that all three modes play a role in the affective scheme of past, present, and future:

> The soul awaits, attends, and remembers. What it awaits passes over into what it remembers by means of what it pays attention to. Who, then, would deny that things which are going to be are not yet? And yet already, in the soul, there is an awaiting for things that are going to be. And who would deny that things that have passed away no longer are? And yet still, in the soul, there is a memory of past things. And again, who would deny that present time lacks any span, because it passes in a point? And yet attention—through which what will be there passes through to absence—endures.[65]

---

[63] *Conf.* XI.xxvii.35: *ipsamque longam num praesentem metior, quando nisi finitam non metior? eius autem finitio praeteritio est: quid ergo est quod metior? ubi est qua metior brevis? ubi est longa quam metior? ambae sonuerunt, avolaverunt, praeterierunt, iam non sunt. et ego metior fidenterque respondeo, quantum exercitato sensu fiditur, illam simplam esse, illam duplam, in spatio scilicet temporis. neque hoc possum, nisi quia praeterierunt et finitae sunt. non ergo ipsas quae iam non sunt, sed aliquid in memoria mea metior, quod infixum manet*.

[64] As *Conf.* X makes abundantly clear, the role of *memoria* is expansive for Augustine. *Memoria* is not just the receptacle of sensory images, but is also the engine for their manipulation and transformation. (X.vii) It thus takes on many of the functions we would usually assign to 'mind' in a broader sense, from our access to numbers (X.xii) and educational disciplines (X.ix) all the way to knowledge of self and God. (X.xvii, xxiv-xxvii)

[65] *Conf.* XI.xxviii.37: *nam et expectat et attendit et meminit, ut id quod expectat per id quod attendit transeat in id quod meminerit. quis igitur negat futura nondum esse? sed tamen iam est in animo expectatio futurorum. et quis negat praeterita iam non esse? sed tamen adhuc est in animo memoria praeteritorum. et quis negat praesens tempus carere spatio, quia in puncto praeterit? sed tamen perdurat attentio, per quam pergat abesse quod aderit*. The words *expectare* and *expectatio* are given above as 'to await,' because Augustine's description is not limited to expectations of fully defined futures. 'Expectation' thus seemed too pre-laden here, while 'awaiting' makes more

It should be clear by now why Augustine must reduce the experience of the past and the future to the experience of images of the past and the future.[66] Such affective mediation, however, also seems to be at play in the notion of the present. In light of the force and nature of time, the present "passes in a point"—that is, it lacks a span and so is nothing more than the possible distinction between past and future. It is nothing more than a quasi-Aristotelian limit that someone might posit. In the past-present-future scheme of temporal experience, however, Augustine salvages the present as enduring *attentio*. Even though the notion of a punctiliar now or time-unit has been destroyed, there is still an aspect of the soul's affective life in time by which it attends to other temporal beings.[67] Such attending would achieve little by itself,

---

sense given the finite and fragile scope of the soul's view of the future. Augustine's use of *adesse* in the last sense also shows that what is primarily at stake here is not a present *punctum*, but rather the experiential 'presence' (or being-there, *ad-esse*) of some intentional object, as it passes from the future into the past.

[66] On the role of affective mediation in temporal psychology as a whole, see Augustine's *De Trinitate* XI.ix.16 and XI.xi.18, where he describes the proliferation of images and images-of-images in the different affective levels of the soul. He does so by combining three such levels—roughly: perception, memory, and imagination—with the Scriptural trio of measure, number, and weight. (cf. Wisdom 11:21) It turns out that each affective level has a certain 'measure' that it begins with, as well as a numerical multiplicity of images that can be made out of that measure. The weight is the driving force that guides the proliferation of such images.

[67] Some would disagree that Augustine has truly done away with the present as a time-point. Thomas L. Humphries, for example, in his "Distentio Animi: Praesens Temporis, Imago Aeternitatis," *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009), 87, claims that for Augustine "time is a *distentio animi* collected in the present moment." On p. 81 of the same work, Humphries writes that Augustine reduces "time to a non-spatial point." This interpretation holds that Augustine retracts the past and the future into the point-like present, thereby 'filling it up' and 'making present' by way of the gift of *memoria*. Yet this argument is said to be non-subjective, because there is a 'real' present point out there in time itself, beyond any specific human soul that might be experiencing it. Humphries, 94, backs up this claim by referring to book XI of *De Trinitate*, where it is explained that one visible thing "can be responsible for multiple images without the images differing in such a way that 'there is no room for distinguishing them.' Thus, we can say that while there may be many individual *animi* which perceive the present, there is no room to distinguish various times among them. That is, the present is public. One present is shared by many *animi*, and, according to Augustine, the images formed of the present cannot be said to differ." This argument, however, fails to distinguish between 'the present' (as a real point in time) and 'a present object' (as anything that should come before a perceiving mind in time). While the latter can be there enduringly, there is nothing about it that necessitates a 'point-like' temporal existence. In *De Trin*. XI—especially in XI.xi, but throughout much of the book—Augustine is explaining how a variety of perceptual images can appear to different perceivers out of the same perceived object. He is not advocating some punctiliar present, and it is unclear how his argument there can be transposed on to the matter of the present in *Conf.* XI. Seeing the same present object is not the same as experiencing the same 'point in time.' Even if one wanted to preserve some kind of point-like present in time, moreover, this would not be adequate grounds for the claim that "time" itself is reduced to "a non-spatial point." If we are going to be clear about what is at stake in *Conf*. XI, we will have to be diligent in distinguishing between time and temporal experience, and therefore between a really present point and an ongoing or 'present' phase of consciousness.

however, and it gains efficacy only in relation to *memoria* (which makes possible the determination of time-spans) and *expectatio* (which makes possible the projection of future possibilities and their potential time-spans). Of course, as the scheme makes clear and as we have hinted at above, this salvaging of the present for temporal experience does nothing to save the shattered idol of the present instant in time itself.

The Perseverance of the Lamentation of Time

Although he has seemingly solved the problem of temporal measurement by correlating the three tenses of time to the structure of temporal experience, Augustine takes a somewhat jarring turn into intense lamentation as his book draws to a close.[68] The neat picture he has sketched out, connecting *memoria* to *contuitus* and *expectatio*, has in fact solved little when it comes to his ongoing sense of the difficulties of living in temporal multiplicity. As he again confesses:

> Look at how my life is a stretching-apart. [*distentio*] Your right hand picked me up and brought me to my Lord, the human mediator. He mediates between you, who are One, and us, who are many. We are in many things and we pass through many things. And You brought me to Him, so that I might take hold of Him by whom I was already held, so that I might be gathered up from my aged days and chase after one thing, having forgotten all that has passed away—so that I might chase not after those things that are going to be and pass away, but after those things that are 'before'...[69]

---

[68] Paul Ricoeur was especially attentive to the persistence of this lament in Augustine, as can be seen in *Time and Narrative* I, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 22-30. He even preserved a place for a genre of lamentation at the very end of his extensive defense of the humanization of time by way of narrative; see *Time and Narrative* III, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 264-265: "it is in the mode of lamentation, within the horizon of stable eternity, that the Augustinian soul finds itself exiled to the 'region of dissimilarity.' The moanings of the lacerated soul are indivisibly those of the creature as such and the sinner. In this way, Christian consciousness takes into account the great elegy that crosses cultural frontiers and sings in a minor key about the sorrow of the finite."

[69] *Conf.* XI.xxix.39: *ecce distentio est vita mea, et me suscepit dextera tua in domino meo, mediatore filio hominis inter te unum et nos multos, in multis per multa, ut per eum apprehendam in quo et apprehensus sum, et a veteribus diebus conligar sequens unum, praeterita oblitus, non in ea quae futura et transitura sunt, sed in ea quae ante sunt*… (This passage continues, and will be picked up in the next block quotation below.) Augustine's invocation of the Latinized Pauline *ante* leads us to a strange contrast between the *futura et transitura* (the going-to-be-and-going-to-pass-away) and the 'before.' *Ante* can mean 'ahead of' in a spatial sense, but here we are talking about time, where *ante* usually means 'before' as in 'antecedent' or 'earlier.' Augustine's goal is not entirely futural but is also

The reference here is to chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Philippians. In order to overcome the strain of time as *distentio*, Augustine needs something more than the threefold mechanism outlined above. He needs salvation. And, as he saw it, this could only come from Christ, the Mediator between the human life of soul-shattering multiplicity and the restorative oneness of God. Paul's eschatological expression of temporal life pointed to such a messianic resolution of Augustine's problem. Solving quandaries about the measurement of 'times' had not removed Augustine from the "force and nature of time" itself. That much deeper question had been left unresolved, and it would seem likely to stay that way until the eschaton, the absolute future. As Augustine writes, continuing the above passage, he was brought to God:

> … so that I might be stretched out, not torn apart; so that I might chase after that victory palm of the calling from above, not distractedly but intently. If I could win this palm, I would hear a voice of praise and contemplate your delight, which neither arrives nor passes away. Now, of course, my years are full of groans. You are my relief, Lord. You are eternal, my father. But I am ripped apart in times. I have no idea what their order is. My thoughts and the innermost guts of my soul will be torn to shreds by unstable differences until I flow into you, purified and melted down by the fire of your love.[70]

---

somehow 'earlier.' It is in fact the 'earliest' thing—*aeternitas*, which has priority over time according to the logic of creation. To place eternity merely in the future would be to commit the error of thinking that it is an everlasting duration to continue after the eschaton. Yet what Augustine is after, as we saw above, is pure timelessness. *Aeternitas* is not only something to 'look forward to,' but also something that can be 'looked back to' or just 'looked up to' as we experience life in passing.

[70] *Conf.* XI.xxix.39: *non distentus sed extentus, non secundum distentionem sed secundum intentionem sequor ad palmam supernae vocationis, ubi audiam vocem laudis et contempler delectationem tuam nec venientem nec praetereuntem. nunc vero anni mei in gemitibus, et tu solacium meum, domine, pater meus aeternus es. at ego in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae, donec in te confluam purgatus et liquidus igne amoris tui*. Both *distentus* and *extentus* can mean 'stretched out,' but the former has much more violent connotations of being pulled-apart. It can also have to do with the distraction of a life lived in temporal multiplicity. *Distentus* and *extentus* are both given here in the past passive participle, and so Augustine could be emphasizing how the soul receives *distentio* (from time) or *extentio* (from God?), rather than achieving these two modes of temporal experience of its own accord. *Secundum* is given as "pursuing" rather than "according to," so that its connection to the subsequent "*sequor*" ("I pursue or follow") is clear. Augustine's text is picking up on the Pauline rhetoric of motion, which emphasizes life as something of a contested race, at least from an eschatological perspective.

Non distentus sed extentus—an odd phrase begins this passage. It is clear that Augustine sees a way out of the torrid torment of *distentio* in Paul's message of salvific *extentio*. But does he really think that such a conversion of his temporal experience is fully realizable here and now? That seems unlikely. In this passage we still find the Pauline rhetoric of the chase and the contest. *Intentio* is pursued over against *distentio*, but this does not necessarily mean that, for Augustine, a more focused *intentio* has already settled into place. His years, he reminds us, are still full of groans. More viscerally, he asserts that he is still "ripped apart" in the varying time-spans of his yet-unsteadied temporal experience. He remains ignorant of their proper order.[71] On the innermost level, Augustine is still being torn to shreds and will be so torn until some final, unimaginable melting-down into God's love. And only in this final dissolution will Augustine paradoxically be given the ability to fully convert *distentio* into *extentio*.[72]

The threefold model of temporal experience does not, then, solve Augustine's question of time in its entirety. What has been left unaffected by *memoria*, *contuitus*, and *expectatio*? That would seem to be the "force and nature of time." Even if the soul's attention endures through the

---

[71] This ignorance of the *ordo temporum* will recur later on, in Augustine's anti-apocalyptic works, among which the *City of God* must be counted. Imminent apocalypticism claims too much about the future, and in this pride it is inattentive to the soul's vulnerability to the torrid stream of time. A model of temporal experience rooted on *distentio animi* could not afford the soul much of a stable perspective, through which it could see its own timeframe from a quasi-eternal perspective. The instability of *distentio* should instead condition in us some humility before the indecipherability of the *ordo temporum*. This connection between *Conf.* XI and the *City of God* will be pursued in later chapters.

[72] All of this is covered over whenever we try to take *distentio animi* as a project constituting part of Augustine's salvific ascent. An example of this overly optimistic reading of *distentio* can be found in Humphries, "Distentio Animi: Praesens Temporis, Imago Aeternitatis," 77, where he argues that, for Augustine, "time becomes an eschatological icon: it truly shows us something of eternity because we experience time like God experiences eternity." Yet throughout Augustine's lamentations of time—hopeful though they are—we are assaulted with language that seems to make the exact opposite point. Our viscera-tearing experience of time remains very much unlike the high remove of timelessness. Humphries, however, denies that Augustine is even lamenting temporal experience at all; see ibid., 90: "Indeed, Augustine does not lament time in the *Confessions*, but the difficulties in understanding time." For Humphries, *distentio* is ultimately a way-station on the path to the eschaton, which will only perfect what *distentio* has already begun; see 98: "In a second sense, though, that of making present, time is the kind of image of eternity which allows us some comfort as we await eschatological perfection." Yet if *distentio* is not such a 'making-present,' but rather the force of time in which the soul finds itself caught up, then there is no need to explain away the lamentations of time altogether.

flux of time, giving some continuity to the soul's distraction and self-differentiation in the turbulence of worldly multiplicity, time itself still affords us no safe harbor. The destruction of the present carried out by Augustine in the earlier stages of his investigation still holds. The threefold present is at best only the strained reaction of the soul to its ongoing destabilization in the flux of time. *Extentio animi* would only name the eschatological possibility of a final conversion of temporal experience, which remains the only hope Augustine has of overcoming the force of time in its full extent.

Conclusion

Even after all this, Augustine is not quite done. In the last two chapters of Book XI, he returns to the Manichean questions of the "old ones." His hope for eschatological stabilization has reinvigorated his opposition to their ill-conceived blasphemies about a time before creation. Against them he asserts quite plainly that "there can be no time without creation."[73] The two are conjoined to one another by the creator who stands outside all temporality.[74] Having done his best to distinguish time from temporal experience and measurement, Augustine ends Book XI by reasserting the exceptionality of God's eternity. As purely timeless, God's knowledge and activity are utterly unlike those of humans. There is no analogy to be made here.[75] Augustine cautions us against conceiving of God's eternal knowledge as an everlasting extension of the way we sing a song by using *memoria*, *contuitus*, and *expectatio*. "Far be it from me," writes Augustine to his God, "to imply that You, composer of the universe, composer of living souls

---

[73] *Conf.* XI.xxx.40: *videant itaque nullum tempus esse posse sine creatura*.
[74] And even though Augustine hints here at those creatures who stand "above the times"—that is, the angels—it remains the case that they are inherently temporal, and receive their divine stability only by the grace of God. They merely stand above the discernible *tempora* or stretches of time that pertain to the visible world of motion and its measurement. For the *caelum caelorum*, see *Conf.* XII.ix.
[75] This would stand against the opinion of Humphries, 87: "*Distentio animi* is a technical phrase that Augustine uses to note both the solution to the problem of measuring time and […] the analogy between human time and divine eternity."

and bodies, know all things that will be and have been like I know a song! You are far, far stranger and far more secret."[76] Eternity, we must never forget, is utter timelessness. If we have trouble conceiving what that could possibly mean, given that all of our ways of talking and thinking and feeling are inextricably time-bound, this should simply help us realize how profoundly unlike us Augustine held his Creator to be.

In Books XII and XIII, Augustine would continue his reading of the opening words of Genesis. Along the way, he had to deal with a broad range of cosmological issues, from angelology to the status of primordial matter. Such topics fall outside our line of questioning here. There is at least one relevant passage from Book XII, however, which clarifies the relationship of *intentio* to *distentio animi* and the threefold present. *Intentio* can bear many interpretations, and it is often tempting to translate it as focus or purpose, rather than the more literal but awkward 'intentness' or 'intentionality.' For Augustine, it seems to mean the basic directedness of the soul in its temporal life. That is why he is able to imply that it can be redeemed by being redirected away from the worldly multiplicity to a God beyond time. Combining *intentio* with the three modes of temporal experience, Augustine writes that:

> The expectation of things to come becomes, when those things come, *contuitus*. Likewise, *contuitus* becomes memory when those things have passed away. Every *intentio*, which is varied in this way, is mutable.[77]

What results, then, from the threefold present is not the reclamation of time from its slippery elusiveness. The soul is not able in this life to take hold of time so as to 'make present.' Rather, the interplay of *memoria*, *contuitus*, and *expectatio* is a kind of varied *intentio*—the intentionality

---

[76] *Conf.* XI.xxxi.41: *sed absit ut tu, conditor universitatis, conditor animarum et corporum, absit ut ita noveris omnia futura et praeterita. longe tu, longe mirabilius longeque secretius*.
[77] *Conf.* XII.xv.18: *expectatio rerum venturarum fit contuitus, cum venerint, idemque contuitus fit memoria, cum praeterierint: omnis porro intentio, quae ita variatur, mutabilis est…*

of a soul still caught up in the currents of temporal mutability. What we have here is some kind of distended intentionality, an *intentio in distentione*.

Yet *distentio,* as we have seen, appears to be doing different kinds of work in Book XI. At first, it might seem possible that it is the spreading-out of the soul in time in order to measure it by means of a threefold awareness. At the end of the book, however, it becomes clear that *distentio* is still that which tears Augustine apart in time, and so leaves him with nowhere to turn but hopeful lamentation. This potential duplicity of *distentio* led a thinker as careful as Paul Ricoeur to postulate something like a positive over against a negative *distentio*.[78] Negative *distentio* would be the distraction that pulls temporal consciousness apart; positive *distentio* would be the extending-outward that redeems it. These two would, however, exist in a ceaseless dialectic of discord and concord, at least until the eschaton. There is something accurate about Ricoeur's reading, in that he seems to grasp that this tension of temporality will in no way be solved until the absolute future. Yet his implied splitting of *distentio* into two types is too schematic and decisive. It is clearer to simply say that *distentio* is time's effect on the soul—it is time stretching the soul apart.

This has various consequences. First of all, the soul can no longer be conceived of on the basis of a punctiliar present or well-defined tenses. *Memoria* does not neatly correspond to the past, nor does *contuitus* to a point-like now, nor *expectatio* to a truly non-present future. Rather, all three coexist in a non-punctiliar and flowing kind of temporality, which is the only kind of temporality the soul experiences. The soul's distended awareness of time goes hand in hand with its ongoing feeling of distraction and destabilization. *Distentio* does not enable the soul to

---

[78] On the one hand, Ricoeur reads Augustine as bringing in *distentio* as a positive solution to the questions of time and measurement; on the other, he sees *distentio* as bursting out of *intentio* at the end of Book XI, casting Augustine back into the realm of lamentation. See especially his section on "*intentio* and *distentio*" in *Time and Narrative* I, 16-22.

expand beyond the confines of some minimal instant, but is rather the "force of time" bearing down upon the soul that lives without any such instantaneity. If we read *distentio* along the lines of Augustine's "*vis naturaque temporis*," then there is no need for us to split it into positive and negative sides. *Distentio* is Augustine's way of talking about the effect of time on the temporal soul, leading to both the threefold present and the ongoing distraction of the soul, which the aforementioned threefold could never hope to overcome in this life. Reflective awareness of this *distentio* can liberate us from the illusion that we are trapped within a paradoxically fleeting present, but such liberation comes at the cost of acknowledging how caught up we are in the torrent of time, grasping after what has just passed away while being drawn inexorably into the future.

It must be confessed that many ambiguities still remain throughout Book XI. Its passages can be followed through to many openings. Augustine would likely have conceded this. What is compelling about the reading offered here is that it grants a certain internal coherence to Book XI, as well as some external coherence between this and Augustine's other writings. Even after all of his subtle speculations about the measurement and experience of time, what remained at issue for Augustine was its force and nature. That final, hopeful lamentation—*ecce distentio vita mea!*—makes clear that time itself lives on as a troubling question for Augustine. It retains its decisive effect on his life and his thoughts about God and the world. It conditions the way he approaches everything from conversion to world-history.[79] But that same lamentation also hints

[79] This claim would directly contradict that of Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 30: "Augustine's psychological account of time is not, so far as I know, taken up by his immediate successors, nor even by himself in later writings." Against Sorabji, see *Conf.* XI.xxviii, where Augustine suggests that his analysis of time and temporal experience would hold for much larger spans of time, even up to the whole panorama of human history: …*hoc in tota vita hominis, cuius partes sunt omnes actiones hominis, hoc in toto saeculo filiorum hominum, cuius partes sunt omnes vitae hominum*. / "The same happens in the entirety of a human life, whose parts are all of the actions of one person, and the same happens in the entire age of humanity, whose parts are all human lives." In later chapters, this

at an ultimate solution that could only lie in the absolute future. In this way, at least conceptually speaking, Augustine weaves the fine threads of the ancient of philosophy of time (with its nuanced distinctions between time and human ways of relating to time) into the Pauline message that only a God could finally dissolve the troubles of time. Augustine achieved the purging of the instant from time, but by doing so he did not conclusively 'solve' time. Rather, he left the question of time's resolution open to an eschatological delay. And we will next have to see what it is like to live in the aftermath of this open question.

---

claim will be brought to bear on the *City of God* and its view of history, with attention paid to how such history relates both to the form of temporal experience and to the force and nature of time itself.

Chapter 3: Belatedness of the Flesh

If the destruction of the present instant in the eleventh book of the *Confessions* counts as an accomplishment, it nevertheless came at a cost. As we have already seen, an understanding of temporal experience as rooted in *distentio* makes it very difficult for us to conceive of planting our feet in the middle of time's merciless current. Torn apart by the force and nature of temporality, how could we hope to steady our gaze so as to get a clear look at the world? Or, if that kind of stability proves impossible, what would our experience of the temporal order of things look like?

Augustine was not unaware of such questions, but to see how he dealt with them, we will have to go a bit out of order ourselves. By looking back to some of the earlier books of the *Confessions*, we should be able to catch a retrospective glimpse of how Augustine gave expression to temporal experience in a way that accords with the account of time we find in Book XI. In Book IV, first of all, we will see how the death of Augustine's unnamed friend triggered in him a quite broad reflection on the arising and passing away of all things. Our sensual experience, it turns out, has a tough time keeping up with this ceaseless flux of impermanence. As a result, Augustine senses a kind of belatedness in our attempts to get a firm grasp on the world.

Augustine expands on this in Book X, where he spends more time exploring how retrospective cognition (*memoria*, broadly construed) is constitutive for our thinking in general—not just about the world, but about ourselves, too. There, he stumbles upon the grim possibility that we arrive late even to our own thoughts, which would create a number of problems for any attempt at self-awareness or even self-control. And there, too, this belated quality reveals itself most evidently in the realm of sensuality. Finally, for Augustine, the modes of belatedness

explored in Books IV and X—belatedness to the world and belatedness to ourselves—ultimately derive from humanity's even more fundamental belatedness in relation to God. The goal here, though, is to show how Augustine used this theme of belatedness to express what it is like to live *in distentione*. In the wake of the present, 'belatedness' could describe not just humanity's relation to a timeless God, but also our relation to the temporal world we live in and the temporal lives we live.

The Late Arrival of Incarnate Experience

At the beginning of the fourth book of the *Confessions,* we find Augustine looking backward. He has, of course, been casting his gaze on the past for the first three books as well, but here he seems especially enraptured by the disturbing memories he recounts for us. He starts out by asking his God for the power to make sense of the seemingly senseless wanderings of his earlier life.[1] The outline of the path he has walked is somewhat shrouded by the fog of forgetfulness, but bit by bit he is able to sketch out certain scenes and sentiments, many of which are tinged with regret: the emptiness of his years spent in rhetorical training; his conflicted feelings about the mother of his son; the perceived pointlessness of his Manichaean observances and astrological investigations. But the memory that leaves the most indelible mark of all on the pages of Book IV is Augustine's reminiscence over the death of an unnamed friend.

Augustine did not even meet this friend until he returned to his hometown of Thagaste, after a stint of schooling at Carthage.[2] But what their relationship lacked in duration it more than made up for with intensity. Their shared interests extended beyond intellectual pursuits and into

---

[1] *Conf.* IV.i: *da mihi circuire praesenti memoria praeteritos circuitus erroris mei*… / "Give me the power to go down the circuitous paths of my past wandering in the present, in my memory."
[2] *Conf.* IV.iv.7: *ecce abstulisti hominem de hac vita, cum vix explevisset annum in amicitia mea, suavi mihi super omnes suavitates illius vitae meae*. / "And look again—you've taken someone away from this life. You took him away when he had been my friend for scarcely a year. He was sweeter to me than anything else in my life."

the realm of religious observance. Both were excited by the prospect of unlocking more of the mysteries that Mani had brought to the attention of the Mediterranean world. This made it all the more startling when Augustine's friend was baptized into a non-Manichaean kind of Christianity. Given that his friend was sick and unconscious at the time of this baptism, Augustine took it as a farcical attempt by these Christians to surreptitiously claim a new member. When that friend awoke, Augustine made some remarks to that effect which—to his great surprise—were met with scorn. It turned out that this friend of his, with whom he felt he was of one mind, had come to fully accept this alternative brand of Christianity.[3] Unsurprisingly, since their religious tendencies had played a role in bringing them so close together, Augustine was unable to understand this transformation in his friend's opinion. Perhaps he might have been more swayed by this change of heart if his friend had not then died, mere days after professing his conversion.[4]

More than the vivacity of this friendship, though, it is its culmination in death that gives Book IV its thrust. Immediately after his friend's demise, Augustine is overcome with grief. He was still in his hometown, surrounded by other friends and family, and yet he felt alienated from it all. Everything he looked at could now only be seen in the dim light cast by memories of his friend. Strangest of all was that he began to feel alienated even from himself. It is in Book IV, after all, that we find a variant of one of Augustine's more memorable recurring remarks: "I became a great question to myself."[5] A fuller exploration of what it means to be a *quaestio* to

---

[3] We should be careful with our language here, so that we do not give the false impression that the young Augustine would have taken his friend to be converting from 'non-Christianity' to 'Christianity.' Manichaeism could still be taken as a form of 'Christianity,' broadly construed, given its reverence for the figure of Christ. And Augustine himself, even in the most fervent stages of his Manichaeism, never lost his reverence for the name of Christ. (See, e.g., *Conf.* III.iv and V.xiv.) So it might be better to frame the friend's conversion here as one that went from 'Manichaean reverence for Christ' to 'non-Manichaean reverence for Christ.'

[4] *Conf.* IV.iv.8.

[5] *Conf.* IV.iv.9: *expetebant eum undique oculi mei, et non dabatur. et oderam omnia, quod non haberent eum, nec mihi iam dicere poterant, `ecce veniet,' sicut cum viveret, quando absens erat. factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio, et interrogabam animam meam quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me valde, et nihil noverat*

yourself will have to wait until a bit later on.[6] Here, the main line of questioning opened up by the friend's death revolves around mortality and its inescapability.

One refrain we come across quite often in florid writings about death and friendship is that the surviving friend would almost rather be dead themselves than suffer through the pain of the other's loss. Augustine expressly denies feeling this way.[7] Instead of giving up his own will to live, he becomes more frightened of death than ever. The universality of mortality presses down on his thoughts with a new and unbearable weight. Under the pressure of that weight, however, Augustine's mind is moved to think new thoughts. If everything is going to perish, even the most beloved of friends, then he will have to think this through and determine whether there can be any coming to terms with such a totalizing picture of loss and destruction. And that is what we see him begin to do in the chapters of Book IV that follow fast upon the account of his friend's demise.

Augustine's reflection on finitude begins with an appraisal of his own affliction. In language that should remind us of Book XI, he casts his sorrow in terms of tearing, ripping, and pulling apart. What is most interesting about such terminology is not that it gives us a new grammar of grief, but that it points to a rift or wound within human experience that cuts deeper than any particular instance of loss or destruction. "Every soul that is overcome by friendship

---

respondere mihi. / "My eyes searched for him everywhere, but he was not given to me. I hated everything, because nothing had him. No one could tell me, 'Look, here he comes!' like when he was alive. He wasn't there. I became a great question to myself. I interrogated my soul about why it was sad and why it disturbed me so much, but it knew of no response for me." Here we should keep in mind the derivation of *quaestio* from *quaerere* (to search for). A *quaestio* is a question, but more broadly it is what is searched for, or perhaps better the process of searching-for. We could then render this passage: "I became a great searching for myself…" Recognizing oneself as a question is not so different from recognizing oneself as a search for oneself. In that way, it is not at all to pose an idle question.

[6] Similar locutions can be found elsewhere in Augustine's writings, such as in Book X of the *Confessions*, as we will see below.

[7] *Conf*. IV.vi.11: *credo, quo magis illum amabam, hoc magis mortem, quae mihi eum abstulerat, tamquam atrocissimam inimicam oderam et timebam, et eam repente consumpturam omnes homines putabam, quia illum potuit. sic eram omnino, memini*. / "I believe that, to the same degree I loved my friend, I hated death that took him away from me. I hated it like my most bitter enemy. My thinking was that, if death could consume him, soon enough it was going to consume everyone. That is exactly what I was like. I remember."

with mortal things is miserable," declares Augustine, "It is torn apart when it loses them. Then it feels the misery that was already there before it lost them."[8] This misery of having a beloved friend torn away should call us back to the prior misery of being torn apart from the beginning. The tearing-apart of loss, that is, might just be a manifestation of the stretching-apart of *distentio*.

The experience of losing someone or something is not simply an unlucky turn that some encouraging words might help us work through. No, for Augustine, such experiences invite us to face up to the general impermanence of things from a more wide-ranging perspective. The response to death we find in Book IV is not, then, an attempt to soften the effects of mortality. What Augustine has in sight is instead an altered way of looking at the world, one that might do justice to its temporality, its mutability, and its finitude. Without attempting such an altered perspective, we would be doomed to 'pour our souls out onto the sand,' as Augustine would have it, by holding on to what is impermanent as if it were going to last forever.[9]

---

[8] *Conf.* IV.vi.11: *miser est omnis animus vinctus amicitia rerum mortalium, et dilaniatur cum eas amittit, et tunc sentit miseriam qua miser est et antequam amittat eas*. Leo Ferrari, in "The Barren Field in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 8 (1977), 55-70, points out the frequency of scratching and tearing language throughout the *Confessions*, associating it with a vegetative metaphor, usually involving thorns or thistles or brambles. (He even attributes *regio egestatis* and *terra difficultatis* to this imagery.) This tearing is associated with sensual concupiscence broadly construed (in Books IV and X, as elsewhere). See esp. 64-65: "Thorns injure the flesh by scratching and piercing it and the resulting wounds can be the source of grievous infection. Likewise, in the moral order, the things of sense can have a similar effect upon the soul. By becoming attached to the things of this world, the soul therefore becomes wounded and suffers accordingly." Ferrari explicitly links such rhetoric to the account of the friend's death in Book IV, with its use of *dilaniare*, *concidere*, *cruere*, *conscindere*, and so on.

[9] *Conf.* IV.viii.13: *quibus cedebat dolor meus ille; sed succedebant non quidem dolores alii, causae tamen aliorum dolorum. nam unde me facillime et in intima dolor ille penetraverat, nisi quia fuderam in harenam animam meam diligendo moriturum acsi non moriturum?* / "That pain of mine began to recede amid all these delights. But it was succeeded, if not by different pains, then at least by the causes of different pains. How had that pain been able to so easily penetrate so deeply into me? Because I had poured my soul out onto the sand, by loving someone who was going to die as if he were not going to die." Cf. IV.vi.11: *vide, quia memini, spes mea, qui me mundas a talium affectionum immunditia, dirigens oculos meos ad te et evellens de laqueo pedes meos. mirabar enim ceteros mortales vivere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat*… / "See how I was! Because I remember. I was astonished that other mortals were still living, since he had died, even though I loved him as if he would never die."

With not a little abruptness, then, Augustine moves from the matter of his friend's death to the impermanence of all things as such.[10] His angle of approach runs through the question of the beauty of all such things. Augustine's friend was indeed beautiful to him, but the world is full of so many other beautiful creatures and objects and events. Friendship is hardly an isolated case here. All these other things, insofar as they are temporal, are changeable and finite. Their beauty cannot save them from that fate. Or perhaps it would be better to say that their true beauty consists less in their being what they are and more in the way they fit into the overarching flow of universal impermanence.[11] Augustine begins his cosmological reflection, as usual, with an address to his God:

> Wherever the human soul turns, it is bound to its pain—except when it is in You. Yet when it is bound to beautiful things, it is both outside of You and outside of itself. Still, those beautiful things would not be at all if they were not from You. These things arise and fall away. When they arise, it is as if they begin to be. They grow until they are mature. When they are mature, they grow old and are lost. Though not all grow old, all are lost.[12]

---

[10] This transition is indeed abrupt, but perhaps we should not overstate the point. Catherine Oppel, in "'Why, my soul, are you sad?': Augustine's Opinion on Sadness in the *City of God* and an Interpretation of His Tears in the *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004), 199-236, points out (on 210) that there is a recurring relationship between a reflection on mortality and an awakening to philosophy throughout antiquity (think of Cicero and the death of his daughter). Augustine, for his part, has a number of other irons in the fire in this book, such as his sustained debunking of Manichaeism. And so another way of connecting these passages would be through his gradual shift away from the Manichaeans. Part of what disillusioned Augustine about their portrayal of God was that He could not be truly impermeable, and so did not seem to be atemporal or truly permanent. Yet only an atemporal, utterly permanent God could provide effective solace to those who suffer loss, since only such a God could never be lost. So, in this way, the shift in Augustine's understanding of God could be linked to his reaction to death and loss. (On this, look to *Conf.* IV.ix.14 and IV.xv.26.)

[11] Augustine himself connects these reflections to his earlier, lost attempt to explore the constitution of beauty in *De Pulchro et Apto*. On this, see *Conf.* IV.xiii.20 and IV.xv.24. Donald A. Cress, in "Hierius and St. Augustine's Account of the Lost '*De Pulchro et Apto*:' *Confessions* IV.13-15," *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976), 153-163, points out that *De Pulchro* was Augustine's (still Manichaean) attempt to simplify aesthetics down to two categories, and then to explore those two categories first in the physical world and then within the soul (and ultimately in relation to God). Cress (162-163) concludes by saying that, in the end, the use of *De Pulchro* in *Conf.* IV is not so much about beauty as it is about love. *De Pulchro*, and its dedication to the rhetorician Hierius, was just another symptom of how Augustine's love was still disordered. This is the same point made by the story about the dead friend. Augustine's general, cosmological reflection will then build on both, showing that he could not love the beautiful things of the world properly, since he did not yet love God as the true source of that most beautiful order in which they fit together.

[12] *Conf.* IV.x.15: *nam quoquoversum se verterit anima hominis, ad dolores figitur alibi praeterquam in te, tametsi figitur in pulchris extra te et extra se. quae tamen nulla essent, nisi essent abs te. quae oriuntur et occidunt et*

Here, the proper response to death is to meditate on universal mortality. That is not say that Augustine stoically sets sorrow aside. On the contrary, he defends human emotiveness in response to all this destruction. Still, he seems to think that the point of such sorrow is not to wallow in it, but to let it drive us onward to higher thoughts.[13] The height of Augustine's thinking here consists in the panoramic view it attempts to take on the beautiful things of the world, the things we try to grab hold of as they slip through our fingers. They cannot be held because they lack stability. That, however, is no defect. Augustine believes that, insofar as God made them all, they all must be 'good' in some sense or another.[14] Their impermanence is not a mistake. Rather, it is simply their way of being. Augustine continues:

> As they arise and stretch out towards being, it so happens that the more quickly they grow in order to be, the more they hurry up so that they are not. This is their limit. You gave them this much. They are parts of things, since they are not all together all at once. Instead, all things give place and take place, and thereby perform the whole, of which they are the parts.[15]

This withdrawal and coming forth, this ceding and succession, is the *modus* of all things. We could, as above, take this as their "way" of being. More literally, though, we could say it is their limit or even their measure. Augustine's cosmology, here at least, is one of relational impermanence. All things fade away as they come to be, but in so doing they give their place to

---

oriendo quasi esse incipiunt, et crescunt ut perficiantur, et perfecta senescunt et intereunt: et non omnia senescunt, et omnia intereunt.

[13] For the full weight of Augustine's sorrow in this book, look to *Conf*. IV.v.10. On the transformative or even redemptive power of sorrow for Augustine, see Oppel, 206.

[14] Cf. *Conf*. IV.x.15: *laudet te ex illis anima mea, deus, creator omnium, sed non in eis figatur glutine amore per sensus corporis*. / "God, You are the creator of all these things. Let my soul praise You for them, but don't let it get stuck to them by the glue of love in its incarnate experience."

[15] *Conf*. IV.x.15: *ergo cum oriuntur et tendunt esse, quo magis celeriter crescunt ut sint, eo magis festinant ut non sint: sic est modus eorum. tantum dedisti eis, quia partes sunt rerum, quae non sunt omnes simul, sed decedendo ac succedendo agunt omnes universum, cuius partes sunt*. Augustine next likens this relational arising and falling to the way that language works: *ecce sic peragitur et sermo noster per signa sonantia. non enim erit totus sermo, si unum verbum non decedat, cum sonuerit partes suas, ut succedat aliud*. / "Look, for example, at how a sentence is accomplished by means of audible signs. There will not be a whole sentence unless one word gives way, once its parts have sounded, and another comes in."

others. That is their *modus*: the limit of their finitude, which is a limit that has not just destructive but generative power. It is only by withdrawing into nothingness that one thing lets another come onto the scene. In that way, then, the performance of the whole retains a kind of beauty—the beauty of the most beautiful order[16]—while the loss of each thing remains cause for grief. This is the sensibility humanity might attain to if it were to strive towards a broader perspective on things and strain to make out the *modus* of the world.

But why is it so hard to do this? Why is such a general reflection so alien to our lived sense of loss and our terror before grim death? Augustine could only articulate a response to such questions in terms of sin. Our inability to see the impermanence of the world beyond the particularity of death has to do with the fact that we cannot extricate ourselves from our love of things that die. Such love is 'sinful' because it is inordinate. This improperly considered attachment to temporal things is what tears us apart, as we saw above, so that we can see the even deeper tear within. But what we cannot see is the total order of temporality, even as it rushes by all around us:

> These things go where they go, so that they are not. They tear the soul to pieces with sickening desires, since it wants to be and loves to rest in the things it loves. But in them there is no 'where,' since they do not stand still. Instead, they flee. And who could chase after them in incarnate experience?[17] Incarnate experience is late, since it is incarnate experience. That is its limit. It is able to do certain things, since that is what it was made for. But it is not able to do this: that is, to hold things as they pass by, running from their obligatory beginning to their obligatory end. They were created through Your Word, and in Your Word they hear this: "From here up to here."[18]

---

[16] This is the way Augustine phrases it in *Conf.* XIII.xxxv: *omnis quippe iste ordo pulcherrimus rerum valde bonarum…*

[17] In more antiquated terms, this could be rendered: "… with a fleshly sense, with the senses of the flesh?"

[18] *Conf.* IV.x.15: *eunt enim quo ibant, ut non sint, et conscindunt eam desideriis pestilentiosis, quoniam ipsa esse vult et requiescere amat in eis quae amat. in illis autem non est ubi, quia non stant: fugiunt, et quis ea sequitur sensu carnis? aut quis ea comprehendit, vel cum praesto sunt? tardus est enim sensus carnis, quoniam sensus carnis est: ipse est modus eius. sufficit ad aliud, ad quod factus est, ad illud autem non sufficit, ut teneat transcurrentia ab initio debito usque ad finem debitum. in verbo enim tuo, per quod creantur, ibi audiunt, 'hinc' et 'huc usque.'*

The limits that the Word places on things by its ineffable speaking cannot be grasped by us as we live in the midst of such things.[19] This is the case because we, too, are things like that: that is, we are temporal, mutable, finite, and so on. We, too, have a *modus*, just like every other thing in this beautiful, deadly order. It is our *modus*, this measure allotted to us, that keeps us from seeing the *modi* of everything else as we live our lives out in time. Caught up in the same swift flight of impermanence, we fail to catch up to the things we love so as to take hold of them. They have always just passed by. We are always late. That is our *modus*.

We should not rush past this point too quickly. What Augustine has come to see here is that humanity is limited by a certain *modus* and that this *modus* produces in us an experience of belatedness in relation to the world. But the way he phrases this measure of belatedness bears further scrutiny. He says not "*tardus est homo*" but "*tardus est sensus carnis*." It is incarnate experience, the sense of the flesh, that he associates most closely with worldly belatedness. Human experience appears to have a kind of sensual limitation, while sensation itself appears to be ineluctably partial. "Whatever you sense through the flesh is only partial," writes Augustine, "You do not even know the whole of which sensual things are just the parts, and yet still they delight you."[20] On the face of it, such limitation derives from original sin (as Augustine understands it). It is one aspect of the punishment owing to that transgression. Still, Augustine suggests that even if the censure of such a limitation were lifted, the insatiability of desire would

---

[19] 'God' is the name of what hands out these limits to the things of the world, humanity included. The Word is the totality of these formal limitations, the permanent ordering principle (or structure) of all this finite impermanence. Yet, for all that, the Word is of course not itself temporal or impermanent. See *Conf*. IV.xi.16: *ecce illa discedunt ut alia succedant, et omnibus suis partibus constet infima universitas. 'numquid ego aliquo discedo?' ait verbum dei*. / "Look at how these things pass away, while other things come forth. And look at how the foundations of the universe are constituted out of all of their parts. But the Word of God asks, 'Am I going anywhere?'" Later on, Augustine clarifies the matter of how we should comport ourselves to the created world. He suggests that we should love creation only if we are loving God through it. That is the only way to safeguard against the damages of impermanence, since only God truly 'stands.' (This can be usefully compared to the recurring talk about 'standing' in Book XI.) But loving the permanent through the impermanent happens through Christ, who links the world of impermanence to the possibility of permanence. On that, see *Conf*. IV.xii.18-19.

[20] *Conf*. IV.xi.17: *quidquid per illam sentis in parte est, et ignoras totum cuius hae partes sunt, et delectant te tamen*.

nevertheless drive us on to a totalizing lust, rather than being satisfied with a calm consideration of the beautiful order of things: "Even if your fleshly senses were suited for comprehending the whole—even if they had not received as their punishment a just limitation to a part of the whole[21]—you would then want to go beyond whatever presently exists, just so that you could take even more pleasure in all things."[22]

As it stands, however, the sensual limitation of incarnate experience is still in place. Humanity is still always arriving late to the scene of its own life. There was only one man who was ever on time. But all that means, of course, is that to overcome belatedness, we would have to be as quick as Christ.[23] Augustine is rather skeptical of that ever happening. So, for the time being, we are stuck with belatedness. Luckily, that is not the end of the conversation. There remains much to be said about belatedness. To begin with, we should recall how Augustine told us that the tearing-apart of loss points to a deeper wound, torn open long before any particular injury we may face in life. We can relate this internal scarring to the fundamental being-torn-apart of temporality that we saw in Book XI. Stretched out by time, we are unable to settle down and grasp any of these fleeting things, so as to establish some kind of stable dwelling. Instead,

---

[21] This clause implies that the temporal-experiential limitations faced by humanity are, at least in some sense, a consequence of the Fall. Despite also being temporal (because created in time), Adam may then have had some more wide-ranging view of his universe than we are able to manage, given our belatedness. Whereas time is a feature of creation *qua* creation, belatedness is not. Belatedness would then be a consequence of sin rather than an Edenic condition. But for Augustine, Christians should not be in the business of focusing on the psychology of pre-fallen humanity or the cosmology of a pre-fallen world. It is the postlapsarian world that counts.

[22] Here, Augustine's "you" is addressing humanity, not God. See *Conf.* IV.xi.17: *sed si ad totum comprehendendum esset idoneus sensus carnis tuae, ac non et ipse in parte universi accepisset pro tua poena iustum modum, velles ut transiret quidquid existit in praesentia, ut magis tibi omnia placerent*. In the same section, he continues: *nam et quod loquimur per eundem sensum carnis audis, et non vis utique stare syllabas sed transvolare, ut aliae veniant et totum audias. ita semper omnia, quibus unum aliquid constat (et non sunt omnia simul ea quibus constat): plus delectant omnia quam singula, si possint sentiri omnia*. / "You hear what we say through these same fleshly senses, and you do not want the syllables to just stand there. You want them to fly past, so that others can come, so that you can hear the whole thing. It is always like this, with all things that come together to constitute one 'something.' All of the things that constitute it are not all there at the same time. But all things would delight you more than each individual thing, if all things could be sensed."

[23] On Christ, see *Conf.* IV.xii.19: *non enim tardavit, sed cucurrit clamans dictis, factis, morte, vita, descensu, ascensu, clamans ut redeamus ad eum…* / "He was not late. No, he ran screaming through everything he said and did, through his death and his life, through his descent and his ascent, screaming for us to return to Him."

they flitter past us, while we ourselves flitter along in the same sort of flux. Pulled along by the current of time in this way, it would seem that the only path left open to us is to take a look back on what has already happened, since that is the only field of view that even comes close to hardening into shape for us.

Living this belated life, we are unable to take stock of things. It is too late for us to measure out the fluid multiplicity of the world as we pass through it. Such a measure—such a *modus*—proves elusive. And that is just what we might expect, having worked through Book XI before leaping back into Book IV. It was in Book XI that we saw the fundamental role *memoria* played in the measuring out of any stretch of time, be it the span of a song or the life of a friend or the ages of the world.[24] All such measuring could only be done retroactively. Both in Book IV and in Book XI, then, our view on the world tends toward the retrospective. And the paradox of all this is, as we saw in Book XI, that whatever we are said to be measuring is already gone. The mediation of *memoria* cannot be circumvented. If we want to understand a bit more about the belatedness of experience, then, we could do worse than spending some time with another book of the *Confessions*: the tenth.

Memoria as Belated Thinking

Augustine begins the tenth book of his *Confessions* by reflecting on the potential absurdity of the work as a whole. He has been 'confessing' both the details of his past life (*confessio peccatorum*) and the fact that his God is God (*confessio laudis*), but he has been doing so in the form of an address to that same God. Yet who knows that God is God better than God? And who knows the story of Augustine's sojourn around the Mediterranean world better than the Creator who made the entire world? In a sense, such confessing could only be done in retrospect,

[24] Recall *Conf.* XI.xxvii.

as a response to some divine agency that would always precede the content of the confession.[25] If there is any effective audience for Augustine's words, then, it could only be made up of other people: those who would read or hear the *Confessions* as a work disseminated throughout their world.[26]

In addition to clarifying his audience, Augustine also begins Book X by shifting the temporal parameters of his confession. Here he aims to tell us about not the distant past, but rather present conditions—the ongoing struggle that is his life. And as we have already seen in Book XI, pinning down such a present will prove more difficult than it might have first seemed. But, for now, Augustine is not so obviously concerned with laying out the force and nature of time. Instead, he wants to show us 'how' he still is or 'what he is still like.'[27] He remains a tempted man, living in a world of sensual temptations.[28] He knows he should love God, and he even thinks he does love God, but the problem is that he does not really understand what it means to love God. He cannot quite discern what it is that he happens to be loving when he loves

---

[25] This is how Marion, 11-55, describes the sequence of *confessio*.

[26] See *Conf.* X.i-iii. Scholars have proposed various ways of fitting Book X into the sequence of the *Confessions* as a whole. That should suggest to us that the fit is not self-evident. J.J. O'Meara, in *The Young Augustine: the Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1954), 13, perhaps with tongue planted in cheek, referred to the *Confessions* as a "badly composed book" on account of such questions of fit. Citing O'Meara, Paul Archambault, in "Augustine, Memory, and the Development of Autobiography," *Augustinian Studies* 13 (1982), 23-30, counters (on 23-24) with the proposal that the discussion of memory in Book X is part of Augustine's project of self-narration. Meanwhile, Catherine Chin, in "Christians and the Roman Classroom: Memory, Grammar, and Rhetoric in *Confessions* X," *Augustinian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2002), 161-182 (and especially on 162-163 and 168-169), sees Book X as a Neoplatonic exercise aimed at replacing the 'rhetoric' of Augustine's earlier life with the timeless 'grammar' of his new, Christian intellectual framework.

[27] *Conf.* X.iv.6: *indicabo ergo talibus qualibus iubes ut serviam, non quis fuerim, sed quis iam sim et quis adhuc sim; sed neque me ipsum diiudico*. / "I will not point out who I was, but who I already am and still am. But I am not judging myself." The verb Augustine uses here is *di-iudicare*, which is indeed 'to judge,' but most basically 'to judge between' one thing and another. Hence the *di-* prefix ('into two'), which goes with all those splitting and cutting-up words, such as *distentio*, *dilaniare*, and so on. This might then already be a play on words, anticipating the splitting up of the soul into a scattered multiplicity later on in Book X. The verb *indicare*, which Augustine uses to begin this passage, will also recur throughout the book, leading up to a passage near the end (X.xxxvii.62) where he begs God to 'point him out to himself.'

[28] *Conf.* X.v.7.

God. In short, Augustine's present situation is not so different from the conflicted portraits he paints of his earlier life in the other books of the *Confessions*.

He even tries some of the same tricks he had dabbled in earlier. Recognizing, as in Book IV, the temporal createdness of all the world's beautiful temptations, he affirms that the God he loves would have to be something quite different from them. And as in some earlier attempts at ascent, Augustine gets past the various aspects of the created world by questioning them as to their divinity and so negating their potential status as 'gods.'[29] In so doing, he comes to realize that, if he wants to get a better idea of what loving God is all about, he will have to go further than contemplating the nature of the world, however inescapable it may be for him. He will have to go further by going back (again) into his *memoria*. Here Augustine is reversing the flow of Book IV. There, a troubling memory led him to reflect on the finitude of creation. In Book X, though, the finitude of creation leads Augustine to reflect on the troubles of memory.

Now we must keep in mind that, when Augustine talks about *memoria*, he is not talking solely about the past or even past-oriented kinds of thinking.[30] To be sure, remembering things in the quotidian sense is one of its possible functions. We could not remember to meet a friend or recall what we were going to say without *memoria*. But Augustine is explicitly clear that he is talking about our ability not just to hold on to something from the past, but also to think about things in any way at all. This is not to say that *memoria* somehow does not have to do with the past. Rather, Augustine seems to be pointing out to us how the retrospective quality of memory plays a part in every aspect of our cognitive life. Very early on in his journey into memory, then, he declares:

---

[29] *Conf.* X.vi.9-10. Cf. the ascents at VII.x.16 and IX.x.23-25.
[30] Marion, 75, has put it succinctly: "Saint Augustine proves this unthinkable expansion of the domain of *memoria* by emphasizing that *memoria* is not limited to conserving past things, an obvious point that metaphysics established with ease, but also bears on thought's presence to itself."

> I will go beyond that force of my nature, then, ascending by steps to Him who made me. I am coming into the fields and expansive palaces of memory, where innumerable images of things of all measures have been brought in by the senses and stored up. Also hidden away there is whatever we think—by increasing or decreasing or varying in whatever way that which sensory experience has touched upon, as well as whatever else is perhaps preserved and deposited there, and which forgetting has not yet absorbed and buried.[31]

The powerful engine of imaginative thought is thus housed in the memory. Though Augustine may use language reminiscent of ancient *ars memoriae* techniques, the idea of the fields or palaces of memory here seems more geared to invoke the immense openness of thought. The memory, of course, can only take in a certain number of images of things long past, many of which are lost (either temporarily or forever) to the oblivion of forgetting. And Augustine is also clear that what our memory holds on to is not at all the sensual things themselves, but only mediated images of those things.[32] All the same, *memoria* is able to do great things with those limited resources.

In memory, then, Augustine finds a workshop alongside the storehouse. Along with imaginative variation, *memoria* is also held to be responsible for all kinds of conditional and

---

[31] *Conf.* X.viii.12: *transibo ergo et istam naturae meae, gradibus ascendens ad eum qui fecit me, et venio in campos et lata praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum de cuiuscemodi rebus sensis invectarum. ibi reconditum est quidquid etiam cogitamus, vel augendo vel minuendo vel utcumque variando ea quae sensus attigerit, et si quid aliud commendatum et repositum est quod nondum absorbuit et sepelivit* oblivio. Chin, 164, points out that the background for Augustine's characterization of *memoria* as a storehouse (*thesaurus*) or cavern (*sinus*, fold) or courtyard (*aula*) or palace (*praetorium*) is the first-century BCE *Ad Herennium*, passed down through Cicero and Quintilian as part of the *ars memoriae* tradition. The *ars memoriae* technique involved memorizing things by picturing them within as spatialized in some way (e.g., as rooms in a palace), so as to aid in speedy recollection. On this tradition as it relates to Augustine, see: Dominique Doucet, "L'*Ars Memoriae* dans les *Confessions*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 33 (1987), 49-69, and Wolfgang Hübner, "Die *Praetoria Memoriae* im zehnten Buch der *Confessiones*: Vergilisches bei Augustin," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* (1981), 245-263.

[32] *Conf.* X.viii.13: *quae omnia suis quaeque foribus intrant ad eam et reponuntur in ea. nec ipsa tamen intrant, sed rerum sensarum imagines illic praesto sunt cogitationi reminiscenti eas. quae quomodo fabricatae sint, quis dicit, cum appareat quibus sensibus raptae sint interiusque reconditae?* / "All these things enter into the memory through their specific gates and are repositioned within it. Yet it is not the things themselves that enter. Rather, the images of things experienced are there in that thinking that recalls them. Who will tell us how these images are constructed, even though it is apparent that they are seized by certain senses and hidden away inside?" Such passages can be profitably compared with similar ones in *De Trinitate* XI, though that work goes into a level of specificity about this problem that we cannot do justice to here.

even future-oriented kinds of thinking. When Augustine goes back into its fields and palaces, he stumbles upon a lot more than his memories:

> There are all the things I remember, whether they were experienced by me or believed by me. Of these there are also copious likenesses, whether of things I experienced or things I have believed on the basis of what I have experienced. I myself weave these together out of past things, and from these I also weave together future actions and events and hopes. And I meditate on all these again, as if they were present. 'I will do this and that,' I say to myself in the massive fold of my soul, full of the images of so many great things, and this or that follows. 'Oh, if there were only this or that!' 'God forbid this or that!' I say these things to myself and, when I speak, images of all these things that I say stand forth from out of the treasury of memory.[33]

Our orientation towards the future, Augustine tells us, is rooted in the kind of imagistic mediation that conditions our relation to the sensual world. This goes both for potential plans and hypothetical wishes. All such modes of thinking are rooted in a backward-looking perspective that gathers up ideas about what was in order to think about what might come next.

We might, then, take *memoria* to be co-extensive with human thinking in general. The only thing that stands in the way of this is the troubling fact that we do not seem to be able to comprehend our own memories in thought. *Memoria*, in other words, is bigger than us, even though it seems to be what we are. As Augustine puts it:

> This force of memory is great, my God. It is immeasurably great, filled up all the way down, even infinite. Who could come through to the bottom of it? Yet this is a force of my soul. It belongs to my nature. I myself, then, do not grasp all that I am. Is the soul then too narrow to take hold of itself?[34]

---

[33] *Conf.* X.viii.14: *ibi sunt omnia quae sive experta a me sive credita memini. ex eadem copia etiam similitudines rerum vel expertarum vel ex eis quas expertus sum creditarum alias atque alias, et ipse contexo praeteritis atque ex his etiam futuras actiones et eventa et spes, et haec omnia rursus quasi praesentia meditor. `faciam hoc et illud' dico apud me in ipso ingenti sinu animi mei pleno tot et tantarum rerum imaginibus, et hoc aut illud sequitur. `o si esset hoc aut illud!' `avertat deus hoc aut illud!' dico apud me ista et, cum dico, praesto sunt imagines omnium quae dico ex eodem thesauro memoriae…*

[34] *Conf.* X.viii.15: *magna ista vis est memoriae, magna nimis, deus meus, penetrale amplum et infinitum. quis ad fundum eius pervenit? et vis est haec animi mei atque ad meam naturam pertinet, nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum. ergo animus ad habendum se ipsum angustus est, ut ubi sit quod sui non capit?*

This line of questioning should keep us from thinking that Book X's exploration of *memoria* is a demonstration of how we are able to gather ourselves up in the present by holding on to our own pasts. For Augustine, memory does not so much solve the mystery of how we are able to keep our thoughts straight in the flux of time as compound that same mystery.

Just as in Book IV, here it is a question of the limits of human comprehension. There, we saw how the human soul was unable to handle the breadth of the world's mortal multiplicity. In Book X, we see how the soul cannot even handle the breadth of its own internal multiplicity. Instead of a self-contained individual, with thoughts all sorted out, Augustine gives us the diverse immensity of a *memoria* that outstrips our own thinking about it. So immense is it that it includes not just images and their infinite variations, but also something like pure knowledge (from the liberal arts to mathematical realities),[35] the spectrum of human feelings,[36] and even,

---

[35] *Conf.* X.ix.16: *sed non ea sola gestat immensa ista capacitas memoriae meae. hic sunt et illa omnia quae de doctrinis liberalibus percepta nondum exciderunt, quasi remota interiore loco non loco; nec eorum imagines, sed res ipsas gero. nam quid sit litteratura, quid peritia disputandi, quot genera quaestionum, quidquid horum scio, sic est in memoria mea…* / "But this immeasurable capacity of my memory holds more than these images alone. Here are also all those things taken in from the liberal arts which have not yet slipped away, as if from an internally remote place into no place at all. I carry with me not just the images of these, but the things themselves. Something of literature, something of debating skill, something of the types of questions—whatever of these I know, it is in my memory." On mathematical realities, see X.xii.19. Bruce Bubacz, in "Augustine's Account of Factual Memory," *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975), 181-192, compared *Conf.* X with *De Trin.* XI (which also involves *memoria*), coming to the strong conclusion that, for Augustine, "all knowledge claims are grounded in memory." (186) This has to do with the relentlessly imaged-based mechanics of *memoria* according to Augustine, in which objects both 'absent' and 'present' can only be mediated to us by way of images and, thus, by way of *memoria*. On this, see also Bubacz, 185, 190-192. These sections of the *Confessions* raise the issue of Platonic anamnesis, the recollection of formal knowledge from some pre-birth state or simply straight from the divine realm. In *Conf.* X.x.17, Augustine distinguishes between sensual and intellectual data in the memory by saying that the former are mediated by images, whereas the latter are beheld directly in the soul. Robert Miner, "Augustinian Recollection," *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007), 435-450, provides a recent look into the discussion about these passages, showing in a fairly convincing fashion that there is still much that connects Augustine's view of *memoria* to the Platonic tradition. Still, the question of anamnesis does not seem pertinent to many of the other sections of Book X, including those that are most relevant to the theme of belatedness.

[36] *Conf.* X.xiv.21. Augustine argues that our memories of our past feelings are not mediated to us by images, and yet all the same the recollection of a feeling does not produce that feeling anew in the one who remembers. This perplexes him, and so he lingers on this question for some time.

most confusingly, forgetting.[37] All of these are in *memoria*. All of these are 'us,' and yet they are also something else, perhaps even something outside of us. This leaves Augustine perplexed:

> I am the one who remembers. I am the soul. It is not surprising if whatever I am not is far away from me. But what is nearer to me than myself? And look, the force of my memory is not comprehended by me, although I am not saying that I myself am beyond it.[38]

Augustine goes on to further express the depths of this mystery of memory in language reminiscent of both Books IV and XI. *Memoria* is the kind of thinking that would correspond to a creature that is pulled along in life, pulled apart in time, and pulled onward towards death. It is the kind of thinking that corresponds to a creature that cannot catch up with itself:

> My God, the force of memory is great. It is something to be shuddered at, but I know not what. It is a deep and infinite multiplicity. And it is the soul. I myself am it. My God, what then am I? What nature am I? A manifold life of variety, violently beyond measure. Look at the innumerable fields and caves and caverns of my memory, all innumerably filled with things of innumerable kinds […]. I run all around these things, I flitter about from this to that. I get as deep into them as I can, but there is no end. Such is the force of memory. Such is the force of life in the human who lives mortally.[39]

The terminology of this passage is one of violence and unstable mobility. Its tone is equally urgent. Rather than a dispassionate analysis of how we remember this or that, here we have a kind of panicked questioning. *Memoria* is the same as me but also bigger than me. It is how I think about and interact with the world, but also how I am torn apart by the variety of that world.

---

[37] *Conf.* X.xvi.24.

[38] *Conf.* X.xvi.25: *ego sum qui memini, ego animus. non ita mirum si a me longe est quidquid ego non sum: quid autem propinquius me ipso mihi? et ecce memoriae meae vis non comprehenditur a me, cum ipsum me non dicam praeter illam*.

[39] *Conf.* X.xvii.26: *magna vis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum, deus meus, profunda et infinita multiplicitas. et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum. quid ergo sum, deus meus? quae natura sum? varia, multimoda vita et immensa vehementer. ecce in memoriae meae campis et antris et cavernis innumerabilibus atque innumerabiliter plenis innumerabilium rerum generibus, sive per imagines, sicut omnium corporum, sive per praesentiam, sicut artium, sive per nescio quas notiones vel notationes, sicut affectionum animi (quas et cum animus non patitur, memoria tenet, cum in animo sit quidquid est in memoria), per haec omnia discurro et volito hac illac, penetro etiam quantum possum, et finis nusquam. tanta vis est memoriae, tanta vitae vis est in homine vivente mortaliter!* The English for the parts hidden above by the ellipsis is: "… whether through images (as with all bodies) or through their being there (as with learned skills) or through I-know-not-what notions or notations (as with the soul's affections, which the memory holds on to even when the soul is not experiencing them, since whatever is in the soul is in the memory)."

It is what allows me to construct a unitary narrative out of a diversity of lived experiences, and yet it dangles that unity atop a chasm of ineradicable multiplicity.[40] If all this is true, then what kind of life am I living? Augustine's answer—if indeed he gives one here—seems to be: we are living mortal lives. We are living the lives of those who are caught up in time and doomed to die. *Memoria* is how we think as we live such lives of death.

In Book IV, the thought of mortality opened up what was, for Augustine, an incomprehensible multiplicity on a cosmic scale. All things arise and pass away, and we know not how. In Book X, Augustine links mortality to incomprehensible multiplicity at the level of thinking itself. Our thoughts, we might say, arise and fall away, and we know not how. This goes not just for the vagaries of remembering and forgetting, but also for the haziness surrounding temptation and personal agency. Augustine had begun this book, we recall, by talking about his status as a tempted sinner who loved God without knowing what that meant.[41] He could not find

---

[40] On the multiplicity of the soul, see Sarah Byers, "Augustine on the 'Divided Self:' Platonist or Stoic?," *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007), 105-118, who characterizes it less as a Platonic 'multiplicity of faculties within one soul' and more of a Stoic 'multiplicity of dispositions within one soul.' Likewise, James Wetzel, "The Force of Memory: Reflections on the Interrupted Self," *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007), 147-159, sees the encounter with *memoria* in Book X as frustrating any attempts to establish a stable self that might foreclose this kind of multiplicity. See esp. 150: "Augustine's memory never seems to offer him a stable self; either he gets reminded of something incomprehensible, or he gets a vision of hopeless distention—a Babel of scattered selves, presumably once united. It might be nice not to have to recollect a self at all." And also 155: "In *Confessions* X, where we might have expected a relatively unified self to emerge, he dwells instead on the astonishing narrowness of his self-comprehension and his continued vulnerability to temptations that tempt him to be unlike himself." Wetzel (156) makes clear that a failure to establish a singular self is not necessarily a shortcoming: "If Augustine were to achieve a state where he is fully present to himself, with no possibility of interruption, he will have forgotten God beyond all possibility of recall. Such perfect narcissism is no longer a misspent love; it is spiritual death, the soul's self-entombment." On the other side of the spectrum, we have Wayne Hankey, "'Knowing as We are Known' in *Confessions* 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian, and Christian Obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi Seauton*, from Socrates to Modernity," *Augustinian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003), 23-48, who takes Book X's self-examination as a more successful search for a prefiguration of eschatological stability, which is of course only achieved through God's grace. See, e.g., 28: "The altogether remarkable result is that, in the self-examination of Book 10, the eschatological hope becomes a present reality. Indeed, the book demonstrates not only that knowing as we are known must happen now, if we are to achieve repentance and forgiveness now, but also that this can be so, because we know by knowing in the divine ideas that are in the Word of God, the eternal Son." In a sense, Augustine's introspection (if that is what it is) in Book X would then be a successful version of the ascents to divine stability attempted in Books VII and IX (on which, see Hankey, 31). That would in turn make Book X more contiguous with Augustine's Platonic awakening in *Conf.* VII.

[41] Augustine returns to the topic of whether he can remember the God he thinks he loves in *Conf.* X.xxiv.35.

that God in the sensual world and, now, a bit later on, he cannot find a place for God in *memoria*, either, though He would seem to have to be in there somewhere. But what Augustine has come to realize is that God has no place, not there or anywhere.[42] And yet still, Augustine feels that something divine has spoken to him. He remembers it, but he remembers it from no time at all. That is to say: Augustine has come to realize that the priority of God before humanity is not temporal priority, but the absolute priority of a Creator over His creatures. Within this kind of relation of priority, there can be no question of anyone ever 'catching up' to God. That is why the only thing Augustine can say is *sero te amavi*: "I loved You too late, beauty so ancient, beauty so new. I loved You too late."[43]

This kind of belatedness, however, has to do with the creature's relationship to its Creator.[44] But that is far from the end of the story. There is also, as we have begun to see, the belatedness of the human creature in relation to its fellow beings (as in Book IV) and to its own

---

[42] *Conf.* X.xxvi.37: *ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te? neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem. ubi ergo te inveni ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me? et nusquam locus, et recedimus et accedimus, et nusquam locus. veritas, ubique praesides omnibus consulentibus te simulque respondes omnibus etiam diversa consulentibus. liquide tu respondes, sed non liquide omnes audiunt. omnes unde volunt consulunt, sed non semper quod volunt audiunt. optimus minister tuus est qui non magis intuetur hoc a te audire quod ipse voluerit, sed potius hoc velle quod a te audierit.* / "Where then did I find you, so that I learned of you? You were not already in my memory before I learned of you. Where then did I find you, so that I learned of you, if not in you above me? And this place is nowhere. We can withdraw and approach again, but this place is nowhere. You, truth, are everywhere, sitting before all who reflect upon you and at the same time responding to all who reflect upon you in diverse ways. You respond clearly, but not all hear you clearly. They reflect upon what they want, but they do not always hear what they want [to hear]. Your best servant is the one who has less regard for hearing what he wants from you than wanting what he hears from you."

[43] *Conf.* X.xxvii.38: *sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi!* Cf. Marion, 184: "I am always late to the event and the last to know what I love." There is, of course, something else that Augustine thinks should be said from this position of belatedness: *da quod iubes, iube quod vis*. (*Conf.* X.xxix.40) But that too would take us outside the scope of this chapter.

[44] On this most fundamental kind of belatedness, see Marion, 198: "If time emerges only with the world and in one and the same creation, if the difference between time and eternity can therefore be defined by a temporal belatedness, God's precedence over and above the ego, as well as the world, goes back beyond time. The difference between the ego and God, finitude, therefore, stems from the fact that I alone differ from in deferring myself, because I temporalize. … The difference between my differance (temporal) vis-à-vis myself and God's in-differance (eternal) indicates my belatedness, itself intemporal, but multiform, vis-à-vis God." And again, 199: "… from the outset *homo temporalis* has been incessantly late."

thoughts (as in Book X).[45] The recognition of God's absolute priority is not enough to compensate for these other ways of running late. Such compensation could only be achieved if Augustine could indeed catch up to his God and cling to Him. But that, of course, will have to be eschatologically deferred. As it stands, Augustine is still caught up in the unstable world of time and death, which is also—as Book X never hesitates to remind us—the world of temptation. With regard to the question of whether or not he will overcome his trials and grab hold of true stability, Augustine makes a blunt confession: "I do not know on which side victory might stand."[46] Spelunking the dark caverns of *memoria* has not made Augustine's situation any clearer to himself. On the contrary, Augustinian *memoria* might be most helpfully described as the kind of inevitably retrospective thinking that is best suited to the belatedness of humanity.

The Sense of Belatedness

After all that, we are still far from the end of Book X. Just as in Book IV, there is a shift in the discussion that might strike us as rather abrupt. Earlier, Augustine took us from the intimate remembrance of a friend to the macroscopic scale of universal impermanence. Here, we pass from the urgent interrogation of memory to a sketch of the senses and the role they play in Augustine's daily temptations. The abruptness of this shift might be mitigated somewhat, though, if we recall the sensual quality of belatedness back in Book IV. It was *sensus carnis*, after all, that was so troublesomely late. It was our fleshiness, our sensuality, that kept us from

---

[45] Marion, 199, provides a concise summary sentence on the belatedness of thinking and *memoria* in the extended sense: "Since *memoria* collects my entire cogitation, it must be concluded that I am late with regard to my own cogitation, which becomes other to me."

[46] The full quotation can be found at *Conf.* X.xxviii.39: *cum inhaesero tibi ex omni me, nusquam erit mihi dolor et labor, et viva erit vita mea tota plena te. nunc autem quoniam quem tu imples, sublevas eum, quoniam tui plenus non sum, oneri mihi sum. contendunt laetitiae meae flendae cum laetandis maeroribus, et ex qua parte stet victoria nescio. contendunt maerores mei mali cum gaudiis bonis, et ex qua parte stet victoria nescio*. / "When I will have clung to you with every part of myself, there will be no pain or labor for me. My life, totally full of you, will be living. But now, since you support whatever you fill up, I am a burden to myself because I am not full of you. My celebrations to be wept over contend with my sorrows to be celebrated, and I do not know on which side victory might stand. My evil sorrows contend with my good joys, and I do not know on which side victory might stand."

keeping time with the rising and falling of all things. This connection should make it less surprising that sensuality is reintroduced in Book X, right after Augustine's discussion of how thinking, too, has trouble catching up to itself.

Ostensibly, the later parts of Book X consist of a listing of the five senses and their respective weightiness in Augustine's ongoing temptations.[47] Some of these accounts are more gripping than others. At first, it might seem like Augustine is engaged in a fairly straightforward procedure here. He will just run through the different senses, listing what it is about each that tempts him most. Once this has been done, he will have more fully confessed his weaknesses before both humanity and God. But that is far too neat. What is much more striking about these closing chapters of Book X is the way some of them (at least) come back to the question of catching up to oneself in thought and in practice.

We first catch the scent of this question in the section on the sense of smell. Notably, this is the sensual realm which Augustine finds least tempting. We might then think that he would simply state this and move on, but instead he lingers over this perceived absence of temptation. He begins to question his own claim that no aroma tempts him, which would presume that he had gotten a firm grasp on who he really was and what he was like:

---

[47] There is much to be said about these later chapters of Book X, and here we can only touch on a few relevant points. Augustine deals with a number of other important claims in these passages, one of which is the fact that the problem with sensual temptation is not that it is rooted in materiality (as a Manichaean might claim), but that it is a flaw of the soul's wayward desire. See, e.g., X.xxxi.46, on gluttony: *non ego immunditiam obsonii timeo, sed immunditiam cupiditatis.* / "I do not fear the uncleanness of meat, but I do fear the uncleanness of desire." Augustine also continues beyond the first, most obviously fleshly version of desire (*concupiscentia carnis*) and deals with its other, perhaps even more pernicious forms: *concupiscentia oculorum* (*curiositas*, the urge to know) and *ambitio saeculi* (the prideful lust for power and praise). The lack of clarity to oneself that comes with *concupiscentia carnis* presumably also accompanies these other desires. For one example, regarding *ambitio saeculi*, see *Conf.* X.xxxvii.62: *ecce in te, veritas, video non me laudibus meis propter me, sed propter proximi utilitatem moveri oportere. et utrum ita sim, nescio. minus mihi in hac re notus sum ipse quam tu. obsecro te, deus meus, et me ipsum mihi indica, ut confitear oraturis pro me fratribus meis quod in me saucium comperero*. / "In You, Truth, I see that I should not be motivated by praise of myself on my own account. I should instead be motivated by what is useful for my neighbor. But I do not know whether I am motivated by the latter. In this matter, I am known less to myself than to You. My God, I beg you: point me out to myself, so that I can confess the wounds I display on myself to my brothers who pray for me."

> This is how I appear to myself—but perhaps I might be mistaken. There is this lamentable darkness in me. What I am capable of is concealed from me in this darkness, so that when my soul interrogates itself about its own strength, it cannot easily consider itself to be credible to itself. What lies within is entirely hidden, unless it is made manifest by experience. And in this life called 'total temptation,' no one ought to be sure that he who can become better after being worse cannot also become worse after being better.[48]

Augustine's appearance to himself cannot be fully trusted. But this is not just due to some general skepticism. "What lies within is entirely hidden," he says, "unless it is made manifest by experience." There is a futural component to this lack of self-knowledge. It is what Augustine is capable of doing in the future that scares him most. The mutability of the world does allow for improvement, but, as he emphasizes here, it can also open up dark new possibilities. For the time being, then, no one can trust themselves to diagnose their own condition. The totality of who someone is must await the completion of their life. And so, even in Augustine's attempt at self-criticism, we find that a necessary delay intercedes—he is held back, unable to take hold of himself and interrogate himself to the fullest extent.

This sensibility is developed further in the section on hearing. Here Augustine admits the intensity of his ongoing preoccupation with beautiful sounds, especially the music of the Church. Hymns long played a role in his religious life, and he could never deny their appeal. Still, like all sensual things, he thought they should be held in check and used only when needed. But this was Augustine's official position on the matter, not the lived reality of his experiences.[49] Sometimes, for example, he might be sitting before his congregation, listening soberly to the hymns being

---

[48] *Conf.* X.xxxii.48: *ita mihi videor; forsitan fallar. sunt enim et istae plangendae tenebrae in quibus me latet facultas mea quae in me est, ut animus meus de viribus suis ipse se interrogans non facile sibi credendum existimet, quia et quod inest plerumque occultum est, nisi experientia manifestetur, et nemo securus esse debet in ista vita, quae tota temptatio nominatur, utrum qui fieri potuit ex deteriore melior non fiat etiam ex meliore deterior*.

[49] For an eloquent expression of Augustine's oddly passionate ambivalence regarding music, see Carol Harrison, "Getting Carried Away: Why Did Augustine Sing?" *Augustinian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015), 1-22, esp. 4: "Augustine didn't like music; he didn't like the fact that it could have such a powerful effect on the listener; that it had the ability to stir the deepest recesses of the mind and heart; to delight and to move the soul; to articulate feelings which were inexpressible in words. He didn't like music; he loved it."

sung, when an intense delight flows over him and takes charge of his thoughts. In that case, he is no longer in control:

> But the delight of my flesh—to which a weak mind should not be given over—often deceives me. This happens when sense-experience does not follow upon reason, in such a way that it is patiently posterior. Instead, it merits admittance on account of its delightfulness,[50] and it tries to run ahead and lead reason. In these kinds of things, I sin without feeling it. Only afterwards do I feel it.[51]

This is a strange feature of sin. The temptation here is obviously sensual—Augustine is tempted by feeling, and yet he does not feel it. Or, rather, he does not feel it to be sin as he lives in and through it. Only afterwards, only in retrospect, can he sense it to be something quite different than what he felt. Only through the mediation of *memoria*, in other words, could he even properly (in his eyes) make sense of his own experiences.[52]

It is in this same section on sonic temptation that Augustine repeats his claim about becoming a *quaestio* to himself. Going back and forth on whether hymns are useful tools for sensual instruction or gateways to sensual destruction, Augustine collapses into confusion and lamentation over what he himself even thinks:

> Look where I am at! Weep with me and weep for me, you who do some good within yourselves! This weeping comes from that inner goodness. If you do not do it, then these things do not move you. But You, my Lord God—hear me out!

---

[50] This could also be taken as "on account of reason" or "on account of a rational argument about the effectiveness of beautiful hymns as opposed to poorly sung ones." The *illam* in *propter illam* could be referring back either to *delectatio* or, more proximately, *ratio*. (See the full Latin below.)

[51] *Conf.* X.xxxiii.49: *sed delectatio carnis meae, cui mentem enervandam non oportet dari, saepe me fallit, dum rationi sensus non ita comitatur ut patienter sit posterior, sed tantum, quia propter illam meruit admitti, etiam praecurrere ac ducere conatur. ita in his pecco non sentiens et postea sentio*.

[52] Harrison, "Getting Carried Away," 13-14, tries to link this sensual danger of music to the exemplary status of singing in *Conf.* XI, although she does not go as far in this direction as she might have: "It is partly because song consists of musical sound as well as words; the sound ensures that the words cannot be taken as ends in themselves, but must be perceived as pointing in and through themselves to the reality they convey. This works at a number of levels: first, musical sound makes words part of time, suspending them in an ordered sequence which is happening but is not yet finished; second, it lends to words a breadth and openness which the speaking voice does not possess (we can sustain, prolong or improvise on a single note in a way that is impossible for a single word or syllable); third, it can give utterance to what is in the heart, to what words cannot express, and in so doing, can carry us across to the inexpressible); fourth, it resonates with the soul in such a way that it inspires what Augustine describes as 'loving devotion.'"

> Look at me. See me. Have mercy on me and heal me. In your eyes, I have become a question to myself. And this itself is my weariness.[53]

When Augustine fails to settle his own feelings on something, it reminds him that he appears to himself as a question still to be figured out. But all this struggling to uncover himself only tires him out. He becomes sluggish, languorous, even late. And if he is a question to himself, then he cannot have himself there as something already present. He strikes himself as something to be asked about or, better, sought after (hence the repetition of *quaerere*). Augustine is in search of himself, trying to catch up to himself and pin himself down as present—as this or that, as music-loving or music-reviling, as a good person or an evil person. And yet, as we see again and again in his writings, he cannot ever track himself down in time. Nothing in heaven or earth or thought has yet been able to resolve this question for him, as he confesses to his God: "In all these things that I run through and consult You about, I can find no safe place for my soul."[54] There is no rest from the mobility, nor is Augustine's scatteredness ever gathered up—until the eschaton. Only a

---

[53] *Conf.* X.xxxiii.50: *ecce ubi sum! flete mecum et pro me flete qui aliquid boni vobiscum intus agitis, unde facta procedunt. nam qui non agitis, non vos haec movent. tu autem, domine deus meus, exaudi: respice et vide et miserere et sana me, in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus*.

[54] For the whole quotation, see *Conf.* X.xl.65: *et saepe istuc facio. hoc me delectat, et ab actionibus necessitatis, quantum relaxari possum, ad istam voluptatem refugio. neque in his omnibus quae percurro consulens te invenio tutum locum animae meae nisi in te, quo conligantur sparsa mea nec a te quicquam recedat ex me. et aliquando intromittis me in affectum multum inusitatum introrsus, ad nescio quam dulcedinem, quae si perficiatur in me, nescio quid erit quod vita ista non erit. sed recido in haec aerumnosis ponderibus et resorbeor solitis et teneor et multum fleo, sed multum teneor. tantum consuetudinis sarcina digna est! his esse valeo nec volo, illic volo nec valeo, miser utrubique*. / "And I still do this often. It delights me. Insofar as I can relax from necessary activities, I find refuge in this pleasure. In all these things that I run through and consult you about, I can find no safe place for my soul. I could only find a safe place in you. My scatteredness and whatever recedes from me might be gathered up by you. Sometimes, you send me into a very unusual feeling within. It is a kind of sweetness, but I do not know what kind. If it were brought to fulfillment in me, I do not know what such a life would not be. But I always fall back into those other things, pulled down by wretched weights. I am swallowed up again by customs. I am held there. I weep much about it, but I am held all the more. The burden of custom is so heavy! I am strong enough to be with these things, but I do not want to be with them. I want to be 'there,' but I am not strong enough. Either way, it is miserable." The word translated here as "safe" is *tutus* (guarded, watched-over) which shares a root with *contuitus* (viz. *tueri*). Perhaps one way of phrasing this problem is that Augustine is too caught up in his scattered life to get a clear view on his own place in the world. He is unable to watch over himself.

God could answer Augustine's question about himself, and so his *quaestio* could only be deferred until the very end.[55]

Conclusion

Given that a large part of the *Confessions* is devoted to Augustine's gradual shift to the position that God is neither material nor temporal, it is perhaps unsurprising that he grants God absolute and a-temporal priority over all things in time. That humanity could then be described as utterly belated in relation to such a deity would hardly count as a remarkable development. "*Sero te amavi*" is not the most shocking thing Augustine ever wrote. But what we find in both the fourth and tenth books of the *Confessions* is that Augustine builds on this theme of belatedness in his approach to other aspects of human experience. In addition to the belatedness of creature to Creator, there is also the belatedness of the human creature to its world and to itself. Of course, for Augustine, both of these kinds of belatedness were rooted in the divine and involved divine agency. In Book IV, it is the divinely instituted order of arising and passing away that sensual humanity is always too late to see. In Book X, it is the search for God that reveals to Augustine what a *quaestio* he is to himself. Yet Augustine's extension of belatedness to these other kinds of relationships was not inevitable. It remains striking that he took catching

[55] Marion, 44, latches on to this recurring refrain of the *quaestio*: Augustine "does not comprehend himself in his past (books I-IX): *factus eram mihi magna quaestio*; nor in his present (book X): *mihi quaestio factus sum*; nor even in his future (books XI-XIII), since those who see the good see in the Holy Spirit and not by themselves: *non ipsi, sed Deus videt, quia bonum est*." Unlike Hankey and some others, Marion does not at all see Augustinian *memoria* as a path to self-comprehension. See, e.g., Marion, 73-74: "I am of an in fact certain existence, without however the slightest access to my essence nor to my ipseity, and this crisis can last my whole lifetime, for it finds its place (and its nonplace) in my *memoria*. I can still love what I know nothing about and therefore endure my existence without essence because what I know nothing about, my *quaedam memoria occulta* at once preserves for me and hides from me. And since I am my *memoria*, I therefore become hidden from myself."

up to the world and to oneself to be just as difficult as catching up to God.[56] All three would be finally achievable only in the absolute future of an eschatological end.

Reading Books IV and X alongside one another, as we have, allows us to distinguish these two other kinds of belatedness (to the world and to oneself), but also to sketch out some of their parallels. In both cases, mortality and finitude play a key role in calling Augustine back to the limitations on the life he lives. The death of the unnamed friend spurs on the kind of fresh thinking about time, memory, and impermanence that motivates Augustine's cosmological speculations not only in Book IV, but also in Book X, Book XI, and beyond. In Book X, Augustine comes back to the matter of death, attributing the incomprehensibility of memory to the finite condition of mortal humanity. Both books also link their belatedness back to sensuality. It is, after all, *sensus carnis* that is late, while it is through the ongoing temptation of the senses that we come face to face with our inability to get a hold of ourselves.

Finally, by reading both books after Book XI, we can see how a deep sense of *distentio* lurks beneath their pages. Book IV refers us back to the scar of temporal instability that was already there in us before we lost anything in particular, while Book X shows how our attempts to gather ourselves up from dispersion never quite succeed in this life. *Memoria* is not the name for a kind of cognitive achievement that overcomes the way we are pulled apart into multiplicity in time. Rather, as it brings something of the retrospective even into our relation to the future, *memoria* is the mode of thinking most appropriate to those who are unable to escape the *distentio*

---

[56] At the very end of the tenth book, at *Conf.* X.xlii and X.xliii, Augustine makes clear that to try to rush into eschatological stability before the time is ill advised. He associates it with dabbling in the dark arts. The one exemplar of victory over belatedness in this life—as in Book IV—is Christ. For Augustine, He was the only true mediator between the scattered and the gathered. Here, Christ's humility and mortality seem to be the keys. Though, in His humility, Christ was victorious over death, no one else will repeat that feat until the eschaton. But that fact itself provides the only possible way out. See *Conf.* X.xliii.69: *merito mihi spes valida in illo est, quod sanabis omnes languores meos per eum qui sedet ad dexteram tuam et te interpellat pro nobis; alioquin desperarem*. / "Given His [i.e., Christ's] merit, I have a firm hope that You will heal all my weariness through Him who sits at Your right hand and intercedes for us. Otherwise, I would have no hope."

that constitutes them. It is incapable of making them present to themselves, and so the *quaestio* remains. In light of all this retrospection, we always experience ourselves as arriving late to our own lived experiences. Humanity can never quite catch up to the moment that it is living in, perhaps because—as we saw in Book XI—the 'present moment' is ultimately a spurious concept. Without such a present as a firm foundation, we can only ever slip into the future as we look back and try to gather ourselves up, never quite succeeding. 'Belatedness,' then, would be our imperfect way of describing what it feels like to live this way. And this is the kind of sensibility Augustine seeks to express through Books IV and X, at least as read in light of Book XI. Caught up in a time without present, he could only sense that he was somehow late for a present that never was.

Chapter 4: Conversion and Perseverance

We have seen how Augustine destroyed the present in the eleventh book of the *Confessions*. We have worked through the sense of belatedness that haunts a life lived in the wake of the present in the fourth and tenth books of the same work. And yet, for all this talk of being pulled apart, is there not at least one key turning point in Augustine's life, where he seems to have been able to pull himself together and make a decision in the present instant? In Book VIII of the *Confessions*, Augustine tells us the story of his conversion. It was not a smooth process. In rhetoric that should be familiar by now, he writes of being pulled this way and that, thinking that he knows what he wants, but not being able to get a firm hold even on his own thoughts. The tension runs higher and higher as he approaches conversion, that moment of transformation after which everything should be different. Interpreted this way, his conversion would be that unimaginable instant when he could finally decide to follow the God he thought he wanted to follow.

One thing stands in the way of this dream of conversion: "The instant of decision is madness." The quotation is attributed to Søren Kierkegaard, but it was memorably repeated by Jacques Derrida in a variety of works, from "*Cogito* and the History of Madness" to *Given Time*.[1] By "*l'instant de la décision est une folie*," Derrida seems to have wanted to suggest the impossibility of a moment when time would freeze and we would have present before us all the information needed to make a truly justifiable decision. But, of course, the river of time never does freeze and we never do have all that information on hand. Still, decisions are made. The

[1] The quotation serves as the epigraph to "*Cogito* and the History of Madness" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 31. It is referenced again in *Given Time*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9, when Derrida tries to link the possibility of a gift to an instantaneous break in time: "This condition [of the instant] concerns time but does not *belong* to it, does not pertain to it without being, for all that, more logical than chronological. There would be a gift only at the instant when the *paradoxical* instant (in the sense in which Kierkegaard says of the paradoxical instant of decision that it is madness) tears time apart."

relationship between this line of thinking—intriguing though it is—and what Kierkegaard was talking about is far from clear.

Thankfully, Geoffrey Bennington has written an article that tries to trace out the awkward lineage of this citation.[2] He reminds us that the quotation is from the *Philosophical Fragments*, written under the pen name of Johannes Climacus.[3] What is at issue there is neither the philosophical integrity of the temporal instant nor the difficulty of ever achieving a fully justified decision. Rather, the discussion is about knowledge and learning taken more generally. Climacus is arguing against what he takes to be a Socratic model of anamnesis. According to that model, all knowledge is akin to recollecting something long forgotten. There would then be no radical moment of awakening, no time when new knowledge is truly gained where there was none before. And it is that kind of breaking point Climacus wants to safeguard.[4] The "instant" in the "instant of decision" is referring to just such a point. Calling this instant "madness" is not, in fact, Kierkegaard's claim or even Climacus'. It is instead a polemical characterization of the so-called Socratic position, which allegedly denies all such instants.[5] It is this position that accuses them of something like 'foolishness.'

---

[2] Geoffrey Bennington, "A Moment of Madness: Derrida's Kierkegaard," *Oxford Literary Review* 33, no. 1 (2011), 103-127.

[3] A recent edition is Kierkegaard, *Johannes Climacus: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard & Edna Hong (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1985).

[4] Bennington, 111: "the moment of decision occurs as a moment of conversion or rebirth, as a radical break without return, which Climacus suggests is scarcely thinkable at all, and that it is his project or proposal to try to think or at least approach." Notably, Climacus relates this breaking point to the Pauline *plērōma tou chronou*, which we encountered briefly above. It is the idea of a possible *kairos* that still seems to be at stake here.

[5] Bennington, 114: "'*L'instant de la décision est une folie*' is thus not, as one might have been forgiven for thinking on reading Derrida's apparently enthusiastic endorsements or countersignings of it, Kierkegaard's, nor even Climacus', direct characterization of the moment, but their characterization of the *Socratic* view of it, i.e. the view that the whole point of the *Fragments* is to contest, at least hypothetically, according to the thought-project." The Hong translation (51-52) gives the relevant passage as: "The dialectic of the moment is not difficult. From the Socratic point of view, the moment is not to be seen or to be distinguished; it does not exist, has not been, and will not come. Therefore, the learner himself is the truth, and the moment of occasion is merely a jest, like an end-sheet half-title that does not essentially belong to a book. And the moment of decision is *foolishness*, for if the decision is posited then (see above) the learner becomes untruth, but precisely this makes a beginning in the moment necessary." (Italics theirs.)

Through the historical accidents of language, Kierkegaard's foolishness became Derrida's madness.[6] Both are talking about turning points of one kind or another, but in the end they are trying to tackle different problems. Still, the phrase remains oddly appropriate to the matter of Augustine's conversion. As he approaches his own instant of transformation, he is plagued by a torment that is not unlike madness. What is most relevant here, though, is not the agony that leads up to the instant, but the turmoil that is supposed to be its aftermath. Augustine's account of his conversion in Book VIII does indeed inhabit this rhetoric of instantaneity, but that is far from the end of the story. His post-conversion life would continue to show symptoms of the same afflictions and crises that characterized his earlier years. Augustine would go on to explore this ambiguous experience of life after conversion in later works, most poignantly in the very late *De Dono Perseverantiae*. There we read of how true conversion involves the survival of a maddening kind of delay, even beyond the triumphant climax of Book VIII. The logic of perseverance, which Augustine lays out for us in that work, is thus a necessary aspect of the temporality of conversion. After winding our way through Book VIII, then, we will have to take leave of the *Confessions* and leap ahead to another time in Augustine's life. Doing so should aid us in our appraisal of Augustine's own "instant of decision," which might itself turn out to be *folie* of one sort or another.

The Search for Stability

In Book VIII, we come upon Augustine in the middle of a search for the same kind of stability we find him seeking out in other books of the *Confessions*. In Book IV, the goal is a more grounded perspective on the arising and passing away of everything we love. In Book X, the aim is to test whether or not there is any secure basis for selfhood lurking in the dim corners

[6] Bennington, 117-118, traces out the particulars of the Danish and the French (of both the *Philosophical Fragments* and the New Testament), with helpful parallels in German.

of *memoria*. And in Book XI, as we read, Augustine is overcome with lamentation over the impossibility of holding his heart still so that he can make sense of time and change. What must be admitted first of all, though, is that the search for stability in *Conf.* VIII ends on a much happier note than those other books do. It tells the story of what has often been regarded as the most transformative moment in Augustine's life: his conversion.

But what exactly is the content of that conversion? Augustine's approach to God, as narrated in the *Confessions*, is a long and drawn-out process, and yet Book VIII can obviously be taken as a special kind of turning point. If we want to understand why that privileged status is bestowed upon the story of his conversion, we should spend some time looking at which of Augustine's desires is being sated by it.

At the very beginning of his account, Augustine lets us know what exactly he was still looking for in those days. Living in Milan, making money off his oratorical skills and slowly making his way up the social ladder, he was already becoming disgusted with himself and his pointless goals. Having expanded his mind a bit by reading the Platonists, he had also made his break with the Manichaeans complete. He no longer felt so caught up in confusions about the relationship between God and matter or good and evil. Neoplatonic arguments about the immateriality of God and the privative concept of evil had provided him with some of the mental clarity he had been after. But despite all that, he did not feel so different. Despite these tectonic intellectual shifts, it did not feel to him as if much of consequence had changed. It was beginning to dawn on him that what he was looking for was not more certainty about God or the world, but rather more stability 'in' God and the world:

> So I no longer wanted to be more certain about you. What I wanted was to be more stable in you. But in my own temporal life everything was wavering. My heart still had to be cleansed of its old, boiling passion.[7] [*fermento veteri*]

The issue, here as so often for Augustine, is temporality. All the arguments about the nature of divinity or the non-being of evil could not suffice to pull Augustine out of the river of time. Its waves were still crashing down upon him. "Everything was wavering:" such a sentiment should seem familiar to any reader of Book IV, with its excursus on the arising and passing away of things. Here Augustine uses the verb *nutare*—'to nod,' but more fittingly to wobble from side to side or even bob up and down. Elsewhere, he will prefer the language of *aestus*. Augustine applies that term, which connotes both the turbulent waves of the sea and the flickering flames of fire, both to his own passionate anxieties and to the unsteady hesitation that accompanies such anxieties.[8] A kind of wavering, then, plagues us on both the 'inside' and the 'outside.' The temporal world crashes down on us like waves, while our desires burn us up from within. Together, these two forces—something like water and fire—produce the bubbling *fermentum* of Augustine's soul.

That is the situation Augustine finds himself in at the beginning of Book VIII. It is a situation that cannot be fixed by more philosophical formulas. Augustine is stuck in the kind of hesitation that is symptomatic of all this turbulence. And he was not the first to be so stuck. Feeling strangely motivated to go speak to Simplicianus, a revered Christian teacher in Milan, Augustine heard from him the story of Marius Victorinus.[9] Much like Augustine, Victorinus too had been convinced by several Neoplatonic arguments about God and evil. And yet this did not

---

[7] *Conf.* VIII.i.1: *nec certior de te sed stabilior in te esse cupiebam. de mea vero temporali vita nutabant omnia et mundandum erat cor a fermento veteri*.
[8] For *aestus meos* as "my anxieties," see the last line of *Conf.* VIII.i.1. In VIII.viii.19, *aestus* in the singular serves as a kind of "agitation." The connotation of hesitant "wavering" comes in with the related verb *aestuare*, as used in passages like the end of VIII.x.23.
[9] *Conf.* VIII.ii.3.

keep him from his involvements in society, including those that involved observing the old, polytheistic rites. When Simplicianus pointed out the hypocrisy of this, Victorinus responded tartly, "So it is walls that make a Christian?"[10] As it turns out, the answer is a qualified 'yes,' and Augustine will be forced to explore the qualifications of this in later works. Here, though, it is enough to bring his anecdote to a close with a happy ending: Victorinus openly proclaimed his faith and the community of the faithful rejoiced.[11]

After running through this anecdote, it occurs to Augustine how strange it is that audiences love to hear stories where a lost soul is redeemed in some way. Would it not be happier if that soul were never lost in the first place? It would certainly be more stable, at least. This turns into a long aside about the interplay between loss and victory, adversity and prosperity.[12] What Augustine stumbles upon here is that, in addition to the arising and passing away of all things, there is always the affective arising and passing away of joy and sorrow:

> Everywhere greater joy is preceded by greater troubles. Why is this, Lord? Why is it like this, my God, even though you yourself are eternal joy for yourself, and those who come from you are always rejoicing around you? Why is it that this aspect of things alternates between lack and growth, failures and gains? Or is this their limit? [*modus*] Is this as much as you gave them, when you put all kinds of goods and all your just works in their proper places and led them to their proper times,[13] from the heights of heaven to the ends of the earth, from the beginning up to the end of the ages, from the angels to the worms, from the first move down to the last?[14]

---

[10] *Conf.* VIII.ii.4: *ergo parietes faciunt christianos*?
[11] *Conf.* VIII.ii.5.
[12] *Conf.* VIII.iii.6-7. Humanity's situation here stands in stark contrast to how things are for God: *nam tu semper idem, qui ea quae non semper nec eodem modo sunt eodem modo semper nosti omnia*. / "You always remain the same. You always know in the same way everything that is never 'always' and is never 'in the same way.'" Here again we have an association between the language of inconstancy and the term *modus* (way or measure).
[13] Here Augustine employs the plural *tempora*, which he will often use to designate 'spans' of time that correspond to the duration of certain things or events, as opposed to time proper (*tempus* in the singular). In terms of Book XI, *tempus* is what is ultimately at issue, but part of his approach in asking about *tempus* involves tackling the question of how to measure out *tempora*. The distinction might seem over-subtle, but it is good to keep in mind as we muddle through Augustine's semantic flexibility when it comes to talking about time.
[14] *Conf.* VIII.iii.8: *ubique maius gaudium molestia maiore praeceditur. quid est hoc, domine deus meus, cum tu aeternum tibi, tu ipse, sis gaudium, et quaedam de te circa te semper gaudeant? quid est quod haec rerum pars alternat defectu et profectu, offensionibus et conciliationibus? an is est modus earum et tantum dedisti eis, cum a*

Just as it is unwise to rely on temporal things that are born to pass away, so is it ill advised to assume that particular states or situations will last. In Book IV, Augustine uncovered the *modus* of things as it pertains to their existing at all; here, he is showing that this *modus* also bears upon the quality of their existence. The arrangement of things into which we are born is always changing and never lasts, but even more disorienting is that anyone's place within that order is just as unstable. The triumphant tale of Victorinus bears within it a chilling lesson about the inconstancy of things and how our desires are caught up within that inconsistency. And so even our desire to hear stories of escape from this wavering world shows how embedded we are in that world and the way it works. There would, then, appear to be good cause for hesitation.

Augustine's conversion was being put on hold. This delay was surely a manifestation of all the wavering that was written into his world, but that alone does not tell us much. Luckily, Augustine has more to say about the mechanics of hesitation. He describes it, first of all, as a rising up of one will against another. Though he wanted very much to emulate Victorinus' success story, 'wanting it' was just not enough:

> I was held back—not by someone else's iron sword, but by my own iron will.[15] … Yet a new will began to be for me, so that I could worship you freely and want to enjoy you, God. You alone are certain pleasure. But this new will was not yet fit for overcoming the old hardness that was already there. And so my two wills—one old, the other new; one fleshly, the other spiritual—were fighting against each other. They were scattering my soul with their discord.[16]

---

summis caelorum usque ad ima terrarum, ab initio usque in finem saeculorum, ab angelo usque ad vermiculum, a motu primo usque ad extremum, omnia genera bonorum et omnia iusta opera tua suis quaeque sedibus locares et suis quaeque temporibus ageres?

[15] Here Augustine uses "iron will" in a pejorative sense, standing for a kind of stubborn entrapment, whereas today we might more readily associate it with virtuous determination or resoluteness.

[16] *Conf*. VIII.v.10. In the same passage, Augustine discusses how this involuntary entrapment by one's own will is seen most clearly in the force of habit. He also attributes the 'chaining up' of his will to "the enemy," at least in part. This hints that Augustine experiences this conflict of the wills as coming upon him from something like 'the outside.' In Latin, the passage reads: … *ligatus non ferro alieno sed mea ferrea voluntate. velle meum tenebat inimicus et inde mihi catenam fecerat et constrinxerat me. quippe ex voluntate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas. quibus quasi ansulis sibimet innexis (unde catenam appellavi) tenebat me obstrictum dura servitus. voluntas autem nova quae mihi esse*

Here again we have language that suggests the violent ripping-apart of Augustine's soul. This kind of scattering or dissipation is due to a multiplicity of 'wills' (*voluntates*) arising in opposition to one another. Rather than treating this as a metaphysical proliferation of faculties, it would be best to take it as a plurality of dispositions. Put simply: Augustine is realizing that the question of 'what he wants' has no straightforward answer. When he reflects upon his volition, he finds much more going on there than he expected. His conversion is not easily describable as the 'turning-around' of a unitary will that is merely pointed in the wrong direction. Instead, it is more like the 'turning-together' (*con-versio*) of the diversity of wills he is discovering within himself.[17]

Since Augustine was still wavering between these wills, the reduction of their multiplicity would have to be put off. But Augustine knew he was running late for his own conversion. What seemed to be needed was a moment of transformation that would gather up Augustine's wills and draw them all in the right direction. Yet every time Augustine looked for such a moment, it was not there for him to seize. He likens the experience to trying to tear

---

coeperat, ut te gratis colerem fruique te vellem, deus, sola certa iucunditas, nondum erat idonea ad superandam priorem vetustate roboratam. ita duae voluntates meae, una vetus, alia nova, illa carnalis, illa spiritalis, confligebant inter se atque discordando dissipabant animam meam.

[17] By turning a diversity of wills all to the same direction, conversion would also be a decreasing of this internal multiplicity. Augustine's way of talking about 'many wills' is apt to cause confusion, but it might be easier to decode if we think of 'the will' less as a distinct faculty of the mind and more as a disposition of the mind. Multiple dispositions are at least easier to conceive of than multiple, overlapping faculties. This dispositional reading is recommended by Sara Byers, "Augustine on the Divided Self," 114-117. She holds that a reading of Augustine that takes the will to be a distinct part of the soul is too 'Platonic,' since it evokes the image of separate psychic portions—e.g., will, understanding, memory, or what have you—struggling against one another for leadership of the soul. Instead, she proposes that we take a 'Stoic' approach to these *voluntates*, interpreting them as dispositions that affect the whole soul. They can then, at least in principle, be multiplied to the highest degree. The process of conversion could, again, be taken as a trimming-down of this overgrown multiplicity of divisions. In *Conf.* VIII.v.11, Augustine maps this volitional diversity on to Paul's spirit-flesh dichotomy, which he also seems to take as a dispositional distinction (as opposed to a substantial one which, as always, might bring him too close to Mani): *sic intellegebam me ipso experimento id quod legeram, quomodo caro concupisceret adversus spiritum et spiritus adversus carnem, ego quidem in utroque, sed magis ego in eo quod in me approbabam quam in eo quod in me improbabam*. / "By experiencing this within my own self, then, I began to understand what I had read about how the flesh desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. Certainly, I was in both, though I was more in what I approved of than in what I disapproved of."

yourself free from the clutches of sleep and failing. Augustine's was an especially extreme case, since it was God Himself who was trying to get him out of bed:

> You were saying to me, "Get up! Stop sleeping! Rise from the dead! Christ will illuminate you." But there was no response from me. From all sides, You were showing me that You were telling the truth. But even though I was overcome by the truth, I had no response at all, except for some slow, sleepy words: "In a moment." "Look, I will get up in a moment." "Give me a little bit." But this "moment" [*modo*] had no measure. [*modus*] This "little bit" was getting long.[18]

God is trying to wake Augustine up to an instant of change, a moment of transformation. And yet Augustine is not living through such a moment. It is not that he cannot conceive of it at all; he can. But the instant, this 'now' of upheaval, never arrives. It is always just around the corner. It

---

[18] *Conf.* VIII.v.12. The passage deserves to be reproduced in full: *ita sarcina saeculi, velut somno adsolet, dulciter premebar, et cogitationes quibus meditabar in te similes erant conatibus expergisci volentium, qui tamen superati soporis altitudine remerguntur. et sicut nemo est qui dormire semper velit omniumque sano iudicio vigilare praestat, differt tamen plerumque homo somnum excutere cum gravis torpor in membris est, eumque iam displicentem carpit libentius quamvis surgendi tempus advenerit: ita certum habebam esse melius tuae caritati me dedere quam meae cupiditati cedere, sed illud placebat et vincebat, hoc libebat et vinciebat. non enim erat quod tibi responderem dicenti mihi, 'surge qui dormis et exsurge a mortuis, et inluminabit te Christus,' et undique ostendenti vera te dicere, non erat omnino quid responderem veritate convictus, nisi tantum verba lenta et somnolenta: 'modo,' 'ecce modo,' 'sine paululum.' sed 'modo et modo' non habebat modum et 'sine paululum' in longum ibat. frustra condelectabar legi tuae secundum interiorem hominem, cum alia lex in membris meis repugnaret legi mentis meae et captivum me duceret in lege peccati quae in membris meis erat. lex enim peccati est violentia consuetudinis, qua trahitur et tenetur etiam invitus animus eo merito quo in eam volens inlabitur. miserum ergo me quis liberaret de corpore mortis huius nisi gratia tua per Iesum Christum, dominum nostrum?* / "I was being pressed down sweetly by the burden of the world, like I was asleep. And when I meditated on you, my thoughts were like the efforts of someone who wants to get up, but cannot, and falls back into a deep sleep. But no one wants to be asleep forever. It has been soundly judged by everyone that it is better to be awake. Still, quite often people put off cutting short their sleep, especially when there is a heavy sluggishness in their limbs. Then they are gladly seized by sleep, even though the time to get up has already arrived. And so I was certain that it was better to give myself up to your love than to yield to my desire, but various things were pleasing me and overwhelming me. They were making me happy while chaining me down. You were saying to me, 'Get up! Stop sleeping! Rise from the dead! Christ will illuminate you.' But there was no response from me. From all sides, you were showing me that you were telling the truth. But even though I was overcome by the truth, I had no response at all, except for some slow, sleepy words: 'In a moment.' 'Look, I will get up in a moment.' 'Give me a little bit.' But this 'moment' had no measure. This 'little bit' was getting long. My inner person was delighted by your law, but that was pointless, because there was another law in my limbs. It was fighting the law of my mind. It took me captive and led me into the law of sin that was in my limbs. This law of sin is the force of habit. It drags the unwilling soul and holds it down. But the soul deserves this, because it is being dragged into the very things it slipped into willingly. And so I was miserable. Our Lord, what could free me from the body of this death? What, if not your grace through Jesus Christ?" Again, here we have the language of habit. To hazard a guess at how it fits into the bigger picture: habit (*consuetudo*) might be the kind of action that is most appropriate to those who live in the kind of belatedness we have been examining. Habit is not what you plan out in advance and execute in full clarity and with a robust voluntariness. It is, rather, the kind of action you do without realizing it. It is the kind of action you recognize yourself as having done only after having done it—if at all.

is a *modo* without *modus*, as he puts it. A kind of delay always finds its way into the instant, giving it that extra duration needed to keep time flowing onward. Augustine is powerless to compact the duration of this delay into a punctual stigma of conversion. And he experiences this powerlessness as a kind of sleepiness, sluggishness, or, as he suggested elsewhere, belatedness.

Fairly early in Book VIII, then, we see that Augustine is still having trouble with time. His search for stability uncovers yet more instability, while his longing for a present instant is met with deferral. A moment of wakefulness or an eye-opening instant still seems far off, and yet, so far, this is the only form Augustine's hope for conversion can take. He is late for an auspicious appointment, and it remains unclear whether or not he will ever be able to rise up out of his languor long enough to make it on time. Book VIII, then, is about the agony of delay. More specifically, it is about the incessant deferral of the instant of change. Few would doubt that Augustine did indeed change throughout his life, but if we go on to ask the question—'When did Augustine change?'—we find that the answer to this is not so obvious. Yet that should not be so surprising, provided that we keep in mind how decisive *distentio* was for the way Augustine experienced time and expressed it in his writings. By reading Book XI first, we have prepared ourselves for the complications facing Augustine's search for a transformative instant. In a time without any stable present, such a search would seem quite mad. What could Augustine expect to find, other than a *modo* without *modus*? Still, if we want to trace out more carefully how *distentio* as deferral conditioned Augustine's understanding of conversion, we will have to look to another kind of *distentio*, one that we have already begun to talk about above. This is the *distentio* of wills.

Volitional *Distentio*

After recounting his anecdote about Victorinus, Augustine moves on to a scene at the home he and Alypius were staying at in Milan. They are visited—seemingly for no reason—by Ponticianus, a fellow African now occupying an impressive post in the military. Their visitor strikes up a conversation about Paul, trying to convince Augustine that the epistles of the Apostle are worth reading more closely. In so doing, Ponticianus happens to mention Antony, the Egyptian whose ascetic accomplishments were proving quite popular all around the Mediterranean. Shocked that Augustine and Alypius had never heard of Antony, Ponticianus proceeds to recall a somewhat convoluted story about how he first learned of the great monk.[19]

Some time earlier, Ponticianus tells them, he had been posted up near Trier. One day, while he and some fellow soldiers were walking around some gardens near the city wall, two of them (not including Ponticianus) stumbled upon a house occupied by two "slaves" of God. The identity of these figures is not revealed, but it is reported that they had a copy of the *Life of Antony*, written by Athanasius of Alexandria to build up the ascetic's reputation. As he began to leaf through the text, one of Ponticianus' compatriots began to reflect on the futility of his life compared to that of Antony. Roman aristocrats, he mused, struggle their way through the *cursus honorum* to grasp at a more secure place in the hierarchy. But even then, the positions near the top tend to be the most precarious of all. Antony, meanwhile, had all he needed in his dedication to God. What is most relevant for our purposes here is that Ponticianus' friend contrasted the long slog of social mobility with the transformative instant of divine favor. "If I want to be a friend of God," he reflected, "look, I am made one right now."[20] That utterance itself, however, was not the moment of conversion. That came a little bit later. As he continued to read, "the flow

[19] *Conf.* VIII.vi.14-15.
[20] *Conf.* VIII.vi.15: *amicus autem dei, si voluero, ecce nunc fio.*

of his heart changed." The instant of transformation he was looking for had just happened. "I have already broken myself away from our old hopes," he announced, "I am determined to serve God. It starts now, right here in this place."[21] Ponticianus' friend had been able to identify the 'now' of conversion and, just a short while after, it had already come to pass.

Augustine was struck by this valorized instance of conversion, which nevertheless did not seem to be in store for him.[22] Instead of identifying some incoming 'now' of conversion, he was still putting things off. He immediately follows this portion of Ponticianus' story with his own commemorative reflection on the various ways he has deferred changing himself. Again, even though he professed to already know everything he needed to know, that was not enough. He refused to go find his own garden, where he could ask himself why all this philosophical knowledge was not translating into some kind of higher awareness. "I was still deferring taking some time off to investigate wisdom," he writes.[23] But this deferral was not a recent development. It had been a mark of Augustine's life since his younger years. "At the beginning of my youth, still miserable, I had asked you for purity," he recalls, "'Give me purity and self-control,' I had said, 'but not yet!'"[24] This "not yet" properly applies to the past as he remembers it, but it also bears on the deferral of change that shapes his life still.

The cruelest part of all this was that Augustine had treated such deferral as a consequence of insufficient knowledge. His old way of thinking went like this: if he could learn more about God, or about the world, or about evil, he would be able to change. Certainty would breed stability. But this turned out to be a lie: "I had thought that I was deferring following only you —

---

[21] *Conf.* VIII.vi.15: *namque dum legit et volvit fluctus cordis sui, infremuit aliquando et discrevit decrevitque meliora, iamque tuus ait amico suo, `ego iam abrupi me ab illa spe nostra et deo servire statui, et hoc ex hac hora, in hoc loco aggredior*.
[22] *Conf.* VIII.vii.16.
[23] *Conf.* VIII.vii.17: *differebam contempta felicitate terrena ad eam investigandam vacare*.
[24] *Conf.* VIII.vii.17: *at ego adulescens miser valde, miser in exordio ipsius adulescentiae, etiam petieram a te castitatem et dixeram, 'da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo.'*

day after day, in condemned hope for this world—because of the fact that nothing certain appeared to me to guide my way. But the day had come, and I had been stripped bare before myself."[25] Simplicianus' anecdote about Victorinus could not fix this state of affairs. Nor could Ponticianus' story. Both were exemplary, but examples did little to overcome this deferral of the instant of change. Hesitation remained.

Augustine could hardly be clearer about the fact that he is talking about a wavering of will, not the hesitancy of epistemological doubt. Once Ponticianus leaves, he sits with Alypius in the garden of the home where they are staying. Augustine is trying to come to terms with this strange new resistance within himself. He can understand why uncertainty might be able to hold him back from what he wants, but he has no idea how his own will could hold him back from what he wants. Overcome by "waves of hesitation," his confusion turns into a convulsive fit.[26] His inability to will himself to calm down physically hints at a similar inability to gain stability psychologically. But it is one thing for someone to want to control their body—to stop their teeth from chattering or their knees from trembling—and fail to do so; it is quite another to 'want to want something' and fail to do so. That, of course, is Augustine's problem. He wants to be converted to God, and yet he also does not. That is to say: he wants to want to be converted to God, but he does not know how to want to be converted to God. Perhaps the madness of these

---

[25] *Conf.* VIII.vii.18: *et putaveram me propterea differre de die in diem contempta spe saeculi te solum sequi, quia non mihi apparebat certum aliquid quo dirigerem cursum meum. et venerat dies quo nudarer mihi*. The passage continues: *terminato autem sermone et causa qua venerat, abiit ille, et ego ad me. quae non in me dixi? quibus sententiarum verberibus non flagellavi animam meam, ut sequeretur me conantem post te ire? et renitebatur, recusabat, et non se excusabat. consumpta erant et convicta argumenta omnia. remanserat muta trepidatio et quasi mortem reformidabat restringi a fluxu consuetudinis, quo tabescebat in mortem*. / "When his story was over and his cause for coming by was complete, he went away, and I went back to myself. What did I not say within myself then? Which mental whips did I not use to whip my soul, so that it would follow me as I tried to go after you? It was resisting. It was refusing me, and it was not sorry about it. All of my arguments had been conquered and consumed. Yet a quiet hesitation remained. My soul was deathly afraid of being pulled out of the flow of habit. But it was in that flow of habit that it was decaying unto death."

[26] *Conf.* VIII.viii.20, taking *cunctationis aestibus* as "waves of hesitation."

kinds of formulations owes something to the way the will works. That would make the will more complicated than we would like it to be, as Augustine admits:

> So there I was, doing so many things, even though wanting to do them was not always enough to be able to do them. And I was not doing what would have pleased me much more—the feeling would be incomparable. If I could just want to do that, I would be able to do it as soon as I wanted it, since, as soon as I wanted it, I would want it unconditionally. There, that is where this capacity was. There was the will. There, to want to do that was to have already done it. Still, it was not happening.[27]

'The will' (*voluntas*) might strike us as something that should be fairly straightforward. We are talking about whatever the soul might want (*velle*) in whatever situation. What could be simpler? Yet, if that is what the will is, then how are we to talk about hesitation, or a crisis of will? How are we to talk about decisions that involve competing wants? And how, most crucially here, are we to address our inability to will ourselves to want something? According to Augustine, our urge to talk about such things necessitates a multiplication of 'the will' into many 'wills.'

At first, Augustine regards our inability to will ourselves to want something as a "monstrosity." But he comes to see that it would only be a monstrosity if the will were a simply unitary thing, incapable of opposing itself. Luckily, or unluckily, that is not how willing works. Given the multiplicity of wills, the competition between wills is not some otherworldly monstrosity. Instead, it is a kind of sickness or weakness: the inability to draw all those wills together in one, shared direction.[28] The problem of many wills thus parallels the difficulty of

---

[27] *Conf.* VIII.viii.20: *tam multa ergo feci, ubi non hoc erat velle quod posse: et non faciebam quod et incomparabili affectu amplius mihi placebat, et mox ut vellem possem, quia mox ut vellem, utique vellem. ibi enim facultas ea, quae voluntas, et ipsum velle iam facere erat; et tamen non fiebat*.

[28] *Conf.* VIII.ix.21: *imperat animus sibi, et resistitur … imperat animus ut velit animus, nec alter est nec facit tamen. unde hoc monstrum? et quare istuc, inquam, ut velit qui non imperaret nisi vellet, et non facit quod imperat? sed non ex toto vult: non ergo ex toto imperat. nam in tantum imperat, in quantum vult, et in tantum non fit quod imperat, in quantum non vult, quoniam voluntas imperat ut sit voluntas, nec alia, sed ipsa. non itaque plena imperat; ideo non est quod imperat. nam si plena esset, nec imperaret ut esset, quia iam esset. non igitur monstrum partim velle, partim nolle, sed aegritudo animi est, quia non totus adsurgit veritate consuetudine praegravatus. et ideo sunt duae voluntates, quia una earum tota non est et hoc adest alteri quod deest alteri*. / "…when the soul

gathering oneself up amidst dissipation, which is a theme we are already familiar with from Books X and XI.

When there is competition between two wills, then, we have a kind of unsteady interplay between different desires. Augustine does not express this as a battle between two fully present opponents, but rather as an unbalanced back-and-forth between wills that are not fully 'there' all at once. "What is there for one," he writes, somewhat obliquely, "is not there for the other."[29] The human struggle to make a decision consists in this drawn-out alteration from presence to absence and back again. And it is even more of a struggle when we are trying to decide what it is we want. Augustine is quick to caution us, however, against schematizing this conflict of the wills too easily. So far, he has been sketching out the situation as it stands when there are two competing *voluntates*. But this depiction is far too simplistic. And, what is worse in Augustine's eyes, it provides an opening for the Manichaeans to sneak in their psychological dualism.

Augustine had to admit that the followers of Mani were right to place an emphasis on this volitional multiplicity. His complaint was not that they did so, but how they did so. For the Manichaeans, these kinds of turbulent conflicts between opposing wills stood as evidence for

---

commands itself, it resists. … So: the soul commands the soul to will. It is not another will, and yet still it does not do it. Where does this monstrosity come from? Why, I ask, is it the case that the soul wants something and yet does not do what it commands itself to do, even though it would not have commanded it unless it wanted it? But it does not fully want it, and so it does not fully command it. The soul commands something to the degree that it wants it. If what it commanded was, to a certain degree, not done, then, to the same degree, the soul did not really want to do it. Will commands that there be will—not something else, but will itself. And so the full will is not giving the command, since what it commands is not there. If it were the full will, then it would not command that there be will, since will would already be there. It is not, then, a monstrosity to partially want something and partially not want it. It is rather a sickness of the soul, since it does not entirely rise up to the truth, being weighed down by habit. And so there are two wills for this reason: one of them is not whole. What is there for one is not there for the other." Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 164, characterizes this *monstrum* as a kind of undecidability: "'*Imperat animus corpori et paretur statim: imperat animus sibi, et resistitur*.' / 'The mind commands the body, which obeys at once; the mind commands itself, and it resists [itself].' (*Conf.* VIII.9.21.14.50) In other words, the will is felt (and brings the self to feel itself) precisely insofar as it does *not* will—more exactly, is able *not* to will what it wills. When it must decide about anything other than it, it experiences itself as willing and obedient, but when it must decide about itself, it is experienced as not deciding."

[29] *Conf.* VIII.ix.21: *hoc adest alteri quod deest alteri.*

their underlying cosmological dualism. Human life was full of these nearly irresolvable tensions because such tension was the substructure of the universe. Everything referred back to the primordial battle between good and evil, the substance of light and the substance of darkness. It was not at all a shock to them, then, if someone felt there was a struggle between light and dark going on inside themselves. Augustine, by the time of the *Confessions*, has left this view behind—but that does not mean he has abandoned his interest in the plurality of wills. Rather, he wants to take a fresh look at that plurality, now seen in light of his Christian worldview. This inner tension, he now thinks, is a symptom of the sickness that plagues all human willing. It is a symptom, that is, of sin.

When two (or more) wills vie against one another, this is not a contest between two opposed substances. It is the instability of one thing—the soul—that happens to be scattered into a million pieces. Augustine makes it very clear that, in the context of his struggle towards conversion, it is the same "I" that is opposed to itself through a volitional multiplicity:

> When I was weighing whether or not to serve my Lord and God, as I had set out to do so long ago, it was I who wanted to and it was I who did not want to. It was I. I did not fully want to. I did not fully not want to. And so I was contending with myself.[30] I was being scattered around away from myself. This scattering happened to me unwillingly, to be sure. What it was showing me, though, was not the nature of some foreign mind. No, it was showing me the punishment of my own mind. And so I was no longer in control of that mind.[31]

---

[30] *Contendere* is the verb used here. Augustine is fond of these *-tend-* words, as we can see from the recurrence of *attendere*, *extendere*, *intendere*, and, of course, *distendere*. All of these share a root in *tendere*, to stretch or reach, though their semantic histories diverge in all sorts of ways. Still, Augustine continues to repeat them with a certain lyricism, and it might not be too much of a stretch to interpret their recurrence as suggestive of a general theme of 'stretching-out' or 'stretching-apart.' Here in Book VIII, at least, he relates this contentiousness of the wills to the *distentio* (stretched-apart-ness) of the soul whose wills they are.

[31] *Conf.* VIII.x.22: *ego cum deliberabam ut iam servirem domino deo meo, sicut diu disposueram, ego eram qui volebam, ego qui nolebam: ego eram. nec plene volebam nec plene nolebam. ideo mecum contendebam et dissipabar a me ipso, et ipsa dissipatio me invito quidem fiebat, nec tamen ostendebat naturam mentis alienae sed poenam meae. et ideo non iam ego operabar illam, sed quod habitabat in me peccatum de supplicio liberioris peccati, quia eram filius Adam*. Augustine concludes: "It was instead being controlled by the sin that dwelled in me. That sin was the sentence for a freer sin, and it was there in me because I was a son of Adam."

Any operation of the will is first conditioned by an involuntary scattering into multiplicity. It is not that Augustine's mind is taken over by another being; that would be far too Manichaean. No, his mind loses control of itself to itself. This is the strange psychology of sin. Not surprisingly, we might have some difficulty making sense of this situation. But that is the root of Augustine's struggle in Book VIII.

Introducing the topic of sin is crucial here, but it can also be misleading. Augustine is not saying that our souls are scattered into a volitional multiplicity only when we are tempted to do evil things. That would make sin simply the set of bad options, whereas here it seems to be more the impossibility of choosing or even distinguishing clearly between options.[32] This might become more obvious if we follow Augustine a bit further in his discussion. Still arguing against the Manichaeans, he turns to situations where there are a multitude of good and bad choices we might want to make.

He begins by positing a scenario in which a faithful Manichaean is distracted from his observances by a plethora of unhealthy amusements: the circus, the theater, and however many other enticing events might be taking place at the time. For the sake of argument, let us say there are four such events. "If all these things occur within one of time's joints," writes Augustine, "if all are equally desired and yet cannot all be done at once, then they tear the soul apart in four wills, all turned away from one another. The soul can be torn into even more wills, as there are so many things to be desired."[33] The Manichaean parallelism between volitional conflict and

---

[32] In *Conf.* VIII.x.23, Augustine claims that all deliberation is a manifestation of this kind of contesting multiplicity: *cum quisque deliberat, animam unam diversis voluntatibus aestuare*. / "… when someone deliberates, one soul wavers between wills that are going different ways." To 'deliberate' is literally to weigh out the options (as on a scale, *libra*), but seldom is there a weight that pulls all of someone's many wills in the same unified direction. That would take quite a *pondus*.

[33] *Conf.* VIII.x.24: *si omnia concurrant in unum articulum temporis pariterque cupiantur omnia quae simul agi nequeunt, discerpunt enim animum sibimet adversantibus quattuor voluntatibus vel etiam pluribus in tanta copia rerum quae appetuntur*.

cosmological dualism turns out to be poorly thought through. Augustine then goes on to take a somewhat unexpected turn: he applies this same logic of volitional multiplicity to scenarios in which there are a number of good options.

> I might ask them [the Manichaeans] whether it is good to delight in a reading of the Apostle, or to delight in a sober psalm, or to talk about the gospel. And they will respond to each one: "It is good." Well then, if all of these are equally delightful at the same time, is it not the case that diverted wills stretch apart [*distendunt*] the human heart, as we deliberate about what we should take to be most important? All are indeed good, but they struggle against each other until one is chosen.[34]

Augustine's analysis of the 'sinful' will thus goes beyond the notion of a will that simply has a predilection towards bad choices. Even when faced with nothing but good options, the human heart is still "stretched apart" by its "diverted wills." Here we can see that, despite Augustine's all-pervasive language of sin, he is talking about a basic feature of temporal psychology.

The verb Augustine uses for 'stretching apart' here is, as in Book XI, *distendere*. There is then a kind of volitional *distentio* that afflicts all who live their lives in the temporal *distentio animi* we dealt with above. And this affliction does not affect only those who tend to choose poorly. It is an aspect of living in time, at least as Augustine is able to understand it from his own vantage point. The only cure for such a *distentio*, caused as it is by too many *diversae voluntates*, would be a *conversio* that was weighty enough to draw them all together.

---

[34] *Conf.* VIII.x.24: *nam quaero ab eis utrum bonum sit delectari lectione apostoli et utrum bonum sit delectari psalmo sobrio et utrum bonum sit evangelium disserere. respondebunt ad singula: `bonum.' quid si ergo pariter delectent omnia simulque uno tempore, nonne diversae voluntates distendunt cor hominis, dum deliberatur quid potissimum arripiamus? et omnes bonae sunt et certant secum, donec eligatur unum quo feratur tota voluntas una, quae in plures dividebatur. ita etiam cum aeternitas delectat superius et temporalis boni voluptas retentat inferius, eadem anima est non tota voluntate illud aut hoc volens et ideo discerpitur gravi molestia, dum illud veritate praeponit, hoc familiaritate non ponit*. The passage concludes: "When that happens, the will that had been divided into many is drawn out as one, whole will. Although, at its best, the soul is delighted by eternity, and at its worst it is held back by pleasure in temporal goods, it is the same soul. But it wills this and wills that, and so it never wills with its whole will. That is why it is torn apart by heavy anxiety. It puts one thing first for truth, and yet, out of familiarity, it does not put another thing away."

But where could such a great weight come from? When could we expect it to arrive? At this point of his story, Augustine turns back to the problem of the transformative instant. With Alypius still sitting there beside him, he finds himself engaged in an interior monologue rather than a dialogue with his friend. Augustine is still trying to will himself to want what he thinks he wants:

> Inside myself, I was saying, "Let it happen soon, let it happen soon." With those words, I was already approaching resolution. Already, I was almost doing it—but I was not doing it. … And I was getting a little bit closer, and a little bit closer, and then I was starting to touch upon it and take hold of it. Already, I was touching upon it and taking hold of it. Yet I was not there, I was not touching upon it, I was not taking hold of it.[35]

Reaching out for that moment of conversion, Augustine is bounced back. In keeping with the logic of volitional *distentio,* though, it is not that this moment is 'there' for him to seize, as if he just had to take one more step and he would be right on top of it. The experience is more like the sensation of having something yet not having it, as his rhetoric makes clear. Augustine is drawing closer and closer to a point in time that will change everything, and yet there does not appear to be such a point on the horizon. The thought of this strikes him with horror:

> As that point in time when I was going to be something else drew closer and closer, it struck me with more and more horror. But it did not hit me back again or even turn me away. Rather, it just held me there.[36]

Augustine associates the kind of conversion he is looking for with a *punctum temporis*—a point in time. As we saw earlier, Book XI will go on to show just how complicated a concept this is. There, Augustine is going to systematically break down the idea of a pure present, in which someone could plant their feet and assert control over their own tangled mess of wills. But here,

---

[35] *Conf.* VIII.xi.25: *dicebam enim apud me intus, 'ecce modo fiat, modo fiat,' et cum verbo iam ibam in placitum. iam paene faciebam et non faciebam … et paulo minus ibi eram et paulo minus, iam iamque attingebam et tenebam. et non ibi eram nec attingebam nec tenebam.*

[36] *Conf.* VIII.xi.25: *punctumque ipsum temporis quo aliud futurus eram, quanto propius admovebatur, tanto ampliorem incutiebat horrorem. sed non recutiebat retro nec avertebat, sed suspendebat*.

in Book VIII, Augustine is expressing what it is like to actually live out the absence of that present *punctum*.[37]

The point he awaits is one that would signal his transformation into something else (*aliud*). It is not unlike the instant of change that so concerned the authors of the *Parmenides* and the *Physics*. If Augustine is ever going to convert, there will need to be such a sudden irruption of a 'now' in which he could achieve that conversion—at least, according to a certain punctual understanding of how converting works. But such a now seems to be long in coming. Augustine is still overwhelmed by his multitude of wills, each calling him back with its own voice. "They were making me late," he writes.[38] They are deferring that instant he is after. But 'they,' we must remember, are also him. "This controversy in my heart," he continues, "could only be myself turning against myself."[39] All of this debate with himself is going nowhere, and so Augustine turns—as he did in the writing of the *Confessions*—to address God instead. Lamenting, he questions his God: "And You, Lord? How long? How long will You be angry, Lord? Until the end?"[40] At first, the unimaginable *punctum temporis* of transformation struck Augustine as horrifying. Now, thinking about it further and even questioning God about it, he can only move from horror to suspense. The deferral of the instant 'just holds him there.'

That, of course, is not the end of Book VIII. Like Victorinus, Augustine too gets his happy ending. Leaving Alypius behind for a while, he carries on with his breakdown in a more

---

[37] Marion, 146, has already interpreted Augustine's account of the struggle of the wills and the delay of conversion in terms of *différance*, a kind of deferral amidst differentiation: "My resistance to conversion—put otherwise, conversion as resistance of what I have become to what I used to be—renders me different from myself and therefore makes me defer my coming to God, that is to say my coming to myself, more exactly myself coming to itself. Through this *différance* an arena opens where time plays itself out, or more exactly as we will see, for the time of *distentio*, the time that sin distends and that provokes resistance."

[38] *Conf.* VIII.xi.27: *tardabant tamen cunctantem me…*

[39] *Conf.* VIII.xi.27: *ista controversia in corde meo non nisi de me ipso adversus me ipsum*.

[40] *Conf.* VIII.xii.28, quoting Psalm 6:4: *et tu, domine, usquequo? usquequo, domine, irasceris in finem?* Augustine adds: *iactabam voces miserabiles: 'quamdiu, quamdiu, 'cras et cras?' 'quare non modo? quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meae?*'/ "And I was tossing off pitiful expressions like, 'How long? When—tomorrow? And then tomorrow again? Why not right away? Why cannot this hour be the end of my disgrace?'"

remote patch of the garden. Amid all the voices of all the wills still pulling him this way and that, he is able to pick out another voice, one that seems to be coming to him from the outside in a more literal sense. "*Tolle, lege*," it says, sounding like a little boy or maybe a girl. Remembering how Antony's rapid conversion was triggered by obedience to such a chance command, Augustine returns to Alypius, takes up his copy of Romans, and randomly reads through part of its thirteenth chapter.[41] There he finds some moral exhortations that are particularly well suited to his own flaws, although this is probably not the first time he ever heard the advice they contained. But here, at the end of Book VIII, they are invested with a whole new significance. "Immediately," he claims, "all the shadows of my hesitation were scattered, as if my heart had been infused with the light of security."[42]

So there it is. There is the longed-for instant of transformation. Sharing his conversion with Alypius, Augustine next goes to find his mother Monica to tell her the good news. He is no longer interested in sex or social ambition. He has been brought under the rule of faith, and that

---

[41] *Conf.* VIII.xii.29: *audieram enim de Antonio quod ex evangelica lectione cui forte supervenerat admonitus fuerit, tamquam sibi diceretur quod legebatur: `vade, vende omnia quae habes, et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelis; et veni, sequere me,' et tali oraculo confestim ad te esse conversum. itaque concitus redii in eum locum ubi sedebat Alypius: ibi enim posueram codicem apostoli cum inde surrexeram. arripui, aperui, et legi in silentio capitulum quo primum coniecti sunt oculi mei: `non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitiis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis.' nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat*. / "I had heard, of course, about how Antony was warned by a gospel reading that he had come upon by chance, as if what was being read was being said to him in particular: 'Go, sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Come and follow me!' He had been converted to you immediately by this saying. Urged on, I went back to where Alypius was still sitting. I had left my book of Paul's letters there when I had gotten up. I grabbed it, opened it, and read in silence the first verse my eyes hit upon: '… not in partying and boozing, not shamelessly in the bedroom, not in contests and oneupsmanship—instead, put on Jesus Christ, and do not make plans for your flesh with all your desires.' I did not want to read any further. I did not have to." Leo Ferrari, "Paul at the Conversion of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980), 5-20, points out that Romans 13 did not have much importance for the earlier Augustine, at least if that can be judged from his first forays into Pauline interpretation. His usual practice had been to pass over Romans 13 without suggesting the all-important role it supposedly played in his own conversion.

[42] *Conf.* VIII.xii.29: *statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*.

is what will guide his life from now on.[43] His mother, of course, could not have been happier, at least as far as Augustine tells it. At the end of the eighth book of the *Confessions*, God has saved Augustine from his inner turmoil by providing that immense weight of His, the only thing that could pull so many diverted wills in the same, sound direction.

This is indeed presented as a happy ending, but is it the end of the whole story? As any reader of the *Confessions* would have to admit, it most certainly is not. On the most obvious level, there is still the question of Augustine's sacramental transformation through baptism, as discussed in Book IX. Then, as we have looked at in detail above, Books X and XI will make clear that, whatever happened in that Milanese garden, *distentio* both temporal and volitional had yet to relinquish its grip on Augustine. To acknowledge this is not simply to suggest a skeptical reading of the relationship between the story of conversion in *Conf.* VIII and the reality of Augustine's life. That debate already has a long history.[44] To dig it up again here would be to miss out on a more appealing opportunity. What makes the triumphalist attitude about conversion at the end of Book VIII so suspect has nothing to do with its realism. It is rather a question of how this account fits with the interwoven themes of *distentio* and belatedness as they recur elsewhere in the *Confessions*.

---

[43] *Conf.* VIII.xii.30: *convertisti enim me ad te, ut nec uxorem quaererem nec aliquam spem saeculi huius, stans in ea regula fidei in qua me ante tot annos ei revelaveras, et convertisti luctum eius in gaudium multo uberius quam voluerat, et multo carius atque castius quam de nepotibus carnis meae requirebat*. / "You converted me to yourself. No more would I seek a wife, no more would I seek any hope in this world. I was standing on that rule of faith, as you had shown her that I would do so many years earlier. You turned her sorrow into joy even more plentiful than she had ever wanted, a joy dearer and purer than the joy she would get from the other thing she used to want: grandchildren."

[44] F.B.A. Asiedu, "Following the Example of a Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003), 276-306, provides a helpful summary of some of the basic positions, while also contrasting the conversion story in *Conf.* VIII with other accounts given by Augustine in earlier works, like *De Beata Vita* and *Contra Academicos*. One of the more notable differences is that these earlier accounts tend to characterize conversion as an ongoing pilgrimage rather than a transformative moment. On this, see Asiedu, 280-281. Ferrari, "Paul at the Conversion," also provides a summary of the debate and its history. He pits the 'historicists' (Marrou, et al.) against the 'fictionalists' (Courcelle and company).

If we are going to entertain the notion that Book VIII actually tells the story of a "non-conversion," this is not at all to deny that Augustine ever changed.[45] It would be absurd to posit that he merely hovered around some static moral wavelength throughout his entire life. And who could ever hope to prove such a claim? No, the point is instead that Augustine was always changing, and that this ceaseless process of change could never be reducible to a *punctum temporis*. As suggested above, this is how the case of Augustine's transformation parallels the problem of 'making change punctual,' as it was discussed by the ancients. There, the realization that the instant of change is a retrospectively posited limit did not mean that there was no change at all. But it did suggest that we might have to change the way we think about change. The same could be said about the mechanics of conversion in *Conf*. VIII. If we take Augustine seriously on temporality and belatedness, then we simply cannot be satisfied with a naively punctual account of conversion.

It is not only the rest of the *Confessions* that militates against the triumphalism of Book VIII. Many of Augustine's other works also confront *distentio* in its various guises. Even before the completion of his *Confessions*, Augustine composed a work to the same Simplicianus of

[45] The possibility of Augustine's "non-conversion" has been worked out most fully by Marion. See, e.g., 166: "the narrative of the conversion (*Confessions* VIII) should, at least at first, be read as that of a nonconversion, of an obstinate refusal to convert, as it already puts into operation what the doctrine of the truth of the third order will define (*Confessions* X): the almost insurmountable impossibility of loving the truth and the almost inevitable possibility of hating it, precisely because one can reach it only by loving it." He also (200-201) relates Book VIII to his own reading of what Augustine is up to in Book XI: "In fact, the experience of time as an endless splitting of the present, which disperses and fades away in inconsistent and inconstant instants to the point that no sense, no decision, and no will can any longer be carried out, comes up well before Book XI of the *Confessiones* with the story of the (non)conversion related in Book VIII. Time, as the flux in which freedom vanishes and consciousness is engulfed, does not appear first in the conceptual analysis of a rigorous philosophy but in the dismaying diagnosis of sin and the powerlessness in which it fixes the will." If there is an experience of 'conversion' in Book VIII, then, it is a "negative" experience, as Marion (221-222) also makes clear: "'Conversion,' and fist of all in the figure of the impossibility of willing it, presents itself as a *différance*, which negatively manifests the event by forever putting it off until later."

Milan referred to above.[46] In attempting to answer some of the tough questions posed by the old man, Augustine was forced to revisit his early, simplistic reading of Paul's letters. Most relevant here are passages like Romans 7:15: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."[47] At first, Augustine took this as referring to someone who had yet to convert. With their will all out of order, they were not yet able to get things straight and do what is right. After converting, the good Christian would be privy to a newly cleared-up line of communication between what they want to do and what they actually do. In rereading Romans, however, Augustine came to think that this was not the case. What Paul was describing was not the unconverted outsider, but the converted insider. Of course, if insiders were still plagued by this kind of volitional conflict, their position as insiders would not seem to be as secure as it once looked.

This line of thinking shows up fairly early in Augustine's work and runs throughout his corpus, though it is not always right there on the surface. Near the end of his life, though, he came back to such themes with a new sense of urgency. He did so in response to the moral reformer Pelagius, whose interpretation of Paul reminded Augustine too much of his own early, overly triumphalist readings. If we want to appreciate Augustine's understanding of conversion in a way that goes beyond the confines of Book VIII, we will have to leap ahead to the more complex account of 'post-conversion' life he gives us in later works like *De Dono Perseverantiae*. It is in this work on perseverance, in fact, that Augustine picks up again the line of questioning we saw near the end of *Conf.* VIII. "How long?" he asked his God in the garden,

---

[46] In *De Dono Perseverantiae* (PL XLV, 933-1034; henceforth *DDP*), a work to be discussed below, Augustine attributes his understanding of grace to this rereading of Paul in *De Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*; see *DDP* XX.lii and XXI.lv. A recent translation of *DDP* can be found in Augustine, *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park NY: New City, 1999), 191-239. My own translations, however, will be used below.

[47] This is how the NIV renders it; the Greek has (according to the SBL New Testament): ὃ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω· οὐ γὰρ ὃ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὃ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ. As for the Vulgate: *quod enim operor non intellego non enim quod volo hoc ago sed quod odi illud facio*.

adding quaveringly: "Until the end?"[48] The probability of an affirmative answer to this turns out to be much higher in the long run. In the *Gift of Perseverance,* Augustine finds that the key to figuring out who has truly converted is perseverance, and perseverance proper can only be perseverance until the end. Only by taking a closer look at this kind of perseverance will we be able to decide how seriously we should take the *punctum temporis* of conversion.

Perseverance as the Future of Belatedness

The writing of the *Gift of Perseverance* was occasioned by some concerned letters Augustine received from a community of monks at Massilia, in southern Gaul. In the debate over the definition of grace between Pelagius and Augustine, these monks thought they had sided with the Bishop of Hippo.[49] They agreed that grace played a role in Christian rebirth and moral improvement, and that this extended even to their own ascetic practices. But they had recently heard some discomfiting news about the particulars of Augustine's teachings on grace.[50] It now sounded like grace was more than just the divine favor that helped Christians reach new heights; it was the motivating force behind the most basic features of human life. Not just ascetic virtue, but also the very beginnings of faith—even conversion—were to be attributed to God's agency,

---

[48] *Conf.* VIII.xii.28, cited above.

[49] In *DDP* II.iv, Augustine reiterates what he calls the three antidotes to Pelagius' message: *Nam tria [antidota] sunt, ut scitis, quae maxime adversus eos catholica defendit Ecclesia: quorum est unum, gratiam Dei non secundum merita nostra dari; quoniam Dei dona sunt, et Dei gratia conferuntur etiam merita universa justorum: alterum est, in quantacumque justitia, sine qualibuscumque peccatis in hoc corruptibili corpore neminem vivere: tertium est, obnoxium nasci hominem peccato primi hominis, et vinculo damnationis obstrictum, nisi reatus, qui generatione contrahitur, regeneratione solvatur*. / "There are three antidotes that the catholic church uses to defend against such poisons, as you know. First is that the grace of God is not given to us because of our merits. Those too are gifts from God, and all the merits of just people are to be attributed to God. The second is that, no matter how just they are, there is no one living in this corruptible body without some sins. And third is that each person is born punishable, born in the sin of the first human and bound by the chains of condemnation, even if they are not themselves responsible (for that first sin). What is contracted through genealogy can only be dissolved in regeneration." These three can be summarized as: gratuitous grace, universal sinfulness, and original sin.

[50] A recent survey of the relationship between Augustine and the Massilian monks can be found in D. Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: the Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-Called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003). For their part, the monks were also influenced by contemporary Christian authors John Cassian and Vincent of Lérins, whose positions on grace and freedom did not always align with Augustine's. On the latter, see A.M.C. Casiday, "Grace and the Humanity of Christ according to St. Vincent of Lérins," *Vigiliae Christianae* 59, no. 3 (2005), 298-314.

not humanity's. This meant that even the most rigorous monk had achieved nothing more in himself than had the lowest member of society. Whatever was good in someone had been received as a gift, given graciously by God. To think otherwise would be to succumb to the most grievous sin of pride.

In very basic outline, this is the argument Augustine puts forward in another text, the *Predestination of the Saints*. That treatise is actually the first volume in a larger work, the second volume of which is the *Gift of Perseverance*. The former deals more closely with the primordial divine agency that lies behind the beginning of faith, while the latter shifts to considering the same agency as it motivates the maintenance of that faith throughout the rest of a person's life.[51] That Augustine attributed the *initium fidei* to God's activity should not be surprising, given that the window he allows us into his own conversion is draped with grace. Unable to overcome his own volitional *distentio,* Augustine comes to realize that only a God could do that. "You converted me," he eventually concludes, still addressing the divine in the second person.[52] But if we want to see how the instant of conversion is complicated by Augustine's later works, we will have to move beyond the beginnings of faith and begin to approach the end.

As the second volume in a work on the absolute priority of grace, the *Gift of Perseverance* places a heavier emphasis on "gift" than it does on "perseverance." Still, for us it is a question of the relationship between converting and persevering, and so we should focus on the claims Augustine makes about the necessity of remaining in faith until the very end. That is not to say that grace will be relegated to the background—to read these passages of Augustine that way would be incoherent. Rather, we will instead try to get a sense of why he found it so crucial

---

[51] In *DDP* II.ii, Augustine comments that he devoted *De Praedestinatione* to establishing the *initium fidei* as an effect of grace. He also foreshadows the way that he will proceed to make the same point again, repeatedly, in order to bolster his overall argument about grace's primacy.
[52] *Conf.* VIII.xii.30: *convertisti enim me ad te*…

to bring the effects of grace to bear not just upon particular events, but upon the entire duration of a human life. It could turn out that true conversion needs more than just the turning-point of the *initium fidei*. What is called for is perseverance until the end.

Augustine begins *De Dono Perseverantiae* with a statement that clarifies what kind of perseverance he is going to be addressing. The succinctness of the passage belies the challenging conclusions that can be drawn from it:

> The claim, then, is that the perseverance by which we persevere in Christ until the end is a gift from God. The end, I say—the ending of this life, in which there is nothing but the risk of falling. And so it is never certain whether someone has received this gift for as long as that person leads their life. If they fall before they die, it is said that they did not persevere. Nothing could be truer.[53]

It is peculiar to perseverance, as Augustine understands it, that it can only belong to those who are no longer there to have it. In this, it is unlike the other virtues. We can say that someone is being just, for example, when they act justly. But if they later go on to live in injustice, then we would have to say that they were just but no longer are just. Perseverance does not work like that.[54] If some people abide in faith—if they attend church regularly, say, and make all the proper observances—and then fall away, they did not truly persevere. They may have appeared to persevere, but that counts for nothing. The whole point of perseverance is that it lasts until the end. From the perspective of lived experience, then, perseverance is a particularly future-oriented

---

[53] *DDP* I.i: *Asserimus ergo donum Dei esse perseverantiam qua usque in finem perseveratur in Christo. Finem autem dico, quo vita ista finitur, in qua tantummodo periculum est ne cadatur. Itaque utrum quisque hoc munus acceperit, quamdiu hanc vitam ducit, incertum est. Si enim priusquam moriatur cadat, non perseverasse utique dicitur, et verissime dicitur*.

[54] *DDP* I.i: Augustine admits that, in everyday talk, we can speak of temporary perseverance. But that is not the kind of thing he wants us to picture when he uses the word: *hanc certe de qua nunc agimus perseverantiam, qua in Christo perseveratur usque in finem, nullo modo habuisse dicendus est, qui non perseveraverit usque in finem; potiusque hanc habuit unius anni fidelis, et quantum infra cogitari potest, si donec moreretur fideliter vixit, quam multorum annorum, si exiguum temporis ante mortem a fidei stabilitate defecit*. / "What concerns us now, though, is the perseverance by which someone perseveres in Christ until the end. This should not be said to any degree about anyone who has not persevered until the end. It would be better to have this kind of perseverance for only one year (or as short a time as we can think of) and live faithfully until death, than to live for many years and leave the stability of the faith just a short time before death."

gift. "The sins we are asking to be forgiven are past," writes Augustine, "The perseverance that makes us saved forever, meanwhile, is necessary not for the part of our lifetime that has already happened, but for the time that remains until the end."[55]

As hinted at in the above passage, Augustine strongly cautions against ascribing perseverance to anyone while they are still living. It is a special kind of gift, one that can only be recognized in the dead. Only in death does the receipt of the gift begin to become legible. To say that perseverance was given and then taken away would be nonsense, since its being given goes hand in hand with its finality. In Augustine's words:

> If it is given, someone has persevered until the end. If someone has not persevered until the end, then it was not given. … So let no one say that any perseverance until the end has been given unless the end has come and someone, to whom it has been given, has been found to have persevered to the end.[56]

Such a gift can also never be lost, since whoever had it has already ceased to exist by the time we can hazard a judgment as to whether they received it or not. And yet, despite this relative illegibility, it remains perhaps the most important gift. Many go through the motions of conversion, whether those be raging fits of sorrow in a garden or solemn vows in a basilica. But

---

[55] *DDP* V.viii: *Praeterita enim sunt peccata, quae nobis ut dimittantur oramus: perseverantia vero quae in aeternum salvos facit, tempori quidem hujus vitae, non tamen peracto, sed ei quod usque ad ejus finem restat, est necessaria*.

[56] *DDP* V.x. Augustine continues: "Of course, we do call someone 'pure' when we know them to be pure, whether or not they will remain in that purity. Or if someone has some other divine gift, which they are holding on to but could lose, we say that they have it for as long as they have it. If they lose it, we say that they had it. But it is different with perseverance until the end, since no one can have it unless they persevere until the end. Many can have this, but no one can lose it." The Latin for the parts of the passage cited both here and in the main text is: *quae si data est, perseveratum est usque in finem; si autem non est perseveratum usque in finem, non est data… Non itaque dicant homines, perseverantiam cuiquam datam usque in finem, nisi cum ipse venerit finis, et perseverasse, cui data est, repertus fuerit usque in finem. Dicimus quippe castum quem novimus castum, sive sit, sive non sit in eadem castitate mansurus; et si quid aliud divini muneris habeat, quod teneri et amitti potest, dicimus eum habere quamdiucumque habet; et si amiserit, dicimus habuisse: perseverantiam vero usque in finem, quoniam non habet quisquam, nisi qui perseverat usque in finem; multi eam possunt habere, nullus amittere*.

people can always fall away and, in falling away, lose everything.[57] This goes for everyone. Such appearances of conversion can thus only be taken as provisional, since the long struggle of perseverance awaits. And that struggle is always drawn out until the very last. For Augustine, you cannot have the *initium fidei* without the *donum perseverantiae*, as the pairing of these two topics together in one volume suggests. Salvation is a question of both. So when he warns us here that judgments about perseverance could only be retrospective, he is saying that judgments about salvation can likewise only be made after the fact. And claims like that do strange things to our notions about conversion.

When Augustine makes this argument, he is talking about more than abstract individuals making their long pilgrimage to the divine homeland in solitude. The context of his discussion is a community of faith. Judgments about perseverance take place in and through such communities, whether they are Massilia's monasteries or Hippo's congregations. In a world where some persevere and others do not, it becomes more difficult to sort out who makes up the true community. If some people appear to have converted, if they show up on time, does this license us to christen them members of the communion of saints? Not necessarily. Some will receive the gift of persevering until the end, others will not. This raises the question of why some get this grace and others do not. As always, Augustine points out that the basis for such a decision is cloaked in the sovereignty of divine judgment. It is not at all the case that there are two 'natural kinds' of humans: persevering ones and non-persevering ones.[58] That, again, would

---

[57] Later on in *DDP* (XXIV.lxvi), Augustine will forcefully declare that everything hangs on perseverance until the end: *Quod donum qui non habet, non dubito dicere, alia quaecumque habet, inaniter habet*. / "And I do not hesitate to say that those who do not have this gift have nothing, no matter what else they might have."

[58] See *DDP* VIII.xix, where a hypothetical interlocutor asks: '*Cur quibusdam qui eum coluerunt bona fide, perseverare usque in finem non dedit?' Cur putas, nisi quia non mentitur qui dicit, 'Ex nobis exierunt, sed non erant ex nobis; nam si fuissent ex nobis, mansissent utique nobiscum?'* [1 John 2:19] *Numquid ergo hominum naturae duae sunt? Absit. Si duae naturae essent, gratia ulla non esset: nulli enim daretur gratuita liberatio, si naturae debita redderetur*. / "'Why does God not give perseverance until the end to anyone who worships Him in good

be far too Manichaean. Instead, everyone is made up of the same stuff, and no one deserves any special favors from God.[59] The distinction between those who persevere and those who do not is simply one consequence of a divine agency that is absolutely prior to human life. That is to say: it is a consequence of grace.[60]

Human spontaneity, then, does not find itself at the beginning of things. Our agency is always in reaction to something else that happened first. Like *confessio*, it is always a response. That is how Augustine characterizes our position when it comes to sorting out ourselves and our communities. When we are trying to judge who is on the inside and who is on the outside, we are trying to respond to a situation not of our own making. And it is far from certain that we are even able to approach making such judgments successfully. All our attempts to do so turn out to be stunningly premature. Looking around at a community of faith and imagining all of its

---

faith?' Why do you think? Perhaps because it was no lie when someone said, 'They have gone away from us, but they were not really with us; if they had really been with us, they would have remained with us no matter what.' Are there then two human natures? Absolutely not. If there were two natures, there would not be any grace. Gratuitous liberation would be given to no one if it was given as something owed to a certain kind of nature."

[59] In *DDP* IX.xxi, Augustine invokes 1 John and its talk of those who are 'among' the church but not really part of it, because they have or will have left it at some point. He rules out any explanation of this based on a material distinction between types of human: *Nonne utrique a Deo creati, utrique ex Adam nati, utrique de terra facti erant, et ab eo qui dixit, Omnem flatum ego feci,* [Isaiah 57:16] *unius ejusdemque naturae animas acceperant? Nonne postremo utrique vocati fuerant, et vocantem secuti, utrique ex impiis justificati, et per lavacrum regenerationis utrique renovati?* / "But are not both groups created by God? Are not both born of Adam? Were not both made from the earth by the one who said, 'I have made every breath?' Did they not both receive their souls from one and the same nature? At long last, had they not both been called? Had they not both followed that call? Having both been without religion, were they not both then made just? Were they not both renewed in the bath of rebirth?"

[60] *DDP* VII.xv: The church "prays that those who believe might persevere. But it is God who gives perseverance until the end. And God knew He was going to do this in advance. This itself is the predestination of the saints." (*Orat, ut credentes perseverent: Deus ergo donat perseverantiam usque in finem. Haec Deus facturum se esse praescivit: Ipsa est praedestinatio sanctorum*.) Augustine then spends some time (VIII.xvi-xix) laying out the defense of predestination that can be found in most of his anti-Pelagian works. To summarize: contrary to what the monks might want, grace is not given due to human merits. Nobody deserves grace. Thanks to original sin, everyone deserves condemnation, and this could only be a just condemnation. God, however, in His beautiful but obscure mercy, has chosen to rescind the punishments of some—only some—of those who nonetheless deserve condemnation. So we should be utterly thankful that some are saved, while humbly accepting the fact that no one deserves to be saved. The criterion for such an all-important choice is, of course, inscrutable. (On that inscrutability, see *DDP* XI.xxv, but it is a refrain that recurs throughout.) If there is a divine order to things, part of its divinity consists in its being impossible for us to discern clearly. On this theme of hidden order, see Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, *L'ordre Caché: la Notion de l'Ordre chez saint Augustin* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2004).

participants as already saved is a dangerous and proud enterprise, however appealing it might sounds:

> It seems to most people that every faithful person who appears to be good ought to receive perseverance until the end. But God has judged it better to mix some who will not persevere in with a certain number of His saints, so that those who are not free from anxiety in the temptation of this life can never be free from anxiety in this life. Many of us should be discouraged from our dangerously premature celebration by what the Apostle had to say about this: "So those who seem to be standing should see that they do not fall."[61]

When everything is all mixed up like this, any pretense of stability does more harm than good. A community of converts remains a multitude of unsteady souls, still caught up in the temporal world, ready at any moment to topple. The walls that make a Christian are not so steady that they could never crumble. The event of baptism, so crucial for Augustine, must also be relativized by the unsettled question of perseverance. "Even among those who are reborn," says Augustine, "there are some who persevere and get to the end, while others are held firm up to a certain point and then fall away."[62]

Conversion, if naively understood as entry into the community and commitment to its principles, now seems like a less dramatic breaking-point. Augustine's decision to convert and follow God, as recounted in *Conf.* VIII, is nothing compared to God's timeless decision about who will persevere until the end. And Augustine's own status with regard to this latter decision must remain unclear, at least until his own death. Still, it is that divine decision—not his

---

[61] *DDP* VIII.xix: *Hominibus autem videtur, omnes qui boni apparent fideles, perseverantiam usque in finem accipere debuisse. Deus autem melius esse judicavit, miscere quosdam non perseveraturos certo numero sanctorum suorum; ut quibus non expedit in hujus vitae tentatione securitas, non possint esse securi. Multos enim a perniciosa elatione reprimit quod ait Apostolus: 'Quapropter, qui videtur stare, videat ne cadat.'* [1 Cor. 10:12]

[62] *DDP* XIII.xxxii. He continues: "If those latter types had gotten out before they slipped, they would absolutely not have fallen. And there is a third group: those who have fallen, but return before they leave this life. If they had left this life before returning, then they absolutely would have perished." The Latin: *ipsosque regeneratos, alios perseverantes usque in finem hinc ire, alios quousque decidant hic teneri, qui utique non decidissent, si antequam laberentur hinc exissent; et rursus quosdam lapsos quousque redeant non exire de hac vita, qui utique perirent, si antequam redirent, exirent*. 'The reborn' are in the accusative because they form part of an indirect speech construction involving what right-minded Christians should see [*videant*].

gesticulations in the garden—that proves determinative for him, however unreadable it may remain to him. Any judgment about the status of Augustine's salvation will have to be deferred until the end, and then, of course, he will not be around to make it.[63]

This might strike us as a rather grim situation.[64] The outcome of our lives depends not on all the ups and downs that shape those lives, but on some final summation that we cannot ever know. The decisions we make that seem so momentous—to convert, to fall away, to repent—turn out to be consequences of a divine decision made outside of time. And the priority of that decision could never be overcome, since it is not temporal priority but the priority of a creator over the created. The intransigence of our own wills and the illegibility of our own communities are symptoms of our inability to unseat God, to lift ourselves out of determined receptivity and into the divine position of determining spontaneity. It is a proud dream, and Augustine is quick

---

[63] *DDP* XIII.xxxiii: *Ad quam vocationem pertinere nullus est homo ab hominibus certa asseveratione dicendus, nisi cum de hoc saeculo exierit: in hac autem vita humana quae tentatio est super terram,* [Job 7:1] *qui videtur stare, videat ne cadat.* [1 Cor. 10:12] *Ideo quippe (sicut jam supra diximus) non perseveraturi perseveraturis providentissima Dei voluntate miscentur, ut esse discamus non alta sapientes, sed humilibus consentientes,* [Rom. 12:16] *et cum timore et tremore nostram ipsorum salutem operemur: Deus est enim qui operatur in nobis et velle et operari, pro bona voluntate.* [cf. Phil. 2:12-13] *Nos ergo volumus, sed Deus in nobis operatur et velle: nos ergo operamur, sed Deus in nobis operatur et operari, pro bona voluntate*. / "We should never say with any kind of assertive certainty that anyone belongs to this kind of calling, unless they have already left this world. As for this human life, this temptation on the earth—whoever seems to be standing should see that they do not fall. That is precisely why (as we already said above) the most provident will of God mixed those who are not going to persevere in with those who will persevere, so that we could learn to be compassionate and humble rather than high and wise, so that we would work for our salvation in fear and trembling. It is God, after all, who works in us in good will, so that we both want to work and actually do it. So: we do want it, but it is God working in us that makes us want it. And we do in fact do the work, but it is God working in us (in good will) that makes us do the work." The placement of *pro bona voluntate* here makes good Scriptural sense, though it is not entirely clear what work Augustine wants this phrase to be doing in this particular passage.

[64] It certainly struck many monks that way. As a consequence, Augustine devoted many of the later parts of *DDP*, beginning around XIV.xxxvi-xxxvii, to the problem of preaching predestination in a non-discouraging way. The point of preaching about grace so openly was not to discourage people from trying harder, but to stoke in them the fires of gratitude for God's prior love. (On which, see XVII.xli.) See also XVII.xlvi: *Ego autem nolo exaggerare meis verbis, sed illis cogitandum potius relinquo, ut videant quale sit quod sibi persuaserunt, 'praedicatione praedestinationis audientibus plus desperationis quam exhortationis afferri.' Hoc est enim dicere, tunc de sua salute hominem desperare, quando spem suam non in se ipso, sed in Deo didicerit ponere*. / "But I do not want to get carried away with my words. I would rather leave it to other people to think about, so that they can see what it is like that they have persuaded themselves that 'the preaching of predestination brings more hopelessness than encouragement to those who hear it.' To say this is to say that someone who has learned to put their hope in God rather than in themselves feels hopeless about their own salvation."

to dismiss it. In its place, he recommends humility in the face of our deep, constitutive ignorance about ourselves.[65]

Yet there can be a kind of hope that comes along with this awareness of our inability to get a handle on our lives in time. Further on in the *Gift of Perseverance*, Augustine shares an anecdote about a monk at the monastery in Hippo. This monk had not been acting in keeping with the high standards of his vocation, and he was called to account for it. In response, he took refuge in what Augustine finds to be a cheap notion of divine foreknowledge:

> There was a certain someone in our own monastery. His brothers were trying to correct him, seeing that he was doing what should not be done and was not doing what should be done. He responded, "Whatever I may be like now, in the future I will be as God knew in advance I was going to be." What he said was true, of course, but it didn't help him advance in goodness. Rather, he advanced so far in evil that he abandoned the community of the monastery and became a dog, turning back to his own vomit. And nevertheless, it is still uncertain what he will be like in the future.[66]

So Augustine warns us about more than triumphalism over one's own conversion or community of converts. He also cautions against ruling out those who look like they are on the outside. The most important line of this passage is its last: "it is still uncertain what he will be like in the future." Even in the case of this intransigent monk, it is impossible to foresee where he will end up. The limitation on our ability to gauge people's lives as they live them is not just a reason to be suspicious of others. It can also signal openness to a future that we must humbly acknowledge

---

[65] Throughout *DDP*, Augustine urges us that our constant refrain should be Pauline: *qui videtur stare, videat ne cadat;* [1 Cor. 10:12] *et qui gloriatur, non in se ipso, sed in Domino glorietur.* [1 Cor. 1:31] / "Whoever seems to be standing should see that they do not fall. Whoever is being glorified should be glorified in the Lord, not in themselves." See, e.g., XI.xxv.

[66] *DDP* XV.xxxviii: *Fuit quidam in nostro monasterio, qui corripientibus fratribus cur quaedam non facienda faceret, et facienda non faceret, respondebat: 'Qualiscumque nunc sim, talis ero qualem me Deus futurum esse praescivit.' Qui profecto et verum dicebat, et hoc vero non proficiebat in bonum: sed usque adeo profecit in malum, ut deserta monasterii societate fieret canis reversus ad suum vomitum: et tamen adhuc qualis sit futurus, incertum est.* The verb Augustine uses for 'turning back' (here, to one's own vomit) is *revertere*, from the same root as *convertere*. For every *conversio*, there is an equal and constant risk of *reversio*. And yet such a reversion does not negate the possibility of other conversions to come. The two are left in tension.

to be unknowable for us.[67] There is a limit to what we can see in people and in ourselves, at least as long as we are still time-bound. But this limit is not a debilitating deformity. It is just our *modus*.

Augustine ends his *Gift of Perseverance* by reiterating the given distinction between those who will persevere and those who will not. Such a distinction, as he repeats throughout, could only be recognized by us in retrospect.[68] The ramifications of this can be felt on both the personal and communal levels. In both cases, the situation is once again one of belatedness. The

---

[67] Such a reading would fit nicely with the way scholars like John Cavadini have interpreted Augustine's meditations on the self as a reflection on instability or non-presence. See, e.g., Cavadini, "The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine's Thought," *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007), 119-132, esp. 123-124, where he writes that Augustine is trying to "describe self-awareness as precisely not the awareness of a stable, statue-like entity which may need cleaning or some touch-up polishing, but rather the awareness of a subject in transformation, undergoing transformation, being transformed, re-created, of subjectivity that—to the extent that it is truly self-aware—is *resisting* a premature foreclosure of identity and yielding to a process that will be complete only eschatologically, and only as a gift partly received and mostly hoped for, and not in the first place as an accomplishment." (Italics his.) Catherine Oppel, "Why, My Soul?," 229, has written about how the process of conversion does not immediately heal this brokenness, but rather intensifies it all the more: "Far from escaping the human condition, or being able to steel oneself against it, the transition from life under the law to life under grace means a new, deeper engagement with the human condition, an attitudinal change that allows a greater acceptance of it, that brings a person closer to it, not further away." Marion, 145-146, makes a similar observation (citing *De Trinitate* XIV.17.23.16.408-410): "One cannot but notice, as Saint Augustine admits elsewhere, that conversion does not resolve everything and that, even if baptism erases all faults, the inclination to commit them does not immediately disappear: '*Sane ista renovatio non momento uno fit ipsius conversionis, sicut momento uno fiat illa in Baptismo renovatio remissione omnium peccatorum*.' / 'To be sure, this renewal does not happen in a single moment, that of conversion, as in baptism renewal by remission of sins is accomplished in a single moment.' The renewal that follows conversion is accomplished only '*quotidianis accessibus*' (by daily advances), '*de die in diem proficiendo*' / 'progressing from day to day.'" At the very least, then, we have to distinguish between two posited limits: that between pre-conversion and post-conversion, and that between pre-baptism and post-baptism. The latter is given more efficacy than the former, perhaps because it announces a 'change'—though such language of mutability is obviously misplaced here—in the divine relation to human sinfulness, as opposed to a change in the activity of human sinfulness itself.

[68] *DDP* XXII.lviii: *si qui enim nondum sunt vocati, quos gratia sua praedestinavit eligendos, accipient eamdem gratiam, qua electi esse velint et sint; si qui autem obediunt, sed in regnum ejus et gloriam praedestinati non sunt, temporales sunt, nec usque in finem in eadem obedientia permanebunt*. / "Those who are predestined by grace to be chosen will receive this grace, by which they want to be chosen and are chosen, even if they have not yet been called. But those who are obeying, yet were not predestined into God's kingdom and glory, are temporary. They will not remain obedient until the end." The source-text for Augustine's distinction here is, again, 1 John. Augustine had already emphasized the same distinction in the *City of God* and in his *Homilies on 1 John*. Written against the Donatists' claim that they could already distinguish between false Christians and the true church 'without spot or wrinkle,' Augustine's *Homilies* make clear that such distinguishing is done by God and God alone. Caught up in the river of time, we are unable to take a firm enough stance to see who is truly on the inside and who will be left outside. The church's history is less legible than the Donatists might want, but this illegibility is, as always, to be attributed to the authorship of grace. See Augustine, *Later Works*, trans. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 251-348.

status of one's own conversion can never be settled for oneself. To identify a proper transformation, we would need to have stumbled upon a new kind of stability that would mark a break from the turbulence of the old ways. But no stability is forthcoming. Only the proud make the mistake of thinking they are standing. The threat of not being what we think we are is never extinguished—until death, and even that too might be provisional. When we turn to the question of communities, it becomes even clearer that a proper sorting-out of true converts from false would have to wait until time itself has reached its limit. That is why the final judgment comes last of all. Still, from a human perspective, the experience of conversion and perseverance feels somewhat out of step. We can only come to decide about who has converted or who has persevered after the fact, but that is always too late. If sufficient knowledge to make these kinds of decisions ever does come, it is when we are already dead upon its arrival.

Augustine's emphasis on perseverance thus places some limits on his presentation of conversion. The triumphalism of Book VIII makes conversion seem like an event that breaks with the past. After the transformative instant has broken into the monotony of time—so the thinking goes—Augustine will tear himself free from his old habits and inadequacies. He becomes present to himself for the first time, just long enough to make a change. Through this experience, his eyes are turned towards a future of moral improvement approaching salvation. But for a reader of *De Dono Perseverantiae*, the brilliance of this triumph shines far too brightly. Augustine's break with the past is not as dramatic as he first represented it. He is changing, yes; he is not exactly the same as he was. But his wills are still many. His eyes are still clouded by all the temporal things that rise and fall in front of him. He remains in the grip of *distentio*, both

volitional and temporal.[69] What is in question is not how much he might improve after conversion—how many merits he can tally up—but whether he will be able to hold on in this river of time and temptation. Awareness of this is what robs the transformative instant of its decisiveness.[70]

In the *Gift of Perseverance*, Augustine is no longer looking ahead to victory. Up ahead, there is really not much to see. Instead, we find him still looking backward—backward to the dead, backward to those who may or may not have persevered, backward to the unsettled question of his own conversion. Perseverance does, of course, have to do with the future. But this future is one that cannot be seen. Its invisibility is inviolable, because it is what safeguards both the sovereignty of God's timeless decision and the open-endedness of human destinations in time. 'Perseverance' names the way we should conceive of our relationship to such a future. It is the most appropriate kind of futural orientation there can be for those who are born looking

---

[69] Cf. Marion, 205, on what *distentio* does to the instant of decision: "If the present moment is never reached, nor ever present, we understand why the moment of decision would find itself, in conversion, always put off until later. The dissolution of the present moment would already defer the moment of decision: the decision would never arrive now (*iam*, *tunc*, *nunc*), because, besides the weakness of my will, there never was, and there surely never is, in general and on principle (*überhaupt*, *schlechtin*), *now*, and because the aporia of time consists precisely in the impossibility of fixing the slightest moment persistent enough for a decision to find stable ground. … The aporia of time thus maintains a direct relation with the difficulty of conversion."

[70] Others have suggested different angles from which the instantaneous picture of conversion looks unconvincing. Edmund Hill, in the preface to his translation of *De Trinitate* (Hyde Park NY: New City, 1991), identifies that work as a manual for the ongoing or progressive project of conversion. He takes the second half of *De Trinitate* to be communicating a personal continuum, made up of the mental trinity (in its most refined state: memory, understanding, and will), which is also a failed analogy for the divine Trinity. This quasi-trinity of the mind, however, provides a roadmap for a process of conversion, which would consist in the refocusing of all three mental operations on God. This turns out to be a process that could only be completed eschatologically. *Imago Dei* thus names not a static icon, but a program to be actualized by means of a historical continuum. Another problem facing the instant of conversion lies in the multitude of possible conversion points that a reader of Augustine might find. If his works posit many distinct turning points, how are we to adjudicate between them all? On this, see, e.g., Oppel, 209: "Augustine's first encounter with Cicero is connected in the not too distant re-collected future with his first experience of deeply painful loss in the death of a childhood friend. Both events are turning points, conversions perhaps, which predispose the young Augustine to a new attitude towards the world." Ferrari, *The Conversions of Saint Augustine* (Villanova UP, 1984), points out that there are a number of potential 'conversions' in the life and story of Augustine: the conversion to philosophy (1-17), to Manichaeism (18-49), and then the scene in Book VIII. (50-69) He even adds a fourth, 'final' conversion to what he considers to more properly be 'Catholic Christianity.' (70-84) The content of this last conversion would be the strong doctrine of grace and predestination Augustine adopted after his rereading of Paul in *De Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, which he then projected back on to his life-story through the *Confessions*, and which he would go on to develop in works like *De Dono Perseverantiae*.

backwards. "Hang on, persevere, tolerate, bear the delay, and you have taken up your cross:" this is the advice Augustine gives in one of his sermons, but it should feel familiar to anyone who has spent some time with the *Gift of Perseverance*.[71] Yet before we leave behind this later work of Augustine's, we should take one last look back at it, so as to see how this persistent belatedness of human experience is not without a certain grace.

Belatedness to Thought as the Opening for Grace

The core message of both *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* and *De Dono Perseverantiae* is the primacy of grace. Augustine is arguing that, against all proud assumptions to the contrary, every human achievement is traceable back to the timeless decision of the divine. If there is one exception to this rule, it is Adam's original Fall. Eden, for Augustine, was always a very special case. There, humanity had been truly free. But it had used that freedom to lose it. After the Fall, things are different. Our freedom only leads us further away from God. It is no longer in our power to return to Him. We can only go back if He has decided to give us the gift of being able to do so. Augustine devotes a large chunk of the *Gift of Perseverance* to showing how the life of the church and even its prayers teach that salvation depends on reception. For him, the Lord's Prayer suffices as a defense of the primacy of grace.[72] Whether we persevere or not is entirely in God's hands. Our free choice holds no sway here. For Adam, it had been otherwise. But things are not what they used to be: "After the fall of humanity, people can only approach God if He wants them to belong to His Grace, and people cannot pull away from God unless He does not want them to belong to His Grace."[73]

---

[71] See Sermon 96, as translated by Edmund Hill in Augustine, *Sermons*, III.4 (Brooklyn NY: New City, 1992), 34.
[72] Augustine first proposes this idea in *DDP* II.iii, and he sticks with it. Much of the treatise, at least early on, proceeds by working through the lines of the Lord's Prayer and showing how each is an affirmation of grace. In doing so, Augustine uses Cyprian as a guide.
[73] *DDP* VII.xiii: *Post casum autem hominis, nonnisi ad gratiam suam Deus voluit pertinere, ut homo accedat ad eum; neque nisi ad gratiam suam voluit pertinere, ut homo non recedat ab eo*.

It is this grace that serves as the motivating force behind conversions, such as they are. Augustine made this clear about his own conversion even in *Conf*. VIII. Here, he underlines the point:

> Nothing happens except what He makes happen or permits to happen. And so He is able to bend wills from evil to good, and to turn back [*convertere*] those who are about to fall, and to put them on a path that pleases Him. "God, you will convert us and bring us to life;" this was not said in vain.[74]

No one, according to Augustine, is strong enough to stabilize themselves in time. No one can will themselves to stand. Only a God could do that.[75] Rather than thinking that we are standing firm or presuming that we have converted, we should be afraid that maybe we have not yet converted at all. Humble fear trumps proud presumption for Augustine.

But where does all this unsteady wavering between standing and falling play out? "People stand or fall in their own thoughts," answers Augustine.[76] From Paul, he had adopted the language of willing and wanting. The basic problem was then one of being unable to do what you think you want. But when he begins to talk about thinking (*cogitatio*), Augustine brings in an influence closer to his own time: Ambrose. It was Ambrose who had been "bold enough to say: 'Our hearts and our thoughts are not in our power.' Everyone who is humbly and truthfully pious feels this to be so very true."[77] There is a sense of cognitive alienation, then, that goes

---

[74] *DDP* V.xii: *Nihil enim fit, nisi quod aut ipse facit, aut fieri ipse permittit. Potens ergo est, et a malo in bonum flectere voluntates, et in lapsum pronas convertere, ac dirigere in sibi placitum gressum. Cui non frustra dicitur, 'Deus, tu convertens vivificabis nos.'* [Psalm 84:7] The participle *convertens* is taken here as active and transitive, since that fits with Augustine's meaning: he is talking about the role of divine agency in turning people around. Outside of this context, many translations would prefer to take *convertens* as describing God's intransitive 'action' of turning back to humanity in order to then (transitively) revivify it. But that does not seem to be what is at issue here.

[75] *DDP* VIII.xix: *Voluntate autem sua cadit, qui cadit; et voluntate Dei stat, qui stat. 'Potens est enim Deus statuere illum:'* [Rom. 14:4] *non ergo se ipse, sed Deus*. / "And whoever falls falls through their own will. But whoever stands stands in the will of God. 'God is powerful enough to make him stand.' He cannot make himself stand. Only God can do it."

[76] *DDP* VIII.xix: *In cogitatione autem sua vel cadit quisque, vel stat*.

[77] *DDP* VIII.xix: *beatus Ambrosius audet et dicit: 'Non enim in potestate nostra cor nostrum, et nostrae cogitationes.' Quod omnis qui humiliter et veraciter pius est, esse verissimum sentit*.

along with the illegibility of our lives as expressed in the *Gift of Perseverance*. This alienation can be linked back to *Conf.* X and its discovery of the strange foreignness of our thoughts. Our thinking had an air of estrangement to it there, but not because it was something totally different from us. We are alienated from our own thoughts not because they are 'not-us,' but because we arrive at them belatedly. There, the examples were sensual: I am carried away in pleasure by the rhythm of a hymn, but I do not realize it until afterward.[78] But, more generally, if we arrive at our thoughts belatedly, then they would not seem to be primarily in our power. We are not there to get them going in the beginning. They are not subject to our spontaneity. Rather, our thoughts happen, and we live through them.

Augustine goes on to cite Ambrose more extensively on this point. He seizes on a quotation from Ambrose's sermon on fleeing the world:

> Our hearts and our thoughts are not in our power. Thoughts flood our souls unexpectedly and deluge our minds. They drag in something that you did not want to think about. They call you back to worldly things. They insert mundane things. They bring in things that please you and weave in things that entice you. At the very time that we are trying to elevate our minds, we are usually invaded by empty thoughts and thrown down to the earth.[79]

---

[78] Marion has characterized Augustine's doctrine of the will in such terms of desire and love. The will is 'given' insofar as it is only active in response to whatever it is given to love. See, e.g., 184: "Of course, that in which I find my pleasure is not something I know in advance, as if I could foresee it, or even choose it. I discover it only once the event teaches it to me and discovers it to me. I do not love what I will, or at least what I believe I will. What I will truly I recognize after the fact as what I loved, and what I love I identify after the fact when I enjoy having reached it. Thus it is necessary for me to enjoy what I love in order to know that I loved it and that in fact, knowingly *or not knowingly*, I desire it beforehand. I am always late to the event and the last to know what I love. The will therefore follows what I love, and what I love precedes my will. I do not find myself there where I am, or where I am thinking, but there where I love, I desire and enjoy. The *self's place* precedes where *I* come from. The radicalization of the will into love reverses the advance—the intentional advance of the *I* toward the object of its willing reverts into a delay of the *I* with regard to the place of that which the *self* loves. *The anticipation belonging to resolution yields to the delay of the will inasmuch as it loves*. As much as I will by an intentional advance, so much I love in the delay of desire." (Italics in the original.) And so 187: "It follows that we cannot will in the real sense without God giving it to us, by giving us to will in the mode of loving, according to an advance to which we come late. This can also be put this way: we will only in response, and even the possibility of refusing the gift also turns out given."

[79] *DDP* VIII.xx, quoting the first chapter of Ambrose's *De Fuga Saeculi*: *Non enim in potestate nostra cor nostrum et cogitationes nostrae, quae improviso offusae mentem animumque confundunt, atque alio trahunt quam tu proposueris: ad saecularia revocant, mundana inserunt, voluptuaria ingerunt, illecebrosa intexunt, ipsoque in tempore quo elevare mentem paramus, inserti inanibus cogitationibus ad terrena plerumque dejicimur.*

Ambrose is providing us with a paradigm case for cognitive alienation: thoughts rush in and we react. Insofar as our relation to our thoughts is characterized as a reaction, it would be fair to call it a relationship of belatedness. A basic receptivity is written into our minds, as thinking seems to derive from a prior spontaneity that is somehow beyond us.

Our hearts and thoughts are not in our power: this formulation encapsulates the belatedness to thought in *Conf.* X, but it also resonates with the volitional mayhem of *Conf.* VIII. It was Augustine that wanted one thing, it was Augustine who wanted another; it was Augustine who thought one way, it was Augustine who thought the opposite. And this plurality of Augustines could be multiplied far beyond the count of two. Still, they were all, in some sense, the same Augustine. But he was incapable of recognizing or appropriating all these thoughts as his own. That is why we can describe Augustine's relationship to his own will and his own thoughts as one of alienation. And if we attend to the temporal mode of this alienation, we can see that it is one of belatedness: we stumble upon our own thoughts, which were already there before we thought to think of them.

This blind spot in thinking, the foreign origin of our own thoughts, also turns out to be the opening for grace. We arrive late to our own thoughts, yes, but in so doing we come to see that they have already been set in motion without our initiative. In Augustine's estimation, this meant that they had been set in motion by grace. Our thoughts, in other words, were given to us. This 'givenness of thinking' would be a good way to approach Augustine's treatment of grace in *De Dono Perseverantiae*. It is not so much that we witness God entering into our minds and forcing us to want or think this or that. Rather, we find that we want or think this or that, while also finding that we did not choose to want or think this or that. Our wills or thoughts were given to us as a given for us. The pious thing to do, according to Augustine, is then to attribute that

givenness to the only one who would have been there in the beginning to give all this: an absolutely primordial creator.

Once Augustine has come to credit God with the origination of thinking and willing, it is a small step to get to such formulations as "the human will is prepared by God."[80] (That, too, was a quotation from Ambrose.) Human willing operates in terms of what it is given to want. If someone truly wants to love God, this is because they have been given the will to do so. If they do not, the gift was lacking. In each case, it is what is given or not given that is decisive. And this, Augustine is at pains to make clear, is not in our power. Even if someone in no way wants to love God, even if they are an "enemy of the faith," as he puts it, still it might turn out that what will be given for them in the future is not what is given for them today. Augustine describes such cases, when the most faithless of the faithless come to believe, in the strongest terms: "They do not want it, but He makes them want it."[81] And it should be clear by now that this 'making' is more accurately described as 'giving.' This is grace in action.

---

[80] The line is taken from *DDP* XIX.xlix. It comes when Augustine is bringing Ambrose's dictum to bear on all human activity, not just abstracted thought: *Qui vero ait, 'Non est in nostra potestate cor nostrum, et nostrae cogitationes,' nec ipsa facta et dicta praeteriit: non enim est ullum factum dictumvi hominis, quod non ex corde et cogitatione procedat*. / "And the one who said that 'our hearts and thoughts aren't in our power' was not passing over actions or words, since there are not any human actions or words that do not proceed from thought or the heart." Augustine then cites Ambrose's commentary on Luke to reinforce the point that our thoughts and our heart are conditioned in advance by divine agency. What we 'see as' good, for example, is determined through this conditioning. Normativity, too, is given to our minds, not built up from some purely subjective basis: *Beatus quoque Ambrosius cum exponeret quod ait Lucas evangelista, 'Visum est et mihi:'* [Luke 1:3] *"Potest," inquit, "non soli visum esse, quod sibi visum esse declarat. Non enim voluntate tantum humana visum est, sed sicut placuit ei qui in me loquitur Christus, qui ut id quod bonum est, nobis quoque videri bonum possit, operatur: quem enim miseratur, et vocat. Et ideo qui Christum sequitur, potest interrogatus cur esse voluerit christianus, respondere, 'Visum est et mihi.' Quod cum dicit, non negat Deo visum; a Deo enim praeparatur voluntas hominum. Ut enim Deus honorificetur a sancto, Dei gratia est*." / "Blessed Ambrose, too, when explaining 'It seemed good to me also' (from Luke's gospel), said: 'What he declares to have seemed good to him cannot have seemed good to him alone. It was not only that it seemed good to the human will. It also pleased the one who speaks in me—Christ, who does the work so that what is good can appear good to us. He takes pity on someone and calls them. And so when someone who follows Christ is asked why they want to be Christian, they can respond, "It seemed good to me, also." When they say this, they are not denying what seems good to God, since the human will is prepared by God. The grace is God's, so let God be honored by the holy.'"

[81] *DDP* XXII.lx. The full quotation is: *Deus enim qui omnia quae praedestinavit implevit, ideo et pro inimicis fidei orare nos voluit; ut hinc intelligeremus, quod ipse etiam infidelibus donet ut credant, et volentes ex nolentibus*

Augustine never lets the anteriority of grace go underemphasized. He declares that even the will to ask God for grace and the thought of praying to God for grace are given through grace. Again, no human spontaneity can insert itself back before the divine:

> This is where we understand that our crying out to God spiritually and with a truthful heart is also itself a gift from God. Those who think that our asking, our seeking, our knocking comes from us and is not given to us should pay attention to how mistaken they are. They say that this is why our merit comes before grace, so that grace follows afterward. When we ask for it, we receive it. When we seek, we find. When we knock, it is opened. They do not want to understand that even our praying—that is, our asking, our seeking, our knocking—comes from the divine allotment.[82]

Whoever is asking for grace but not receiving it is not truly asking for it. If the right way of asking had been given to them, they would have received grace. In fact, they would have received it before they had even asked for it, since they would never have been able to truly ask for it if grace had not given this to them. The whole human relationship with grace is one of retroactivity. We ask for what has already been given or not given. We seek what has already come to us or not. We knock on a door that is either already opened or never will be. All of our willing and thinking takes place in this context of retrospective receptivity to what came before.

We are wavering, as Augustine tells it, between the absolute past of an unimaginable decision and the absolute future of the very end. The vast swath of time between these two atemporal limit-points is not characterized by stable moments, transformative turning points, or

---

faciat. / "God fulfills everything he predestines. That is why he wants us to pray even for the enemies of the faith. That way, we might come to understand that He gives it even to the faithless to believe. They do not want it, but He makes them want it."

[82] *DDP* XXIII.lxiv: *Ubi intelligimus, et hoc ipsum esse donum Dei, ut veraci corde et spiritualiter clamemus ad Deum. Attendant ergo quomodo falluntur, qui putant esse a nobis, non dari nobis, ut petamus, quaeramus, pulsemus: et hoc esse dicunt, quod gratia praeceditur merito nostro, ut sequatur illa, cum accipimus petentes, et invenimus quaerentes, aperiturque pulsantibus: nec volunt intelligere etiam hoc divini muneris esse, ut oremus, hoc est, petamus, quaeramus, atque pulsemus*.

decisive instants. What we find instead are deferral, delay, and suspense.[83] Alienated from the origin of our own thoughts, we come upon them *in medias res* or *in medias cogitationes*. This lends that indelible hint of belatedness to our experience both of ourselves and of our communities.

Grace gives our thinking a head start, and we are never quite able to catch up, no matter how hard we try. The proper response, again, is not to try even harder, deluded by pride into thinking that we might gain control of ourselves if we just make one last stride. Augustine, at least by the time of *De Dono Perseverantiae,* instead recommends a less triumphant stance: perseverance, humility, even fear. Far from catching up to ourselves and so compensating for our belatedness, our best hope is to hold on for dear life. That is what perseverance looks like: living out a distended life, always just a step behind your own mind, ever mindful that things could fall away at any time. Yet it is precisely in acknowledging this belatedness, this lack of spontaneity and primacy, that we can spot the opening for grace, as we have just seen. But this opening is just that—an opening, a possibility, a gap. There is no guarantee of salvation. There is not even a guarantee of some kind of stability that would prefigure the salvific state. "Tremble as you

---

[83] Susannah Ticciati, "Augustine and Grace Ex Nihilo: the Logic of Augustine's Response to the Monks of Hadrumetum and Marseilles," *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2010), 401-422, has built on James Wetzel's work in *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) to show how much we err if we try to assign Augustinian grace to particular 'moments' of human life. When we do that, we end up in some futile attempt at measuring out the percentages of divine and human agency in any given act (which would here have to be taken as punctual—taking place in an instant). Instead, we get a better sense of what Augustine is doing with grace if we map it on to a whole human life. Our angle on grace is then temporally extended, and it fits better with the way Augustine relates grace to a sense of duration. See esp. Ticciati, 403-404, 408, and 416: "Wetzel's innovation is to look at the operation of grace in human lives which extend over time, where most commentators have focused on discrete moments of divine-human interaction." Both Ticciati and Wetzel suggest, convincingly, that the human perspective on grace is limited by time; see Ticciati, 419 (citing Wetzel, 194): "Human beings in time are temporally limited in their perspective and cannot hope to have an overview of the working of God's grace. Wetzel says of Augustine: 'Once he finds himself in the midst of redemption, the beginning of the process will elude the reach of his memory, much in the way that its completion extends beyond his expectation.'" Finally, this temporal limitation also lends our perspective on grace a retrospective quality: "grace has been at work all along, but can only be seen to have been so in retrospect." (417) For his part, Wetzel deals with this problem most directly in the fourth chapter of *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 112-160: "Grace and Conversion."

celebrate Him, since no one can be sure about eternal life," advised Augustine, "until their life, which is a trial on the earth, has come to completion."[84] Everything is deferred to the very end. We will not know whether or not it is indeed grace that comes to fill the gaps within us until it is too late.

Conclusion

In the *Gift of Perseverance*, Augustine was not silent about the account of his conversion he gave in *Conf.* VIII. He returns to it there in order to remind us that, even then, decades before, he had written the primacy of divine agency into the story of his own transformation. It was in the *Confessions*, after all, that he had coined a controversial phrase to communicate this position. "Give what you command," was his imperative to God, "and command what you will."[85] The scene in the Milanese garden can be read as putting these words to work:

> In those same books, then, I also told the story of my conversion. As God was converting me to the faith, I was laying waste with a furious but pitiful verbosity. Do you not remember how I told the story that way, so I could show that I had been given up to the faithful tears my mother cried every day over my perishing? There, I absolutely preached that God converts human wills to faith by His grace.[86]

---

[84] *DDP* XXII.lxii: *exsultate ei cum tremore*: [Psalm 2:11] *quoniam de vita aeterna, quam filiis promissionis promisit non mendax Deus ante tempora aeterna, nemo potest esse securus, nisi consummata fuerit ista vita, quae tentatio est super terram.* [Job 7:1] Forsaking trembling and seeking after self-awareness could only lead to one's downfall through pride. On this, see Cavadini, 127, for his characterization of self-comprehension as a negative goal for Augustine. To not tremble, to not feel the sting of radical humility, would only be to erect a false self, an altar of pride: "If 'the Self' corresponds to anything in Augustine, it is this reified structure of pride, an attractive illusion, but ultimately a self-contradiction, doomed to eternal incoherence." Though Cavadini is talking about Augustine's attempt to know himself in *Conf.* X, a similar association between self-knowledge and pride can be seen in *DDP*.

[85] Augustine refers back to this refrain in *DDP* XX.liii.

[86] *DDP* XX.liii: *Et in eisdem etiam libris quod de mea conversione narravi , Deo me convertente ad eam fidem, quam miserrima et furiosissima loquacitate vastabam, nonne ita narratum esse meministis, ut ostenderem me fidelibus et quotidianis matris meae lacrymis ne perirem fuisse concessum*. Augustine uses the present active participle *convertens*, rather than the past passive participle *convertus*, perhaps to emphasize both God's agency (hence the active part) and the progressive aspect of the conversion (hence 'converting' rather than 'having been converted'). Earlier in the same work (at XIX.l), Augustine claims that in arguing for the primacy of divine agency in both conversion and perseverance, he has the support not only of Cyprian and Ambrose, but also of Gregory Nazianzen: *Isti tales tantique doctores dicentes non esse aliquid, de quo tanquam de nostro, quod nobis Deus non dederit, gloriemur; nec ipsum cor nostrum et cogitationes nostras in potestate nostra esse; et totum dantes Deo, atque ab ipso nos accipere confitentes, ut permansuri convertamur ad eum; ut id quod bonum est, nobis quoque videatur bonum, et velimus illud, ut honoremus Deum, et recipiamus Christum, ut ex indevotis efficiamur devoti et*

He then adds: "There, too, I asked God about ongoing perseverance."[87] But there does not seem to be much explicit evidence for this in the *Confessions*. The triumphant ending of Book VIII shoves perseverance into the background. Its noisiness interferes with our attempts to think about what comes after such apparent transformations. Still, as we have seen, the theme of perseverance can be taken as furthering the sense of belatedness and *distentio* Augustine emphasized in Books IV, X, and XI of the *Confessions*. His account of conversion and his argument about perseverance can, then, be read together, but perhaps not as easily as he would have wanted.

Of course, that might be why works such as *De Dono Perseverantiae* had to be written in the first place. Augustine's tale of victory in Book VIII did not leave much room for the duration, the drawn-out languor, or even the history of conversion. These aspects had to be worked out in more detail, so as to avoid the destructive side of such triumphalism. It was an overly idealistic view of post-conversion life that distorted the worldviews of Pelagius and, to a lesser degree, the monks of Massilia. Augustine's work on perseverance serves as a corrective for that. Beyond just adding the components of duration and history to his framework for conversion, Augustine is at pains to show how that duration is drawn out until the very end and how that history is illegible to those who are still living and breathing.

---

religiosi, ut in ipsam Trinitatem credamus, et confiteamur etiam voce quod credimus: haec utique gratiae Dei tribuunt, Dei munera agnoscunt, ab ipso nobis, non a nobis esse testantur. / "Great teachers like that, then, say that there is nothing we should be glorified over, as if it came from us and was not given by God. They say that our thoughts and even our heart itself are not in our power. They give it all up to God and confess that we receive it from Him that we are converted to Him and remain in that. They confess that we receive it from God that what is good appears to us as good, and so we want it and want to honor God and receive Christ, so that we are made devout and religious when we were not devout at all, so that we believe in the Trinity itself, and so that we confess what we believe out loud. All these things they attribute to the grace of God unconditionally. They acknowledge them to be allotments from God. They testify that these things are for us, but they are not from us. They are from God."

[87] *DDP* XX.liii: *De proficiente porro perseverantia quemadmodum Deum rogaverim*…

Conversion, it turns out, is less about an unimaginable instant and more about the inscrutable hiddenness of an absolutely primordial—because timeless—decision. The instant of one's own decision is, then, a kind of *folie*, but it is perhaps less a form of madness than a foolish presumption. (Although it must be admitted that Augustine's inner turmoil, as described in *Conf*. VIII, does not much resemble a picture of sanity.) Taking the entirety of human life into account, the turning point of conversion is far from the determining factor. At most, it is a retroactive posit aimed at making sense of life as a kind of receptive response to the prior spontaneity that, according to Augustine, conditions our experience.

Our access to that spontaneity, however, remains strictly limited. We might say that Augustine's life story was written out in advance, but in a script that could never be read. 'Perseverance' expresses this illegibility by postponing the interpretation of someone's life until they are no longer living it. Here we stumble upon another way that Augustine's writings on perseverance parallel his writings on temporality elsewhere. As the rhetoric of belatedness in *Conf*. IV suggested, and as *Conf*. XI made clear, Augustine holds that all measurement in time is retrospective. With his work on perseverance, Augustine is telling us that this goes for the measuring-up of a person's life, as well. Next, we will have to see how the same conditions of belatedness apply even to our attempts to take the measure of the whole span of human history.

Chapter 5: Kenosis of the Saeculum

At first glance, the *Confessions* and the *City of God* do not appear to be engaged in the same kind of work. The *Confessions*, as we have seen, weaves details of Augustine's life into an overarching cosmological vision. Along the way, it touches on issues of creation, receptivity, and temporality, all of which lend different shades to Augustine's portrait of human experience. The *City of God*, meanwhile, seems to want to take on the whole scope of human history, dealing as it does in anecdotes from ancient history and questions about the ongoing relationship between politics and theology. Still, it should be clear from the previous chapters that Augustine's fascination with the temporal particularities of human life runs deep enough that it could never be constricted to just one of his works.[1] Now that we have sketched belatedness out as a theme recurring both throughout the *Confessions* and beyond it (into texts as late as the *Gift of Perseverance*), it remains for us to look at how that same theme comes to bear upon time conceived as 'history.'[2]

---

[1] Richard Avramenko, in "The Wound and Salve of Time: Augustine's Politics of Human Happiness," *Review of Metaphysics* 60 (June 2007), 779-811, has drawn his own connections between *Confessions* XI and the project of the *City of God*. On the broad importance of *Conf*. XI, he writes: "Time is not merely a philosophical problem. Considerations of time do present certain philosophical paradoxes, but perhaps more important than these philosophical paradoxes is that time emerges at the center of a series of experienced paradoxes." (782) The bulk of his article then proceeds to lay out seven different aspects of time in Augustine's thought. This cataloguing leads to some useful insights, but it will not be replicated in full here. On the notion of time as a "wound," see also Henri-Irénée Marrou, *L'Ambivalence du Temps de l'Histoire chez Augustin* (Montreal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1950), 47-48: "The time that we must live is like a hidden wound. Being bleeds out of it, insensibly using us up and wearing us out unto death. This is a fundamental truth that St. Augustine never refrains from commenting upon." (All translations of Marrou will be my own.) In a somewhat different register, Charles Mathewes has also connected Augustine's historical politics back to the theme of *distentio*. See "A Worldly Augustinianism: Augustine's Sacramental Vision of Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010), 333-348, esp. 345: "While on earth, then, 'living in the promise' is our best route into recognizing and inhabiting our *distentio*, our experience of tantalizing incompleteness that we confess we exist in at present, while at the same time proclaiming that all will be healed in the eschaton. We must recognize both our own incompleteness and the way that it tantalizes us."

[2] 'History' is a vague enough term that it would take too long to list out every use Augustine made of it. The logic of the *saeculum* that he works out in the *City of God* is but one facet of his approach to *historia* (broadly construed), though it does appear to be a crucial one. On other aspects of *historia* in Augustine, see Basil Studer's 1996 Saint Augustine Lecture, "History and Faith in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997), 7-50, esp.

Already in the *Confessions* we can find hints that Augustine's analyses are meant to be expanded to a world-historical scale. When he sought out a concrete example of how expectation, attention, and memory relate under the conditions of *distentio animi*, he turned first to song:

> I am going to sing a song that I know. Before I begin, my expectation is stretched through the whole thing. But when I start, I will gather some part of the song out of my expectation and into the past. My memory, too, is being stretched. The life of this activity of mine is stretched out into memory, on account of what I've already sung, and into expectation, on account of what I am going to sing. Still, my present attention is there. Through it, what was going to be is thrown over so that it becomes past. As more and more of the song is sung, the memory is more and more expanded as the expectation is shortened, until all expectation is consumed, when the entire, finished action has passed away into memory.[3]

Here Augustine emphasizes the dynamic tension between these three phases by repeated use of those 'stretching' words he so favored. The fluidity of both time and temporal experience becomes visible as we work our way through this mental exercise of singing a song (or at least thinking about singing a song). Augustine then immediately expands this description of temporality, so that it applies to the broadest possible time-span of human history as we know it:

> What happens in the entire song happens also in its individual parts and syllables. The same thing happens in a longer activity, of which that song is perhaps a part. The same happens in the entirety of a human life, whose parts are all of the actions of one person, and the same happens in the entire age [*saeculum*] of humanity, whose parts are all human lives.[4]

8-12. As Studer acknowledges, Marrou had already made a similar point in *Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1983).

[3] *Conf.* XI.xxviii: *dicturus sum canticum quod novi. antequam incipiam, in totum expectatio mea tenditur, cum autem coepero, quantum ex illa in praeteritum decerpsero, tenditur et memoria mea, atque distenditur vita huius actionis meae in memoriam propter quod dixi et in expectationem propter quod dicturus sum. praesens tamen adest attentio mea, per quam traicitur quod erat futurum ut fiat praeteritum. quod quanto magis agitur et agitur, tanto breviata expectatione prolongatur memoria, donec tota expectatio consumatur, cum tota illa actio finita transierit in memoriam.* As in the other chapters, all translations from the *Confessions* are my own.

[4] *Conf.* XI.xxviii: *et quod in toto cantico, hoc in singulis particulis eius fit atque in singulis syllabis eius, hoc in actione longiore, cuius forte particula est illud canticum, hoc in tota vita hominis, cuius partes sunt omnes actiones hominis, hoc in toto saeculo filiorum hominum, cuius partes sunt omnes vitae hominum.*

What can strike us at first as a compelling rhetorical move—the words calling to mind the charming image of human existence as a beautiful melody—becomes troubling if exposed to critical reflection. The example of the song is so neat and tidy because it concerns a song that is 'known.' Augustine is clear about this: *dicturus sum canticum quod novi*. But when he then expands this example to broader time-spans, like that of a human life, any claim to know future content in advance would seem premature. Is Augustine really saying that we recite our lives like we recite well-known songs?[5]

The question becomes even more pressing when we expand this talk of temporality not just to the span of one human life, but even to the span of all human lives. The *totum saeculum filiorum hominum* is supposed to be run through like a melody, but surely we remain unable to know in advance everything that is going to happen throughout human history. If this hymn is meant to be sung by a those who already know all the lyrics, then we humans would not appear to be worthy of joining the choir. So are we then to say that Augustine's example of a song just does not fit with his talk of lifetimes and human history? Perhaps here we have run into an impasse, our path ahead blocked by a dead metaphor.

The word Augustine uses here—*saeculum*—may help us find a way past this impasse. It is a term that carries much weight throughout the *City of God*, a text that also happens to be concerned with the degree of knowledge humankind can have concerning the historical

[5] The importance of song in Augustine's work is at once both obvious—think of his constant referrals back to Ambrose's hymns or the child's voice singing *tolle, lege*—and challenging to comprehend in a unified fashion. Perhaps this is because the true influence of music on Augustine runs deeper than his surface-level references to it. An exemplary peek into Augustine's deeper musicality can be found in Willemien Otten, "Bach's Passions in a Secular World: Comments about Bach, Ambrose, and Augustine in Honour of Ton Koopman," in *Studies in Baroque: Festschrift Ton Koopman* (Bonn: Dr. J. Butz, 2014), 49, where Otten comments on the effect Ambrose's hymn *Deus Creator Omnium* has on Augustine in *Conf.* IX.xii: "What is remarkable here is that there is no detectable formal transformation or development of Ambrose's hymn, as only a few lines are quoted, and yet it seems a new power breaks out of the poem, in the sense that (1) its familiar poetic stanzas allow Augustine to bridle his emotions; (2) through the dialogical mirroring of human life before the God whom he addresses in prayer (*in conspectu tuo*) Augustine is able to draw his mother's and his own life together even after death; and (3) the unity with God and self so achieved allows him to engage in written confession."

development of its world. What makes the connection of the song to world history so troubling is precisely this question of humanity's historical awareness. On the one hand, the events of future history are not known to us like lyrics in a songbook. And yet, on the other hand, Augustine has drawn our attention to how they are both conditioned by the same kind of stretched-out temporality. In doing so, he has also hinted at the idea of some divine singer who would indeed know the song of history well in advance.[6] *Saeculum*, as a term for the age of history, can then be read as encompassing both history's undecipherability to us and the possibility that it is playing out in accordance with some providential melody.[7]

As we work out the implications of this notion of the *saeculum*, it will be important to recall how often Augustine casts the unfinished symphony of temporal life as an impediment to our ability to gain stable awareness of ourselves and the world around us. This is the case not just with events that are going to happen in the future, but also with events that are going on 'right now.' We have seen this in the case of conversion, for example, where claims of certainty only come onto the scene well after the fact. And, even then, as the logic of perseverance has made clear, our retrospective view on such matters always remains open to correction or subversion.[8]

---

[6] Another eloquent expression of this can be found in Harrison, "Getting Carried Away," 22: "I would like to suggest that, for Augustine, song is first and foremost something that is written into the nature of reality as it is created by God, who is eternal and immutable music, and who brings everything into existence from nothing by giving it musical form. Creation, from the lowliest worm to the highest angel, is part of this cosmic harmony."

[7] In adopting this cosmological perspective on time and song, Augustine finds himself anticipated (as in so many things) by his hero Ambrose. A helpful juxtaposition of their potentially conflicting treatments of time as musical can be found in Jan den Boeft, "*Aeterne Rerum Conditor*: Ambrose's Poem about 'Time,'" in Florentino Garcia Martinez and Gerald P. Luttikhuizen (eds.), *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hillhorst* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 27-40. For a critical reappraisal of den Boeft's interpretation, see M.B. Pranger, "Time and the Integrity of Poetry: Ambrose and Augustine," in W. Otten and K. Pollmann (eds.), *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity: the Encounter between Classical and Christian Strategies of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 49-62, esp. 54: "I would like to point out, first, that Augustinian time, aporetic though it may be, is not as merely negative as Den Boeft suggests and, second, that, just as for Ambrose, so also for Augustine, the status of time is somehow related to the status of poetry."

[8] Janet Coleman, in her entry on Augustine in *A History of Political Thought* (London: Blackwell, 2000), 292-340, has done a nice job working something of the logic of belatedness into her analysis of Augustinian political theology. See, e.g., 294: "Contrary to the view of ancient ethics that proposed man's ability to 'know himself,' and his responsibility either for self-perfection in the creation of a unitary moral self, or for successfully crafting his

We see a similar hesitance to ascribe certainty too quickly when it comes to historical time. Again, already in the *Confessions*, Augustine is hinting at this. In the middle of his lengthy, impassioned pleas to God about the tragic dissolution that accompanies *distentio animi*, he cries out:

> Now, of course, my years are full of groans. You are my relief, Lord. You are eternal, my father. But I am ripped apart in times and I have no idea what their order is.[9]

This language of *ordo* is reminiscent of the cosmological questions we saw back in Book IV of the *Confessions*. Again, it is a question of key pieces missing from—or, to preserve the vehemence of Augustine's tone, torn out of—the whole. The conditions of temporal existence seem to preclude a clear view of the order in which 'the times' proceed, if indeed there is such an order to be found. An acknowledgment of this plagues Augustine's understanding of his own life in time and, in the *City of God*, it will also color what he has to say about the order of historical time, the order of the *saeculum*.

The Indecipherable *Saeculum*

The *City of God* is about more than just 'history' in some narrow sense.[10] Its twenty-two books, written over the course of about thirteen years, take us through topics as seemingly

---

character to suit his circumstances, Augustine insisted that we could only be inwardly certain of self-existence but not capable of grasping what we are. We remain, in this life, uncertain about the information acquired through accounts constructed by mental re-readings of our own narratives of previous events that are lodged in our memories. We can obtain no objective knowledge of ourselves. And what we know of others is even less secure. He therefore concluded that our impulses and desires are largely inaccessible to rational guidance and discourse."

[9] *Conf.* XI.xxix: *nunc vero anni mei in gemitibus, et tu solacium meum, domine, pater meus aeternus es. at ego in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio…*

[10] Of course, Augustine continues to place his own creative spin on ancient historiography throughout the *City of God*. In the early books (as well as in some letters), Sallust figures prominently, as shown by Paul C. Burns in "Augustine's Use of Sallust in the *City of God*: the Role of the Grammatical Tradition," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 105-114, esp. 114: Augustine in Letter 138 and in the early books of *City of God* invokes a familiar and authoritative author from the Roman school curriculum in order to engage the educated part of his audience. In subsequent books he continues his review of the calamities that have befallen Rome throughout its history. At 3.17, he uses Sallust's *Histories* to recount those misfortunes in some detail. 39 And he reminds his audience once again that he is using authorities whom they have taken great pains to master and to have their children read." In addition

diverse as the ethics of suicide under threat of rape, the finer points of non-Christian natural theology, and the precise qualities of resurrected bodies after the eschaton.[11] To cover all of these would be both impossible and ill-advised. The goal here is merely to trace out the thematic thread of belatedness as it bears upon the question of the meaning of history for Augustine. Fortunately, this is a question that recurs with some regularity throughout Augustine's massive work. What we lose in breadth of scope, then, we should gain back in precision of focus.

Already at the beginning, with Book I, we find Augustine tackling the problem of what seemingly seminal events in history might mean for both Christians and non-Christians alike. The occasion for this question, as is often repeated, was the sack of Rome carried out by the Visigoths (led by Alaric) in 410 CE.[12] According to Augustine, a number of non-Christians

---

to Sallust, Cicero lurks between the lines of Augustine's text; on the Ciceronian *City of God*, see G.J.P. O'Daly, "Thinking through History: Augustine's Method in the *City of God* and its Ciceronian Dimension," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 45-57, esp. 49: "When Augustine writes the *City of God,* Cicero's *Republic* is one of the key works informing his engagement with the values of the Roman tradition." Yet O'Daly, 57, forestalls any hypberlic conclusions on his own part: "These inevitable differences between Cicero and Augustine serve to remind us that we cannot hope to adapt Augustine's views on the origins and development of societies and on the potential of societies to achieve justice in such a way that they become Ciceronian in some uncomplicated respect. Augustine's view of political life is predominantly bleak, although one must always be sensitive to the rhetoric of the moment in his writings, and remember that, for everything negative that he says about political activity, he recognizes the importance of human institutions in preserving social order. […] Cicero's historically founded approach is fruitful for Augustine, because Augustine's biblically founded approach is, in essence, historical. Cicero's insistence on the role of reason in political development helps Augustine articulate his concept ofa rational divine providence in history. Cicero's emphasis on the moral qualities of citizens, and his relative indifference to constitutional forms—despite his gesture of approval for an interpretation of the Roman constitution as a mixed one *(Rep.* 1.45, 1.69)—provide Augustine with a theoretical focus on human morality as the basis of political order."

[11] See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* [henceforth *CD*], CCSL 47-48, eds. B. Dombart and A. Kalb (Brepols, 1955), I.xxviii, most of books VII-VIII, and XXII.xii-xvii, xix-xxi. All of these issues are deserving of patient analysis, though there will not be space for that here. The relevance of the first issue has been explored by Melanie Webb, "'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself:' Rape and Consolation in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 37-58.

[12] Augustine had a fair amount to say on this subject. See also his Sermons 81, 105, and 296, among others. In Sermon 105 (found in *Patrologia Latina* 38), he is especially blunt about his right to speak on this controversial topic. About those who would try to censor him, he remarks: *sed non dicat de roma, dictum est de me: o si taceat de roma*. / "But they shouldn't talk about Rome and about me, saying, 'Oh, if only he kept quiet about Rome!'" (All translations from Sermon 105 will be my own.) See also Theodore S. De Bruyn, "Ambivalence within a 'Totalizing Discourse:' Augustine's Sermons on the Sack of Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 405-421, where the author singles out specifically sermons 15A, 25, 33A, 81, 105, 113A, and 296, as well as *De Urbis Excidio*. De Bruyn's own analysis builds on earlier work such as that of Jean Doignon, "Oracles, Prophéties, 'on-dit' sur la chute de Rome: les réactions de Jérôme et d'Augustin," *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 36, no. 1 (1990), 120-146.

blamed this attack on the rise of Christianity within the empire. With the perceived waning of the old rites and the waxing of the new 'Christian times,' there was a sense that the old safeguards of civil religion were crumbling. Without the gods to watch over Rome, after all, who could guarantee its future? When these *tempora Christiana* were ruled over by an apparently robust emperor like Theodosius, Christians might have been able to reply that their own rise to power had coincided with some kind of season of renewal or even a new golden age.[13] But when the situation grew more and more volatile, as it did in the years leading up to 410 CE, that kind of counterpoint became less and less tenable.[14]

When Augustine took up writing the *City of God* a few years later, then, he had to rethink the meaning of these Christian times, which constituted the 'present age' of history for so many of his interlocutors.[15] It would no longer be enough simply to reverse anti-Christian accusations and turn them back on the accusers. If pagans or polytheists were calling the *tempora Christiana* worse, it would be insufficient to merely assert that they were in fact better than what came

---

[13] On Augustine's initially favorable view of Theodosius—and on how that view was shaped by his ongoing disdain for Valentinian II—see Neil B. McLynn, "Augustine's Roman Empire," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 29-44, esp. 32: "No other account makes Valentinian (who died aged twenty) so consistently so small. We might therefore suspect that Augustine continued to see the boy he remembered from his encounter in Milan. This would allow the further suggestion that by downgrading Valentinian, Augustine might have been led to overestimate Theodosius, whom of course he never met; which will have helped sustain the belief, which continued to distort his judgment for over a decade, in the exceptional qualities of the Theodosian dynasty."

[14] See W.H.C. Frend, "Augustine and Orosius: on the End of the Ancient World," 1989 Saint Augustine Lecture, *Augustinian Studies* 20 (1989), 1-38, esp. 15: "Between the years 408-411 there had been an increasing popular groundswell in favor of paganism, reinforcing the aristocratic antiquarianism that idealised the Roman past. 'Christian times' had become what we should call 'a sick joke.'" For a comparison of Augustine with another group also engaged in the work of disaster theology, see Robert Kirschner, "Two Responses to Epochal Change: Augustine and the Rabbis on Ps. 137 (136)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990), 242-262, esp. 259: "Even more fundamental are the two radically divergent responses to epochal change that emerge from the present inquiry. In a time of trouble and insecurity, Augustine decribes an eternally secure *civitas* divorced from all danger. Earthly dominion is merely a divine dispensation that may be revoked at any time. Even the sack of Rome cannot shake Christian hope, for such hope transcends worldly tribulations. *Non es hinc, aliunde es* (par. 12): the Christian's home is not here but elsewhere."

[15] This timeframe would be in keeping with the conventional dating of the work's composition to the range of years between 413 and 427 CE. See, inter alia, Ernest Fortin's entry on this in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald et al. (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 196. More specifically, the *City of God* may have been spurred on by the letter Augustine received from the pagan senator Volusianus, whose questions about Christian teachings implied that they had led to the weakening of classical institutions. See Letter 135 and Frend, 16-17.

before.[16] What started out as merely the context-specific implausibility of this kind of argument, however, eventually transformed into a much broader investigation into the meaning of history and the events that constitute its plot.[17] The Sack of Rome seems to have been received, justifiably or not, by Augustine's contemporaries as a particularly meaningful moment, something that could change the face of world history as they knew it.[18] Most tended to receive it as an unwelcome change; others, perhaps, would have seen something positive in it.[19] But what the *City of God* tells us is that the supposed meaning of this event remains unclear for us, even as

---

[16] Augustine's engagement with pagan historiography was, if anything, 'dialectical'—engaging with some of its insights (e.g., those concerning the injustice of states) while shunning others (e.g., those claiming to spot clear turning-points in contemporary events). These threads have been picked up fairly recently by the essays of Peter Busch ("On the Use and Disadvantage of History for the Afterlife") and Andrew Murphy ("Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline") in *Augustine and History*, ed. Christopher T. Daly, John Doody, & Kim Paffenroth (Lanham MD: Lexington, 2008). See also Catherine Conybeare, "Terrarum Orbi Documentum: Augustine, Camillus, and Learning from History," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 59-74, esp. 63, where she cites *CD* III.xviii to argue that Augustine "simultaneously embraces and eschews Roman historiographical tradition, expressing a fear of becoming *nihil aliud quam scriptores… historiae*, 'merely a writer of history.'"

[17] Marrou, 24-25, claims that, if we want to appreciate the "richness" of Augustine's teachings concerning history, "we will have to comprehend the paradoxical and mysterious character of these Christian times." For Augustine, the phrase *tempora Christiana* names a problem, not a solution. The richness of these teachings might extend even to our own contemporary debates about historiography and historical narrative. Concerning these debates, see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990), esp. 73: "Everyone recognizes that the way one makes sense of history is important in determining what politics one will credit as realistic, practicable, and socially responsible. But it is often overlooked that the conviction that one can make sense of history stands on the same level of epistemic plausibility as the conviction that it makes no sense whatsoever." In some sense, this is the 'third way' anticipated by Augustine when it comes to debating the meaning of a historical event. Instead of merely retrenching on one side of that debate, the point is to get past it by acknowledging the possibility that the event has no inherent meaning at all.

[18] On this, see Frend, 17-19, and (more recently) James Wetzel, "A Tangle of Two Cities," the 2012 Saint Augustine Lecture, *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1-2 (2012), 5-23, esp. 6, where the *City of God* "begins as an installment in a late antique culture war. Pagan intellectuals, unhappy to be living in Christian times (*tempora Christiana*), were reading Rome's vulnerability as evidence for the weakness of the Christian god and the unfitness of his otherworldly followers for the task of running an empire. … Having begun largely as an installment in a culture war, *City of God* continues [in Books XI-XXII] as a theological meditation on the meaning of human history."

[19] Augustine's follower Orosius, for example, wrote his own *Historia* of the ancient world, ultimately arriving at moderately more positive conclusions than did Augustine. See Frend, 26: "Augustine and Orosius, therefore, represent two reactions in the west to the fall of Rome and its aftermath. Both are intelligible. Confronted by a pagan reaction and in the comparative security of North Africa, Augustine could bring together his experiences and ideas in a vast but diffuse apologetic and theological work dealing with man's ultimate relations with God. Orosius, on the other hand, younger and having experienced barbarian invasion at first hand, dispensed with the mystical in favor of a universal history, demonstrating the active and beneficial providence of God reflected through the Christian Roman empire and extending to his own day." Cf. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 174-181, and Peter van Nuffelen's comprehensive *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).

we live through the very phase of history it is said to define.[20] To fully understand why Augustine wound up following this third way—between merely ascribing positive or negative value to some historically transformative event—we will have to work patiently through several passages selected from the first nine books of his work.

Book I, though, has to remain our starting point. There Augustine expresses this problem of the meaning of history by way of the related problem of the visibility of divine providence in the world. These two questions are linked by their shared dependence on the issues of invisibility and undecipherability. When it comes to providence, Augustine is quite clear: divine justice rules the world. His conception of an omnipotent Creator could scarcely lead him to say otherwise. But to make this claim about providence only takes us so far. There remains the question of the visibility of providence for us, for humans who live in a providentially ordered world. On this count, Augustine shows much greater hesitation. Even if his convictions about the effectiveness of providence are adamantine, he is far less sure that we are able to read or interpret the logic of this providence merely by looking at the world for ourselves. By shifting our vocabulary from that of providence to that of history, we will be able to see how Augustine's reservations about

---

[20] As M.B. Pranger puts it in *Eternity's Ennui: Temporality, Perseverance, and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 248: "The end of Rome as experienced by so many of his contemporaries because of Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 did not mean anything to him, and it was to replace both the anxieties concerning the end of the 'world' and the false expectations resulting from substituting the longevity of the Roman Empire for that of the church on earth that he undertook to write the *City of God*." Pranger's semantically charged reading in part develops some lines of thought begun in the work of Jan den Boeft, as in "Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* X," *Vigiliae Christianae* 33, no. 3 (1979), 242-259. De Bruyn, "Ambivalence," 421, argues that Augustine's surprisingly indirect response to the crisis at Rome allowed it to break free of its occasional context and so better lend itself to reuse and reinterpretation over the centuries: "For the progress of Christianization in the long run, it may be more important that Christian discourse purported to answer questions of the sort Augustine deals with in these sermons; the discourse thereby framed the way in which the questions were to be understood, and the discourse could be reiterated long after the experience which prompted the questions had faded." On this note, see also Coleman, 325: "Man is sinful and deserves whatever punishment a neutral history appears to serve out to him. Most importantly, the end of this life must come sooner or later and Alaric's sack of Rome was no more than a moment in the temporal sequence of birth and death. In sum, for Augustine, the Roman Empire had no place in the divine, providential plan of universal history; it had no religious significance."

providence bear upon the question of whether or not we are able to read some definite meaning out of history and its events.

Augustine begins, as he so often does, with a passage from Scripture. His occasion for doing so is the fact that Alaric and his allies spared not just Christians, but also many Romans from other backgrounds. In this case, the actions of the Visigoths, apparently motivated by (Arian) Christian mercy, seemed to have injured or benefitted people regardless of the latter's perceived relationship to the Christian God. For Augustine, this was quite in keeping with Matthew 5:45:

> Someone will say, 'So why does divine mercy extend even to the irreligious and ungrateful?' Why do we think this? Perhaps because the one who grants it is He who daily 'makes His sun rise on both the good and the bad, and rains on both the just and the unjust.'[21] … It pleased divine providence to hold in reserve those good things which just people will enjoy and unjust people will not. The same goes for those bad things which irreligious people will suffer and good people will not. But it wanted temporal goods and evils to be common to both, so that we do not desire and seek after what bad people are also seen to have, and so that we do not shamefully avoid what often afflicts even good people.[22]

Augustine's response here emphasizes the way that divine providence does not usually render clear judgments on human actions as they occur. This lack of an immediately interpretable result is what makes moral evaluation so difficult. Picking out who, precisely, is good and who is bad becomes much more difficult once you render providence invisible. The notion that people 'get what they deserve' in this life also becomes much less convincing. Instead of that kind of

---

[21] Matthew 5:45. According to the SBL New Testament, the Greek reads: τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους.

[22] *CD* I.viii: *Dicet aliquis: 'Cur ergo ista divina misericordia etiam ad impios ingratosque pervenit?' Cur putamus, nisi quia eam ille praebuit, qui cotidie 'facit oriri solem suum super bonos et malos et pluit super iustos et iniustos?' … Placuit quippe divinae providentiae praeparare in posterum bona iustis quibus non fruentur iniusti, et mala impiis quibus non excruciabuntur boni; ista vero temporalia bona et mala utrisque voluit esse communia, ut nec bona cupidius adpetantur quae mali quoque habere cernuntur, nec mala turpiter evitentur quibus et boni plerumque adficiuntur.* All translations from the *City of God* will be my own. Along the way, I have consulted the version of R.W. Dyson (Cambridge UP, 1998) and the Loeb editions, translated by George McCracken, William M. Green, David Wiesen, Philip Levine, E.M. Sanford, and William C. Greene (Harvard UP, 1957-1972).

immediate translation of providence into human knowledge, Augustine upholds the idea that just deserts are held in reserve (*praeparare in posterum*) until the end of time. Already we can get the hint that the interpretation of history is insolubly bound up with the end of historical time, which alone could bring the balance sheets of our moral economy to completion.

In the same section, Augustine implies that the correct response to this opacity of providence is neither to grow angry with God nor to attain some higher degree of clarity. Instead, the point is to accept our inability to interpret the meaning of history with any great immediacy. As was the case in the *Confessions*, the temporality of the world is not something to be corrected, but rather accepted, along with all of the problems that accompany it. The alternative is self-deception and the inability to properly distinguish between time and eternity. Those who can manage to think this way, moreover, should not feel too proud about it or set themselves apart on account of it. Such dichotomizing distinctions are exactly the kinds of interpretations that continually get overturned throughout history. And this goes even for people who fail to observe the distinction between time and eternity by loving time as if it were eternity, "since as long as they live it will always be uncertain whether they are going to change their wills for the better."[23]

Later on, we will have to pay more attention to how that kind of historical uncertainty concerning the contours of community relates to the overarching theme of the 'two cities.' Lingering a bit longer with Book I here, however, will help us to see how that theme, too, is best

---

[23] For the quotation in full, see *CD* I.ix: *Non mihi itaque videtur haec parva esse causa quare cum malis flagellentur et boni, quando Deo placet perditos mores etiam temporalium poenarum adflictione punire. Flagellantur enim simul, non quia simul agunt malam vitam, sed quia simul amant temporalem vitam, non quidem aequaliter, sed tamen simul, quam boni contemnere deberent, ut illi correpti atque correcti consequerentur aeternam, ad quam consequendam si nollent esse socii, ferrentur et diligerentur inimici, quia donec vivunt semper incertum est utrum voluntatem sint in melius mutaturi*. / "It does not seem to me to be with little reason, then, that good people are whipped alongside bad people, when it pleases God to punish their ruined morals with the affliction of temporal punishments. They are punished together, not because they lead bad lives together, but because they love the temporal life together. Perhaps they do not love it to the same degree, but still they both love it all the same. But good people ought to condemn this life so that others, scolded and corrected, might chase after eternal life. If they do not want to share in chasing after that life, still they should be suffered and loved as enemies, since as long as they live it will always be uncertain whether they are going to change their wills for the better."

understood in light of the question of undecipherability. As we have already intimated, the problem of providence has much to do with the possibility of judgment. While the invisibility of providence prevents us from reaching any quick and easy moral judgments about particular events, it also points toward an ultimate kind of judgment that would retroactively license all of this invisibility. For Augustine, this takes the form of an eschatological last judgment, which would clarify all distinctions, moral or otherwise. There would be no chance of such distinctions being revised after that judgment, since there would be no 'after.' Providence would culminate in a judgment that brings historical time to an end.

Augustine even describes the eschaton as a kind of *punctum*.[24] Given the awkward relationship between such a 'point' and the flux of time—as we have seen throughout the *Confessions*—this might suggest that the eschatological judgment, too, has at best a liminal place in the time of world history. Another troublesome word from *Confessions* XI—*praesens*—also occurs in the discussion of judgment in Book I of the *City of God*. By delaying the entry of the divine judge until the very last scene on the historical stage, Augustine risks leading the audience to think that God is sitting dormant throughout all of the previous scenes. Divinely unmoved for millennia, without care for things temporal, God would then suddenly spring into action at the climactic moment. But this is not at all what Augustine is trying to argue. "My God," he asserts, "is everywhere present and everywhere whole. Never closed in, He can be there in secret and be

[24] When he does so, the context combines the delay of judgment, the 'moment' of resurrection, and the practice of Christian burial. See *CD* I.xii: *Quanto minus debent de corporibus insepultis insultare Christianis, quibus et ipsius carnis membrosumque omnium reformatio non solum ex terra, verum etiam ex aliorum elementorum secretissimo sinu, quo dilapsa cadavera recesserunt, in temporis puncto reddenda et redintegranda promittitur*. / "How much less should they insult Christian corpses that have not been buried! It is promised to Christians that their flesh and every part of their bodies will be given back and made whole again at that point in time. This goes not only for those parts in the ground, but also for those hidden away in the folds of other things, into which the cadavers receded as they disintegrated."

absent without moving."[25] To be God is to be *praesens*, but somehow also capable of secretly coming and going—of being there or not being there, at least in our estimation.

It is "in secret" that the providential God does His judging. For Augustine, the secrecy of this judgment matters for us.[26] In Book I, when dealing with some examples of the extreme violence that batters human life in history, he introduces another Scriptural passage, Romans 11:33: "His judgments are inscrutable, His ways past finding out."[27] The *iudicia* are there, but we cannot see them clearly, and this lack of clarity should give us pause. There is little reason to proudly and prematurely claim access to confidential decisions that could be revealed only at the very end of things. Humility would seem a safer course, at least.[28] For all that, though, it is not the case that there are no judgments at all. They are, again, simply held in reserve.[29]

At the end of Book I, Augustine applies this combination of providential invisibility and deferred judgment to the notion of the two cities: one that is earthly, another that is heavenly, 'of God,' or even 'wandering.' The proof-text for this dichotomy does not arrive until Book XIV of the *City of God*, and so we ought to admit that its components might not be fully formed right from the beginning of Book I. As we will see more frequently below, the question of how

---

[25] *CD* I.xxix: *Deus meus ubique praesens, ubique totus, nusquam inclusus, qui possit adesse secretus, abesse non motus.*

[26] On secrets in Augustine, see Clifford Ando, "Pagan Apologetics and Christian Intolerance in the Ages of Themistius and Augustine," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 171-207, esp. 190: "it is in any case clear that for Augustine knowledge of the Divine could be described as 'so great a secret.'" (Here Ando is referring to Augustine's use of secrecy-language—which he traces back to Ambrose—in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.)

[27] According to the SBL New Testament, the Greek is: ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ. Augustine refers to the passage at *CD* I.xxviii, but also *passim*. The context at I.xxviii is the discussion of rapes committed by oncoming armies. On this, see Webb, "'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself,'" cited above.

[28] Augustine's model in Book I (x-xi) is, not surprisingly, Job.

[29] See again *CD* I.xxviii: … *nec ideo Deum credant ista neglegere, quia permittit quod nemo inpune committit. Quaedam veluti pondera malarum cupiditatum et per occultum praesens divinum iudicium relaxantur et manifesto ultimo reservantur*. / "People should not believe that God ignores such things [e.g. rape] just because he permits a deed that no one could commit without being punished. Evil desires bear certain weights, we might say, which hidden divine judgment currently lets go, but which are reserved for a manifest judgment in the end."

precisely to delineate between these two cities turns out to be more complicated than it might at first seem.

Augustine suggests this already in Book I. The visible city of God, conceived in terms of the historical church,

> should clearly remember that its future citizens are hidden amongst the enemies themselves. It should not think it fruitless that it endures their hostility until they come to confess. Likewise, the city of God holds within itself a number of those who are not going to be in the eternal lot of the saints, though they are connected to the communion of saints as long as they wander through the world.[30]

A bit more optimistically, Augustine next clues us in to the overall thrust of his entire work:

> So the correction of such people is far from hopeless, if predestined friends are concealed among our most brazen opponents, though they are still unknown even to themselves. Those two cities, then, have been woven together and mixed together in this age, until they are torn apart in the final judgment. Deliberating about what should be said, and divinely aided to whatever degree, I will narrate the rise, course, and proper ends of these cities, for the sake of the glory of the city of God.[31]

"In this age"—*in hoc saeculo*—is a phrase that carries more weight than we might think here. For Augustine, there is a meaningful distinction between what holds for God's judgments and what holds for our historically conditioned understanding. In the end—*in fine*—there will be no mixing between the two cities at all. How could there be? The final judgment is expressed here as a kind of violent rupture, a 'diremption' or cutting-off that would result in two discrete pieces. But that is something we can only, and with great difficulty, eschatologically anticipate. In this "age," bounded by the *saeculum* in which we live, no such clear distinctions are possible.

---

[30] *CD* I.xxxv: *Meminerit sane in ipsis inimicis latere cives futuros, ne infructuosum vel apud ipsos putet, quod, donec perveniat ad confessos, portat infensos; sicut ex illorum numero etiam Dei civitas habet secum, quamdiu peregrinatur in mundo, conexos communione sacramentorum, nec secum futuros in aeterna sorte sanctorum…*
[31] *CD* I.xxxv: *De correctione autem quorundam etiam talium multo minus est desperandum, si apud apertissimos adversarios praedestinati amici latitant, adhuc ignoti etiam sibi. Perplexae quippe sunt istae duae civitates in hoc saeculo invicemque permixtae, donec ultimo iudicio dirimantur; de quarum exortu et procursu et debitis finibus quod dicendum arbitror, quantum divinitus adiuvabor, expediam propter gloriam civitatis Dei, quae alienis a contrario comparatis clarius eminebit.*

Book I of the *City of God* remains a diverse and perhaps overburdened introduction to a diverse and perhaps overburdened work. Still, by isolating out some of the key themes in its pages—invisible providence, delayed judgment, and the limits of thinking within the *saeculum*—we can begin to get a sense of what Augustine is doing with the question of history. So far, it looks like he does not want to give us his version of the meaning of history, since that would require a window into the deep, providential logic lying behind the tumultuous scenes that give structure to life's dramas. Nor does he want to provide us with a way of rushing to judgments about historical events and actors. Nor, finally, does he want us to make pronouncements *in hoc saeculo* about distinctions that could only become absolute if time were to come to a halt.

What, then, are we left to say about the meaning of history? The answer to that question would have to depend on the kind of history we want Augustine to tell us about. When it comes to the *historia* that Scripture was for him, then Augustine is sure to find myriad levels of meaning in each of its passages. His concerns about the inscrutability of providence did not keep him from holding to certainty about Scriptural events. That is not precisely what is at issue here, but we will have to come back to the role played by Scripture-as-history later on, since this will turn out to be the foil against which Augustine defines what we might call 'secular' history. His treatment of this secular history, though, deserves attention in its own right. All of Augustine's anxiety about ascribing clear meaning to history has to do with historical events taking place within this 'present' age of history (or *saeculum*, for short). This is especially the case when it comes to human attempts to identify and interpret turning points—like, say, the Sack of Rome—within the ongoing flux of history.[32]

[32] In an interesting bit of disciplinary self-reflection, Frend, 1-2, poses this problem of turning points to his fellow historians of late antiquity. What is it, he asks, that constitutes the end of late antiquity and the beginning of some other period? Was it the battle of Adrianople? The fall of Romulus Augustulus? More familiarly, the Sack of Rome?

As with Augustine's other anxieties about time, then, we can see that the idea of ascribing fixed value to 'the present' causes him problems. In the *City of God*, he is approaching this on a grander scale.[33] Present time is still at issue, but this is now the present *saeculum*, not the present instant or even the transformative moment supposedly experienced by personal consciousness. And the problem here is similar to the problems there: how can one determine anything about the present as one continues to live through the instability of a time without any fixed present? Our interpretation of the historical present is held in suspense, too, because of this deferral of judgment that accompanies our acceptance of the inscrutability of providence.[34] The distinctions and dichotomies that would give shape to the fluctuations of historical life could only come into view at some eschatological limit-point in the absolute future. Looking back from such a vantage point would be the only way to establish claims about the present that would no longer be subject to revision. It is belatedness—deferral, retrospection, the abortive glance back at what we could not quite see—that ties together all of these reservations Augustine holds

---

Or even the later Vandal invasion of Spain and beyond? Such questions were already glimpsed by late antique authors like Augustine and Orosius, but they remain troublesome for historians of late antiquity today.

[33] Marrou, 43-44, saw that the problem of the present time was still animating much of the *City of God*: "Time, that fluid thing, ungraspable, into which being intervenes only in an ungraspable instant—the mysterious present, which is seemingly squished between a past that's irrevocably swallowed up and a future upon which we cannot yet build anything. For being to be being, to be what that name truly means—*vere, summe esse*—it must break free from time or at least from duration as the present nature of sinful humanity experiences it. Everything that's inserted into historical time *is* not, in the full sense of the word 'is:' 'all such things are borne through the instant as if flying by. Such things flow on like a river's current (*momentis transvolantibus cuncta rapiuntur, torrens rerum fluit*). No, our days *are* not. Look at how they pass away almost even before they arrive.'" (The emphasis is Marrou's; he is citing Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 38.7.)

[34] On the role of the apocalyptic in shaping Augustine's suspended view of the historical present, see Karla Pollmann, "Moulding the Present: Apocalyptic as Hermeneutics in City of God 21-22," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 165-181, esp. 169: One can say therefore that Augustine's (as Tyconius's) apocalyptic thinking comprises two approaches to eschatology, (1) a pragmatic one that outlines its present realization, both in the soul of the individual and in the social institution of the historical church, and (2) an ahistorical and transcendent one, by positing it as an indescribable future event, which nevertheless gives meaning to the temporal historical process as its *telos.* This ineffable future horizon also has consequences for our understanding of the present as the aspect of uncertainty is extended to our limited ability to make ultimately correct statements about the present itself." This sophisticated yet restrained thesis stands up more firmly than Pollmann's potentially hyperbolic conclusion: "For Augustine, the apocalyptic prophecy of the end of the world as we know it helps us less to understand the future than to explain the present."

throughout both the *Confessions* and the *City of God*. We have seen how such temporal belatedness affects us on the minor scale of a "song" or a "human life," but it remains for us to detail its consequences for the "entire *saeculum* of human history."[35]

The Order of Times

To conceive of temporal experience as belated is to acknowledge a kind of inescapable delay. Struggling to take account of things as they fly past us, we always have to catch up to what just was while still trying to ready ourselves for the future. The clarity of the picture of the world we arrive at is relative to the degree of steadiness we are able to achieve within this field of instability. A maximally clear picture would seem to require a maximally stable point of view. For Augustine, such stability is itself deferred until the absolute end of time. The belatedness that afflicts time at its most basic level, then, must also be stretched out into a delay so long that it could best be termed eschatological.

If we want to make sense of what Augustine has to say about the meaning of history, we will have to keep this extreme degree of delay in mind. It colors his portrayal not only of historical events on the grand scale, but also of those day-to-day events that make up humanity's moral life. This is, in part, what Book II of the *City of God* conveys to us. It begins and ends by reminding its readers that the Christian moral economy can only have a delayed payoff. This is not surprising given the difficulties we face in deciphering providence, on which Augustine spent so much time in Book I. He acknowledges, though, that this remains a difficult teaching.

---

[35] Recall *Conf.* XI.xxviii from above, as well as Pranger's "Time and Integrity," 54, where the author uses the rhetoric of song to explain not just Augustine's ambivalence about secular history in the *City of God*, but also his sense of the divine city itself: "a deep sense of skepticism is underlying those discussions of history *wie es gewesen* since its true sense and meaning, its *causae occultae*, remain hidden to the created eye culminating in the tantalizing moment in which the invisible *civitates* of God and the devil meet and historical time, *saeculum*, is being established. But the presence of God's city itself is not for the taking. As a result, in order to be established and grasped, however momentarily, it has to be sung, so to speak, to be performed and brought to the fore by the mind for as long as the latter is capable of laying hold on it."

Figuring out how to express the necessary delay that conditions moral life has caused Augustine some intellectual delays of his own:

> Then this question occurred to me: why do divine benefits come even to irreligious and ungrateful people, and why do the hard facts of war likewise afflict religious and irreligious people equally? It is a diffuse question. Every day, in every way, both the gifts of God and the destruction of humanity fall upon both kinds of people indifferently, and many people are usually moved by this. I have been delayed on this for a while, so that I could answer the question that was necessary for the work I had undertaken.[36]

It rains, in other words, on the just and unjust alike. This is not simply some platitude. It is the moral and historical reality that humanity must face.

The tortuous middle sections of Book II mostly deal with the history of Roman ethics and law. The main thrust, for our purposes, is that there is little correlation between the apparent piety of a people and its historical fate.[37] Licentious polytheists won great battles; admirable monotheists lost them. If moral virtue and religious observance count for anything, it is not for gains in this world. Augustine goes so far as to say that justice is not even a possible goal for states in any age. "There is no true justice," he writes, "except in the republic whose founder and ruler is Christ—if we want to call this a 'republic,' since we cannot deny that it is an affair of the people."[38] In a prior decade, this notion of a Christian *res publica* could perhaps have been appropriated in the name of a good Christian emperor. Here, though, Augustine is applying it to the heavenly 'city' that merely wanders, not without uncertainty, on this earth.

This frustrating delay of moral reckoning relates back to the confidentiality of divine judgment, which lies beneath events both moral and historical. Someone steals bread from their

---

[36] *CD* II.ii: *Inde incidit quaestio, cur haec divina beneficia et ad impios ingratosque pervenerint, et cur illa itidem dura, quae hostiliter facta sunt, pios cum impiis pariter adflixerint? Quam quaestionem per multa diffusam (in omnibus enim cotidianis vel Dei muneribus vel hominum cladibus, quorum utraque indiscrete saepe accidunt, solet multos movere) ut pro suscepti operis necessitate dissolverem, aliquantum inmoratus sum…*

[37] This is emphasized already at *CD* II.iii-iv.

[38] *CD* II.xxi: *… vera autem iustitia non est nisi in ea re publica, cuius conditor rectorque Christus est, si et ipsam rem publicam placet dicere, quoniam eam rem populi esse negare non possumus.*

neighbor, but escapes punishment. A state invades its neighbor, but is not beaten back. And yet everything is ruled by providence. For Augustine, there is no incongruity here, but rather a call to acknowledge the limits of our understanding. Of the judgments that come from *providentia occulta* or *arbitrium secretum*, he writes: "No one comprehends them, but no one can justly condemn them."[39] No one can justly condemn them because we lack the full view of how all these events fit together with one another.[40] Such a complete picture would demand a viewpoint far beyond what we find in our daily estimations of events or even in most of the history books that come before our eyes. We would need a panoramic outlook not just on this or that event, not just on this or that state, but on the whole order in which states rise and fall throughout history.

After spending a bit more time in Book III debunking pagan arguments concerning providence and civil religion, Augustine turns in Book IV to this question of the wavering fates of different states. The solution to this question, if there is one, has nothing to do with appeasing God or gods. It has instead to do with appreciating the temporal nature of both ourselves and our communities. Our desire for an imminent reckoning of moral accountability is a symptom of our inadequate grasp of the slipperiness of temporal things. If we want those who act well to be rewarded right away, then we want them to receive temporal rewards. Our whole view on this is skewed away from the idea of the atemporal, which, for Augustine, is where we should be striving to direct our gaze. He is quite adamant about this:

---

[39] *CD* II.xxiii: *nemo conprehendit, iuste nemo reprehendit.* Cf. V.xxi: *Haec plane Deus unus et verus regit et gubernat ut placet; et si occultis causis, numquid iniustis?* / "Obviously, the one true God rules these things. He governs them as He pleases. Even if His reasons are hidden, are they therefore unjust?"

[40] According to *CD* II.xxix, those who do criticize the times tend to be looking out for themselves, not for some trans-historical standard of justice: *Non audias degeneres tuos Christo Christianisve detrahentes et accusantes velut tempora mala, cum quaerant tempora quibus non sit quieta vita, sed potius secura nequitia*. / "You should not listen to your degenerate friends criticizing Christ and accusing Christians, as if the times were bad. The times they seek are times for unthreatened injustice, not the quiet life."

> As if anybody's life lasts long! In accordance with this, the gods help no one to rule, since everyone soon dies. What lasts a short time for everyone and vanishes like smoke in absolutely every way should not be reckoned a benefit.[41]

Divine favor, properly speaking, has nothing to do with temporal gains, even if they should last until death. Only someone still blind to the deep distinction between temporality and atemporality would let themselves be fooled into thinking that way.

Needless to say, this disjunction between moral acts and their consequences most obviously afflicts our present *saeculum*. Perhaps, Augustine allows, providence did let itself be seen more clearly in the events recounted by Scripture. The patriarchs do seem to have been rewarded quite often for their obedience to God (though Job stands out as a meaningful exception).[42] But that patriarchal standard is a foil, not a precedent, for our own condition. In our times, it looks like the most reprehensible among us are continuously elevated to positions of power. This can be the case even under Christian regimes. Before we could even dream of restoring a correlation between moral virtue and political power, we would have to follow the lack of such a correlation all the way down to its consequences.

If there is then no clear set of values by which we could make sense of the rise and fall of rulers, does that mean we are thrown back into the dice-roll of mere chance? Not quite, says Augustine. The timeless decision of God is not to be identified with *fortuna* (as a goddess or otherwise), though the two do both tend to conceal themselves. In another response to the burning question of the day—will Rome recover its greatness or not?—Augustine offers up some cold comfort: "Who knows the will of God concerning that affair?"[43] But, again, a mysterious

---

[41] *CD* IV.v: *Quasi vero ipsa cuiuslibet hominis vita diuturna est. Isto ergo pacto neminem dii adiuvant ad regnandum, quoniam singuli quique cito moriuntur, nec beneficium deputandum est quod exiguo tempore in unoquoque homine ac per hoc singillatim utique in omnibus vice vaporis evanescit.*
[42] This is a concession made at the end of Book IV; see: *CD* IV.xxxiii.
[43] *CD* IV.vii: *Quis enim de hac re novit voluntatem Dei?*

logic is not the absence of any logic at all. The God of hidden providence remains the ruler of this seemingly nonsensical *saeculum*, insofar as He remains—in Augustine's telling phrase—the *Rex saeculorum*.[44]

Continuing to weave the necessity of delay into our understanding of prosperity both personal and political, Augustine closes Book IV by juxtaposing our search for happiness with the need for some kind of order, however broadly construed. This *ordo* in the fourth book of the *City of God* hearkens back to the *modus* found in the fourth book of the *Confessions*, where we also encountered an arcane structure of temporal arising and passing away.[45] Again, the text tries to account for the inscrutable way that happiness is handed out, without reducing *felicitas* to *fortuna*:

> God, then, is the author and giver of happiness, since He alone is the true God. He gives earthly rule to both good and bad people. But He does not do this blindly, as if by chance; He is God, not Fortune. Rather, He does it according to the order of things and times, which is hidden to us but quite well-known to Him. Still, it is

---

[44] *CD* IV.xvii. See Paul Burns, "Augustine's Use of Sallust," 107, where he writes of the struggle between 'Christian' and 'pagan' in the *City of God*: "the religious debate is not so much about the history of pagan Roman cult itself as it is about certain shared assumptions and their application. Both communities believed in the presence and activity of the divine in human affairs. The issue is over the ways of providence in history, specifically Roman history. But which period of Roman history?" Burn's work builds on that of Goulven Madec in "*Tempora christiana:* Expression du triomphalisme chretien ou recrimination paienne?," *Scientia Augustiniana: Studien iiber Augustinus, den Augustinismus und den Augustinerorden: Festschrift A. Zumkeller GSA zum 60. Geburtstag,* ed. C. P. Mayer and W. Eckermann (Wiirzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1975), 112-36. See again Burns, 108: "Goulven Madec has demonstrated Augustine's development toward a more formally theological understanding of the *tempora Christiana*; rather than emphasizing the political accession of Constantine as Eusebius and others had, Augustine began to invoke the incarnation of Christ as a decisive moment in God's action in human history."

[45] Recall *Conf.* IV.x.15: *eunt enim quo ibant, ut non sint, et conscindunt eam desideriis pestilentiosis, quoniam ipsa esse vult et requiescere amat in eis quae amat. in illis autem non est ubi, quia non stant: fugiunt, et quis ea sequitur sensu carnis? aut quis ea comprehendit, vel cum praesto sunt? tardus est enim sensus carnis, quoniam sensus carnis est: ipse est modus eius. sufficit ad aliud, ad quod factus est, ad illud autem non sufficit, ut teneat transcurrentia ab initio debito usque ad finem debitum. in verbo enim tuo, per quod creantur, ibi audiunt, 'hinc' et 'huc usque.' / "*These things go where they go, so that they are not. They tear the soul to pieces with sickening desires, since it wants to be and loves to rest in the things it loves. But in them there is no 'where,' since they do not stand still. Instead, they flee. And who could chase after them in incarnate experience? Incarnate experience is late, since it is incarnate experience. That is its limit. It is able to do certain things, since that is what it was made for. But it is not able to do this: that is, to hold things as they pass by, running from their obligatory beginning to their obligatory end. They were created through Your Word, and in Your Word they hear this: 'From here up to here.'" Augustine's language on these matters tends to alter from text to text, though resonances usually remain. In *CD* V.xi, there is a reference back to God as the source of all *modus / species / ordo* and *mensura / numerus / pondus*.

> not that He is subdued by this order of times and serves it. He rules it as a Lord and arranges it like a manager.[46]

Augustine upholds the divine right of rule here, but he does so without ascribing any inherent virtue to those who receive this right. The order is firm; fortune has no place. Yet the order is also hidden, so that we cannot easily interpret the fluctuations of political history in terms of merit or just deserts. The *ordo rerum et temporum* calls us back to the *pulcherrimus ordo* of *Confessions* XIII.[47] It has authority over all, which lends it a kind of justice and beauty that is utterly beyond our grasp. And yet the very mystery of its authority keeps us from weaponizing it for our own political and historical disputes. We are not to raise ourselves up prematurely, as if we could survey and navigate this whole order. Instead, our awareness of its confidentiality should lead us to adopt more humility in our own historically conditioned stances. The trick is not to master time, but rather to acknowledge the temporality of our lives by facing up to time's limits.[48]

Book V of the *City of God* sees Augustine outlining some of the mechanics behind this understanding of hidden providence. The first difficulty that presents itself here is the question of fate. If history is reducible neither to an observable moral economy nor to mere chance, does that mean all things are inevitably fated to predetermined outcomes? Augustine's refusal to accept

---

[46] *CD* IV.xxxiii: *Deus igitur ille felicitatis auctor et dator, quia solus est verus Deus, ipse dat regna terrena et bonis et malis, neque hoc temere et quasi fortuito, quia Deus est, non fortuna, sed pro rerum ordine ac temporum occulto nobis, notissimo sibi; cui tamen ordini temporum non subditus servit, sed eum ipse tamquam dominus regit moderatorque disponit.*

[47] Recall *Conf.* XIII.xxxv: *omnis quippe iste ordo pulcherrimus rerum valde bonarum…*

[48] As Augustine continues in *CD* IV.xxxiii: *… felicitatem vero non dat nisi bonis. Hanc enim possunt et non habere et habere servientes, possunt et non habere et habere regnantes; quae tamen plena in ea vita erit ubi nemo iam serviet. Et ideo regna terrena et bonis ab illo dantur et malis ne eius cultores adhuc in provectu animi parvuli haec ab eo munera quasi magnum aliquid concupiscent*. / "True happiness, though, He gives only to good people. Servants can both be happy or unhappy; so can rulers. But there will be full happiness only in that life where no one serves anymore. That is why He gives earthly rule to both good and bad people: so that those who cultivate such things—still children in the growth of their souls—will not desire such gifts from Him as if they were anything great."

the language of fate does not take the shape of a robust defense of the human will.[49] Given his fraught description of the will's frustrations and volitional *distentio* in works like the *Confessions* (especially Book VIII), that should not strike us as terribly surprising.

For Augustine, 'fate' has mostly to do with the stars.[50] It is the astrologers who have inhibited our thinking on these kinds of matters by reducing our alternatives to mere whim, on the one hand, and observable physical causation, on the other. According to Augustine, though, it is indeed correct to say that the will lies behind all events—provided, of course, that we acknowledge this *voluntas* to be divine.

> There is no need to get all worked up and fight a war of words with those who define 'fate' not as the arrangement of the stars (e.g., when something is conceived or born or begun), but as the connection of all things and as the causal sequence (through which everything that happens happens), provided that they attribute this order of causes and this connection to the will and power of the supreme God, who is well and truly believed both to know everything before it happens and never to let anything go unordered…[51]

The *ordo rerum et temporum* finds its footing in this *ordo causarum*. Yet this causal order remains 'voluntary' in a doubly odd sense. Firstly, our human wills themselves are woven into

---

[49] In *CD* V.viii, Augustine criticizes Cicero for attacking fate in order to protect a republican ideal of political liberty.

[50] A helpful overview of Augustine's checkered history with astrology can be found in Thomas O'Loughlin, "The Development of Augustine the Bishop's Critique of Astrology," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1999), 83-103, esp. 99, where O'Laughlin characterizes the City of God as a critical intervention within the field of 'revolutionary astrology:' "Augustine's treatment of astrology here stands apart from that in the rest of his works as here he dealt with 'revolutionary' astrology, as such his rebuttal is but a part the larger plan of the work. Revolutionary astrology deals with nations, kings and rulers, and catastrophes that affect large groups such as wars, famines, and earthquakes. This astrology could omen good or ill, but perhaps betraying an aspect of the human psyche, was normally appealed to in times of disaster. In Augustine's time a belief in this astrology always involves, at least, these three elements: (1) a belief in ordinary astrology and its implications for freedom; (2) a determinist view of history based on a cyclical theory of time, usually expressed in the astrological *annus magnus* which could explain the 'fall' and 'rise' of nations, the Ages, and the processes of the cosmos; and (3) a belief that there was some direct link between the 'rulers' (planets) and the gods of the same name."

[51] *CD* V.viii: *Qui vero non astrorum constitutionem, sicuti est cum quidque concipitur vel nascitur vel inchoatur, sed omnium conexionem seriemque causarum, qua fit omne quod fit, fati nomine appellant, non multum cum eis de verbi controversia laborandum atque certandum est, quando quidem ipsum causarum ordinem et quandam conexionem Dei summi tribuunt voluntati et potestati, qui optime et veracissime creditur et cuncta scire antequam fiant et nihil inordinatum relinquere…*

its web.[52] And secondly, all efficient causes are themselves acts of a will—again, the divine one.[53] That divine *voluntas* is always primordial here, which fits in nicely with the primacy of grace we have already encountered in the *Confessions* and the *Gift of Perseverance*. According to the pages of the *City of God*, moreover, it is quite acceptable to acknowledge a causal order that binds all things together, as long as we beat back the temptation to read that order out of the physical world. As we will see, this temptation besieges our outlook on historical and political events, just as it does in the case of stargazing.

Later on in Book V, Augustine reapplies these mechanics of providence to the question of history. The fluctuations of historical prosperity and adversity, like the rise and fall of empires, are all reduced to a fundamentally causal chain leading back to the divine. But despite the fact that Augustine holds his God to be both moral and just, he does not see any way for us to derive a moral or just meaning from these vacillations of history.

> Since this is the case, we should only attribute the power of giving kingdoms and rule to the true God, who gives happiness in the kingdom of heaven only to the religious. The earthly kingdom, though, He gives to both religious and irreligious people, as it pleases Him. And for Him, nothing is unjustly pleasing. Although we have talked about some things that God wanted to open up for us, still there is much that lies before us. It is far beyond our strength to discuss the hidden things of humanity and to judge the merits of kingdoms with a quick inspection.[54]

Again, the payoff of the moral economy is delayed. There is indeed a correlation between goodness and prosperity, but only in the "kingdom of heaven." Historical kingdoms, for their

---

[52] *CD* V.ix: *Et ipsae quippe nostrae voluntates in causarum ordine sunt qui certus est Deo eiusque praescientia continetur, quoniam et humanae voluntates humanorum operum causae sunt*… / "And our wills too are within this causal order, which for God is certain and contained in his foreknowledge, since human wills are the causes of human works…"

[53] *CD* V.ix: *Ac per hoc colligitur non esse causas efficientes omnium quae fiunt nisi voluntarias, illius naturae scilicet quae spiritus vitae est.* / "From this it is concluded that the efficient causes of all things that happen are nothing if not voluntary, deriving from that nature which is the spirit of life."

[54] *CD* V.xxi: *Quae cum ita sint, non tribuamus dandi regni atque imperii potestatem nisi Deo vero, qui dat felicitatem in regno caelorum solis piis; regnum vero terrenum et piis et impiis, sicut ei placet cui nihil iniuste placet. Quamvis enim aliquid dixerimus, quod apertum nobis esse voluit, tamen multum est ad nos et valde superat vires nostras hominum occulta discutere et liquido examine merita diiudicare regnorum*.

part, merely pass on according to a hidden logic.[55] To try to derive clear meaning out of this historical arising and passing away, to "judge the merits of kingdoms with a quick inspection," is ultimately beyond the powers of humankind's historical awareness.

As hinted at above, the case that tests this argument about the interpretive hurdles of history is the reign of Theodosius. According to the *City of God*, Theodosius was the first emperor who came close to that elusive combination of true piety and supreme authority. A fair number of pages are filled up with praise of his various achievements. Augustine is especially fond of the humility Theodosius showed to Ambrose after the emperor's poorly received massacre of the Thessalonians. Still, after all of that flattery, Augustine returns to this same problem of our misguided evaluation of temporal and historical gains:

> These and similar works (which we could spend a long time recounting) were the good things Theodosius brought out of the temporal vapor of human heights and depths. The real wage for such work is eternal happiness, which God truly gives only to the religious. The other things of this life, whether the highest or the lowest—like the world itself, light, air, land, water, food, the human soul and body, sense, mind, life—all these He grants to both good and bad people. This also goes for great power of any kind, which He dispenses in His governing of the times.[56]

Here Augustine is refusing any easy equation between the *tempora Christiana* and a new golden age in history. In its place, he leaves us with a troubling sense of historical ambivalence.[57] Even

---

[55] Augustine emphasizes this point in his sermons, as well. On this, see Marrou, 29-30: "We should apply to the totality of history the same comparison that Augustine developed long ago and applied to the earthly history of Christ: *Architectus aedificat per machinas transituras domum mansuram*… (*Serm.* 362.7) 'The architect uses provisional scaffolding to build a house that is destined to last,' insofar as all human works on this earth appear as temporary instruments, temporal machines. All earthly kingdoms and all of our civilizations are mortal things—Augustine loves to repeat this (see, e.g., *Serm.* 105.11). But out of these temporal machines 'what remains into eternity' (*illud quod manet in aeternum*) is being built."

[56] *CD* V.xxvi: *Haec ille secum et si qua similia, quae commemorare longum est, bona opera tulit ex isto temporali vapore cuiuslibet culminis et sublimitatis humanae; quorum operum merces est aeterna felicitas, cuius dator est Deus solis veraciter piis. Cetera vero vitae huius vel fastigia vel subsidia, sicut ipsum mundum lucem auras, terras aquas fructus ipsiusque hominis animam corpus, sensus mentem vitam, bonis malisque largitur; in quibus est etiam quaelibet imperii magnitudo, quam pro temporum gubernatione dispensat.*

[57] Marrou, 40, is refreshingly clear on this: "Far from attempting to sweeten this teaching, we must take it in its fullest, most profound sense. St. Augustine is teaching us to recognize this fundamental ambivalence—not only in

when a comparatively well-behaved Christian becomes emperor, this is not to be taken as an inherently meaningful event. The fluctuations of history continue to evade our attempts to categorize them neatly according to our mores. If any ruler, even a Christian emperor, is to be judged, it is not according to some scale of historical value, but according to the degree of their humility.[58] And Augustine adds—in a remarkable levelling of the peaks and valleys of the sociohistorical landscape—the same would go for any other Christian.

Demonic Historiography

The first five books of the *City of God*, diverse as they are, all trend towards a reconfiguration of humanity's perspective on its own historical existence. With each passing century, states rise and fall with great violence and tumult, but this has nothing to do with civil religion or public observances. Like everything else, political realities are shaped in accordance with a causal chain linking us back to a divinely timeless decision. That chain stays hidden, though, and so its firmness—however strange this may sound—gives us no foundation on which to build up our own historical speculations. Instead, our inability to provide conclusive answers to the questions of history throws us back onto the constraints of our own temporal condition and our own historical situation.[59] To truly bring this *ordo rerum et temporum* out of hiding would require a vantage point that would no longer be limited by time or history. Only then could we look back and bring that order into focus. But since our entry into timelessness—if there will be

---

the events of history, but in the very essence of lived time." Marrou, 76-77, expands on this by remarking that "time as it is lived in history still presents itself to us under a double aspect. It is at once the time of (wounded) nature and the time of grace, the time of sin and the time of salvation. These two values do belong to two distinct ontological orders, but for the moment they are practically and concretely associated in an inseparable fashion. This ambivalence of time lends to history a radical ambiguity which contemporary human knowledge cannot overcome. With this ambiguity comes a dramatic character. To speak more correctly, and in Aristotelian terms, it is a tragic character."

[58] *CD* V.xxiv-xxv.

[59] See Augustine's own summary of the purpose of the first five books of *CD* in V.xxvi.

any entry at all—is eschatologically delayed, we must acknowledge the boundaries of our historical knowledge. According to Augustine, this is a limit we cannot force our way past.

There are those, of course, who have tried. Augustine comes around to dealing with such efforts again in Book IX. To leap from Book V to Book IX is not as disorienting as it might sound. Books VI-VIII serve mostly to bring the reader from a discussion of civil religion to one of natural religion. After dealing with the tradition of public observances in the Roman Empire, Augustine spends some time working through the more cosmological and philosophical speculations that also informed 'pagan' culture. Indispensable as his insights might be in that regard, to do them justice would take us too far afield from our inquiry into belatedness and history in the *City of God*.

In Book IX, then, Augustine associates our attempts to know the meaning of history (before the time is ripe) with our warped understanding of our own place in the cosmos. His understanding of the created order was, as we know, not limited to humankind. There were also a variety of other rational beings, which we can simplify here into two categories: angels and demons. It might have been tempting to evoke such beings in order to bring about some sort of mediation between human and divine knowledge, which could then open up the complete panorama of providence before our eyes. Augustine does not do this. For him, there is only one Mediator: Christ incarnate, who was neither angel nor demon.[60] These two other kinds of rational beings do, however, remain part of the cosmological and even historical landscape in the *City of God*. Rather than acting as mediators, they serve as limit cases hovering somewhere between

[60] *CD* IX.xiii-xv. Other Christian groups in antiquity might have seen more room for angelic mediation between the plane of history and the realm of the divine. But Augustine, perhaps still fighting off the old memory of Manichaean cosmogonies, refuses to allow any such room here.

time and timelessness, and therefore also between historical situatedness and trans-historical knowledge.[61]

According to Augustine, angels and demons do not know history in the same way. Angels, sustained as they are by the loving grace of God, know history through the timeless Word of God. Here again, as in Book IV of the *Confessions*, Augustine places true certainty about the order of things only in the eternal. Despite whatever cosmological or spiritual advantages we might take angels to have over us, it is not the case that they are able to discern the meaning of history as it happens any better than we can. Their historical knowledge does not come from looking at history; it comes from looking at God. As Augustine puts it:

> That is why angels are most certainly familiar with temporal and changeable things, since they look upon the first causes of those things in the Word of God. The world was made through this Word. Through these causes, some things are approved and other things are reproved, but all things are ordered.[62]

While strengthening the causal links in this cosmic chain, Augustine is simultaneously pointing us away from its manifestation in temporal life. If there is any certainty to be gained about what matters in history, it would have to come from something transcending the limits of history itself.

Demons are not privy to that lesson. Unable to make out the reasonings and reckonings of the eternal Word, they must judge the world on its own terms. Unlike us, though, they do seem to be liberated from some of the temporal constraints that hinder our own attempts to forecast the future on the basis of the past. Living throughout the span of many human lifetimes, they have become quite familiar with the signs that tend to go along with certain historical shifts and

---

[61] On Augustine's approach to demons, see (inter alia) Jan den Boeft, "Daemon(es)," in the *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1986-), and Gregory A. Smith, "How Thin is a Demon?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2008), 479-512. Smith, 507, lists "illusory prophetic acumen" as a key demonic trait in Apuleius, Antony, Tertuliian, and (of course) Augustine.

[62] *CD* IX.xxii: *Et ideo certius etiam temporalia et mutabilia ista noverunt, quia eorum principales causas in Verbo Dei conspiciunt, per quod factus est mundus; quibus causis quaedam probantur, quaedam reprobantur, cuncta ordinantur.*

transformations. This empirical familiarity, Augustine admits, does grant them a slightly better success rate when it comes to predicting the future. Still, they fall far short of anything like certainty:

> But demons do not contemplate the eternal causes of the times, which are like hinges in the wisdom of God. Rather, having more experience than us with certain hidden signs, they look further ahead into the future than humans can. Sometimes they even announce their own arrangements in advance. Lastly, while angels are never at all deceived, demons often are. It is one thing to conjecture temporal things from temporal and changeable things from changeable, and to bring the temporal and changeable limit of one's will and ability into them, as the demons are permitted to do to a certain degree. But it is quite another to foresee in the eternal and unchangeable laws of God, which live in His wisdom, the changes of the times and to know the will of God through participation in the Spirit. His will is as certain as it is powerful over all things.[63]

Through the limit cases of angelic and demonic knowledge, then, Augustine is able to reaffirm his distinction between the hidden certainty of providence and the manifest fallibility of humanity's historical awareness. There may indeed be "hinges" (*cardinales*) that link ages to ages or times to times, but those hinges remain reserved for the wisdom of God. This imagery of the hinge is worth noting. Augustine does not envisage the "causes" of the times as some dead series listed out on a page. They are instead the relatively immobile pivots around which the transformations of the world turn. To get at these hinges and take them apart for inspection would be to unlock the mechanisms of historical change. But, Augustine tells us, that would be a demon's errand. For now, we are stuck on the other side of the gate, unable to see the mechanisms that make it work. Only an eschatological passage through that gate would reveal the craftsman's handiwork.

---

[63] *CD* IX.xxii: *Daemones autem non aeternas temporum causas et quodam modo cardinales in Dei sapientia contemplantur, sed quorundam signorum nobis occultorum maiore experientia multo plura quam homines futura prospiciunt; dispositiones quoque suas aliquando praenuntiant. Denique saepe isti, numquam illi omnino falluntur. Aliud est enim temporalibus temporalia et mutabilibus mutabilia coniectare eisque temporalem et mutabilem modum suae voluntatis et facultatis inserere, quod daemonibus certa ratione permissum est; aliud autem in aeternis atque incommutabilibus Dei legibus, quae in eius sapientia vivunt, mutationes temporum praevidere Deique voluntatem, quae tam certissima quam potentissima est omnium, spiritus eius participatione cognoscere.*

This brief detour into angelology and demonology might seem odd, at first. But it turns out to be quite in line with the theme we have been tracing throughout the first nine books of the *City of God*. What is at stake in these passages from Book IX is the possibility of historical interpretation from within history itself. Reading the so-called signs of the times is what demons do best. The process of detaching hidden order from manifest disorder finds its culmination here, with the limiting idea of an immortal being that would try to decipher history based on an amount of empirical data that the most rigorous historian could hope for only in dreams.[64] Augustine tells us not only that this kind of being fails, but that it is in fact an agent of the most devastating pride.[65] It is not only difficult or even impossible to try to hear the melody of history by looking at history itself; it is downright demonic.

Conclusion

So far, Augustine has brought us to the point where the significance of historical events is at once absolutely certain and totally unknowable. The meaning of history as a totality would then also seem to be subject to this odd, perhaps even paradoxical condition.[66] From a God's-eye

---

[64] The dream of such a comprehensive archive could be what fuels the fantasy of an all-encompassing historical narrative, one that would be able to clarify the meaning of history by accurately pointing out its key events and turning points. On this, see White, 24, where he argues that "this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries."

[65] Look back to *CD* IX.xx: *Contra superbiam porro daemonum, qua pro meritis possidebatur genus humanum, Dei humilitas quae in Christo apparuit, quantam virtutem habeat, animae hominum nesciunt inmunditia elationis inflatae, daemonibus similes superbia, non scientia*. / "Against the pride of demons, by which humankind is deservedly possessed, the humility of God that appeared in Christ has so much power. Human souls are ignorant of how unclean their inflated self-exaltation is. They are like demons—not in their knowledge, but in their pride."

[66] Marrou, 79, finds this position to be quite 'orthodox:' "This is the profound perspective that gives the Augustinian theory of time and the Christian theology of history its rigor and fertility. We do possess the meaning of history, but only through Faith, that is, through a knowing that remains partially obscure. It is the global meaning of history that has been revealed to us, not the details, not the modes of its realization. God alone knows where the wheat and the tares are, what percentage of each is contained in any age, any nation, any class, any human work, or any event. At time's completion, His Chosen Ones will also know this with Him. This doctrine positions us at the very heart of the Christian faith and gospel teaching. It has been announced: what a surprise awaits us on the Day of Judgment!" Of course, sorting out the 'global' direction of history from the 'details' of historical life is a task that remains unaccomplished.

view, everything is part of a causal chain. Everything mobile swings on an immobile hinge. From our historically conditioned point of view, however, everything is mutable and we can no longer pin anything down.[67] Through a kind of historical kenosis, the *saeculum* in which we live appears to have been emptied of any intrinsic meaning. What is beautiful for the divine, in other words, can strike us only as sublime. By complicating our attempts to establish clear turning-points in contemporary history, Augustine has made it possible—albeit in a provisional way—to conceive of what would later be called the 'sublimity' of history.[68]

History, as we encounter it, is sublime in the sense that it overwhelms us with its tangled web of uncertain connections, its crooked and unsteady path, and the sheer size of the maelstrom of events that confusedly swirls about within it. Platitudes about 'knowing where we've been so that we'll know where we're going' mean little when set beside the torrent of unexpected reversals and radical transformations animating temporal life.[69] Historiography, if conceived of

---

[67] Concerning such historical instability, Mathewes, 345, writes: "A proper hope seeks a middle ground between the too-complacent apocalyptic immanentism of the resigned or self-righteous, and the too-complacent apocalyptic escapism of the embittered or smug. It anchors this view on its theology of history and creation, on its claim that history is not finally literally legible as the record of events, but only as the sacrament of God's presence and activity."

[68] The approaches to this question of sublimity are too varied to be dealt with fully here. Leaving aside what is probably the most complex treatment of the sublime in the last few centuries (namely, that found in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*), we could point to Schiller's more pointed application of the concept to some familiar topics in history and morality: "Away then with falsely construed forbearance and vapidly effeminate taste which cast a veil over the solemn face of necessity and, in order to curry favor with the senses, counterfeit a harmony between good fortune and good behavior of which not a trace is to be found in the actual world…. We are aided [in the attainment of this point of view] by the terrifying spectacle of change which destroys everything and creates it anew, and destroys again…. We are aided by the pathetic spectacle of mankind wrestling with fate, the irresistible elusiveness of happiness, confidence betrayed, unrighteousness triumphant and innocence laid low; of these history supplies ample instances, and tragic art imitates them before our eyes." See *Two Essays by Friedrich von Schiller: 'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' and 'On the Sublime,'* trans. Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), as cited in White, 69. White's aim is to appropriate this notion of the sublime for contemporary historiographical debates, while also retaining something of its rhetoric of courage in the face of the overwhelming. What he is after is "a conception of the historical record as being not a window through which the past 'as it really was' can be apprehended, but rather a wall that must be broken through if the 'terror of history' is to be directly confronted and the fear it induces dispelled." (82)

[69] On Augustine against prediction, see Frend, 22: "So far as concerned the political future, he makes neither judgments nor forecasts. His search was for universal principles valid for all time, not for immediate causes of unwelcome events."

narrowly as the construction of a sensible narrative with an obvious moral, is of little help here.[70] At best, it is the pleasing projection of external beauty onto a mixed-up mass that is in no way inherently beautiful. According to Augustine, the order we give to history is not its true order, which remains hidden. The moments we select as decisive are not always so.[71] That goes even for the Sack of Rome in 410 CE. Demonic pride fights back against this state of affairs, while perfect (and so impossible) humility would have to acquiesce to the appearance of disorder.

There might, however, remain a bridge across this chasm between underlying order and lived confusion. In Books X-XVII, Augustine establishes that he believes this bridge to be Scripture. Only there does he find examples of historical events whose significance has been marked out for all to see. Most often, he calls these events *articuli temporis*: the "joints" of time. These points of "articulation" call us back to the "hinges" (*cardinales*) of Book IX. They are the points around which human historical life is organized, whether we know it or not (though most often we do not). What is crucial to understand about these *articuli temporis*, though, is that they are limited to the *historia* of Scripture itself. By pointing out to us the joints that make Scriptural history run relatively smoothly, Augustine is not just rehearsing well-known tales from his holy books. He is reinforcing his contention that such observable points of transformation have been emptied out from our own contemporary age. As we will see in the next chapter, the *articuli*

---

[70] As White, 2, argues, the narrowness of this kind of historiography has already been unsettled by those historians (such as Fernand Braudel) who refused any easy brand of 'narrativity.' It is their refusal that "permits us to distinguish between a historical discourse that narrates and a discourse that narrativizes, between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on to the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story." Ibid., 3, continues with a rejoinder: "But real events should not speak, should not tell themselves. Real events should simply be; they can perfectly well serve as the referents of a discourse, can be spoken about, but they should not pose as the subjects of a narrative."

[71] What we lack, in the history of this *saeculum* is what White, 11, has called a "principle for assigning importance or significance to events." See ibid., 36: "What is 'imaginary' about any narrative representation is the illusion of a centered consciousness capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes, and representing them to itself as having all of the formal coherency of narrativity itself." For Augustine, this "centered consciousness" could only be divine; the perfect narrative would then be Scripture. But such centering—as we have begun to see here—does not grant secure meaning to ongoing history as it happens. Instead, the certainty of Scriptural *historia* throws the disorder of the *saeculum* into bolder relief, as the next chapter will aim to demonstrate.

temporis give shape to Scriptural history while leaving the *saeculum* to struggle against its own ambivalence.

Chapter 6: Articulations of the Times

The current age, emptied of its illusory turning-points and supposedly inherent meaning, now greets us as something of a homogenous mess. Things do continue to happen, but their value—moral, historical, even political—is opaque, especially relative to the question of what our own status might be in the eyes of a timeless God. Still, Augustine is careful to set limits to this historical kenosis. It does not extend back all the way to the beginning of time itself. Providence, in other words, was not always unknowable. While our own lives are assailed by the crashing waves of an unexpected future and the undertow of an unstable present, we are nevertheless able to grasp at the anchored stability of certain antique figures. We do not know what the Sack of Rome means, but we do know that something changed when Adam left the garden, when Noah built his ark, and when Abraham raised his blade. Transformations in our present age strike us in our blind spot, even while these transformations from the past have settled nicely into view.[1]

Our mode of access to the revealed order of such changes is not, however, to be found in the methods of conventional historiography, whether ancient or modern. For Augustine, this kind of past *historia* only becomes interpretable in and as the words of Scripture. Here any talk of the

---

[1] This emptied-out saeculum cannot be read as a simple continuation of the relative clarity of Scripture's story, despite the argument to that effect in Harry O. Maier, "The End of the City and the City without End: the City of God as Revelation," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 153-164, esp. 153-154: "By invoking God's assistance, Augustine shows that it is not just another chronicle he is writing but an unveiling of how truly to read the signs of the times encoded in the dizzying rise and fall of empires and the chaotic events of his own day. […]Now, in the *City of God*, he tells by showing, stretching the point out in time to reveal the plot of history by allegorically recoding it as the progress and ends of the two cities and the desires they dramatize. Thus does Augustine, with divinely illumined eyes, claim to lift the mysterious veil of human history to peer through its bewildering opacity, to detect within the ambivalence of time the divine arrangement of things, and to expose humankind's perverse loves." Maier reads Augustine's historical work almost as if it were a continuation from the final page of John's Revelation. Yet the point of the *City of God* instead seems to be that such historical signposting is at best a temptation to *superbia*, at worst a demonic snare. O'Daly, "Thinking Through History," 55, risks making a similar overstatement when he writes: "Historical study leads to an understanding of God's part in human affairs. This coheres with what Augustine says in the *City of God* about the role of providence in Roman history."

readability or unreadability of providence becomes almost literal, rather than figurative. Angels gaze upon the Word; we have to read it in a book. If we want to break the vast expanses of human time down into digestible chunks, Augustine tells us, we best do so by interpreting a text, not the world itself as we see it. That is not to say that he takes Scripture to be mere fiction. Far from implying that, he often places the historical veracity of Scripture right alongside its interpretive and even allegorical depths. Still, our path of access to the past written of in Scripture remains the words found on its pages.[2]

By approaching Scripture as history in this way, Augustine is able not only to give shape to the distant past of human antiquity, but also to draw a distinction between that antiquity and his own age. The main difference, for our purposes here, is that the order of the times was visible then in a way that it no longer is now. When Augustine writes of *sacra historia*, he is writing about the events told of in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. He is not necessarily referring to an ongoing 'salvation history' that would extend beyond the borders of those texts.[3] As we saw in the last chapter, of course, this cannot be because he thinks providence has ceased

---

[2] It is possible that Augustine's privileging of the truth-value of Scripture over that of other forms of historical language has to do with his generally low view of the power of non-Scriptural language in general. Draining quotidian chatter about history of its supposed meaningfulness might, in this way, parallel Augustine's debunking of other everyday forms of language that could stand as challenges to Scripture. For a much more well developed line of thinking in that direction, see Ando, "Pagan Apologetics and Christian Intolerance," 195: "Augustine concludes that the failings of human language as a system of signification privilege Scripture and not pagan texts as the recipients of allegorical reading—ie., it is the nature of the signified that determines whether allegorical hermeneutics must be applied to the signifier. Thus there is more to his method in the *City of God* than the apologist's trick of turning classical allusions against the pagan."

[3] Markus puts it well in *Saeculum*: *Augustine: History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), Appendix IV, 231-232: "salvation continues in history since Christ and is, indeed, being worked out in a hidden manner in all history, but, as there are no properly authorized historians to discern its pattern, its history cannot be written. It is thus undistinguishable from all other ('saecular') history." Here Markus is mostly reacting against the much older work of Oscar Cullmann, such as *Christus und Zeit* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946). Cf. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 170: "The historical process as such, the *saeculum*, shows only the hopeless succession and cessation of generations. If seen with the eyes of faith, however, the whole historical process of sacred and secular history appears as a preordained *ordinatio Dei*." If we want to track Augustine on such points, we will have to pay attention both to the messy surface and the subterranean structure of history; see ibid., 172: Augustine's "central theme and concern is the eschatological history of faith, which is, as it were, a secret history within secular history, subterranean and invisible to those who have not the eyes of faith."

its operations. It has merely disappeared from the world stage, while continuing to operate behind the scenes. Augustine's *sacra historia* might, then, be best understood not as the underlying logic that continues to inform ongoing human history, but rather as the foil against which we are to define that history. To sketch a rough parallel: just as a rigorous understanding of God's timelessness is necessary for us to understand the challenge posed by our own temporality, so is a firm grasp of sacred history required if we are to face up to the abyss that is history in the *saeculum*.[4]

Introducing the *Articuli Temporis*

When it comes to interpreting Scriptural history, Augustine is not satisfied with merely going over the major heroes and villains of his favorite holy books. Like so many other students of history, he is interested in dividing the passage of time up into manageable periods. By cutting the continuum up in this way, he is then able to put the pieces back together to form a complete picture. Already in *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, written between 399 and 405 CE as a manual for

[4] There are, of course, those who have taken issue with this kind of interpretation of the Augustinian saeculum. Such authors usually take Markus as their target, although they should also do more to engage with the aging but still potent work of Marrou and Madec. The most vocal critic of Markus-style readings of Augustine is perhaps John Milbank. For a digestible overview of the controversy, see Michael Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular,'" *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 311-326, esp. the summary of Markus' contribution on 312: "Markus made an important contribution in showing how Augustine's thought on the two cities was given its enduring form as a consequence of a roughly datable change in his estimation of the role of the Roman Empire in God's plan for human history. Up to the years 400 or 401, Augustine shared the religious enthusiasm of many of his Christian contemporaries for the *tempora Christiana*, the post-Constantinian phase of Roman history. Subsequently, however, he grew disenchanted with this 'sacralization' ofthe empire. Instead he came increasingly to see the Roman Empire in a coldly 'secular' light as simply one of the many contingent—and disposable—instruments God had used throughout human history to advance his purposes, which, apart from his revelation in the canonical scriptures, were unknown to us. Such a 'secularization' of politics, Markus proposed, was the ultimate conclusion Augustine drew from his reflections on divine theodicy following the fall of Rome in 410. Henceforth the sphere of the political was to be construed as a field of activity in which ultimate loyalties and commitments had no place. The political realm was the area of the overlap of the two cities and could be identified with neither one. It was now neutral territory, 'secular' in an almost modern sense." Hollerich, 314, positions against Markus' contribution Milbank's intervention in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9: "Once, there was no 'secular.' And the secular was not latent, waiting to fill more space with the steam of the 'purely human,' when the pressure of the sacred was relaxed. Instead, there was the single community of Christendom, with its dual aspects of *sacerdotium* and *regnum.* The *saeculum,* in the medieval era, was not a space, a domain, but a time—the interval between fall and eschaton where coercive justice, private property and impaired natural reason must make shift to cope with the unredeemed effects of sinful humanity. The secular as a domain had to be instituted or imagined, both in theory and practice."

instructing new Christians, Augustine is quite clear about how he sees the ages of history breaking down. His periodization takes the form of a historical hexaemeron: six ages corresponding to the six days of creation, with the transition between each age marked by some great biblical figure:

> Five ages of history [*saeculum*] have passed by, then. The first ran from the beginning of humankind (Adam, the first human ever made) up to Noah, who made his ark during the flood. The second age is then from Noah up to Abraham, who was chosen to be the Father of all the nations that imitate him in faith. […] The joints of these two ages are prominent only in the old books, but the joints of the remaining three ages are declared also in the gospel, when the origin of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh is recounted. The third age is from Abraham up to King David. The fourth is from David up to the Babylonian captivity, when the people of God were exiled to Babylon. The fifth goes from that exile up to the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ. From his arrival onward, a sixth age is taking place.[5]

Augustine's language here is not as precise as it will become in the *City of God*, although this six-day periodization will be taken up there, as well. In this passage, Augustine writes of *aetates saeculi* (ages of the *saeculum*), whereas later he will prefer to say either *aetates* or *saecula*. That shift allows him to more deftly position the sixth age—that of ongoing history—as 'the' *saeculum*. The *City of God* will also see him more blatantly paralleling the hexaemeron with the conventionally Roman 'six stages of life:' infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood,

---

[5] *De Cat. Rud*. XXII (my translation); the Latin (CCSL, 46 (J.-B. Bauer, 1969), p. 121-178) reads: *peractis ergo quinque aetatibus saeculi, quarum prima est ab initio generis humani, id est, ab adam, qui primus homo factus est, usque ad noe, qui fecit arcam in diluuio, inde secunda est usque ad abraham, qui pater electus est omnium quidem gentium, quae fidem ipsius imitarentur; […] isti enim articuli duarum aetatum eminent in ueteribus libris: reliquarum autem trium euangelio etiam declarantur, cum carnalis origo domini iesu christi commemoratur. nam tertia est ab abraham usque ad dauid regem: quarta a dauid usque ad illam captiuitatem, qua populus dei in babyloniam transmigrauit: quinta ab illa transmigratione usque ad aduentum domini nostri iesu christi; ex cuius aduentu sexta aetas agitur.* Here I have omitted a passage concerning the role of the Jews as earthly forerunners of the more 'spiritual' divine promise communicated in the New Testament. The relationship between Augustine's view of history and the issue of supersession is a troubling one, which I have sadly had to minimize here in order to focus on other themes. For the contemporary state of the discussion concerning Augustine and the Jewish tradition, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: a Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008) and David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 48-134.

and old age.[6] In *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, though, Augustine sees fit to keep things at a fairly basic level.

One term also found in the above passage, but which might seem unworthy of mention at first, is "joints" (*articuli*). Augustine takes care to note here that the points of articulation between the ages—again, think back to the *cardinales* of Book IX—are not all communicated to us in the same way. The first two *articuli* are not as well emphasized in the New Testament as the other three. The transitions from Adam to Noah and Noah to Abraham are, in other words, more difficult to discern in its pages. Still, with proper attention to Scripture in its entirety, Augustine thinks we can reconstruct all of these 'articulations' of time, so as to make sense of the vast number of generations that stand between Adam and Christ.

That is not to say, however, that the same attention to Scripture can give us more interpretive power concerning history as we live it. As Augustine goes on to say, it is important to remember what it is that sets this sixth age of the *saeculum* apart from the others. Picking up with the advent of Christ, he writes:

> Then the spiritual grace that had been known to a few prophets and patriarchs was revealed to all the nations, so that people might worship God only gratuitously, desiring from Him no visible rewards for their servitude, no happiness in this present life, but only eternal life, in which God Himself could be enjoyed. So just as on the sixth day humanity was made according to the image of God, so in this sixth age the human mind might be remade according to the image of God.[7]

---

[6] Augustine constructs a similar parallel in *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos*, I.xxiii.35-I.xxiv.41. The division of history into a six-day model seems to have preceded Augustine, and he will often merely assume knowledge of it as a matter of course. On that, see Markus' entry for "History" in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999). Sometimes he will resort to an even simpler breakdown into merely three ages: before the law (*ante legem*), under the law (*sub lege*), and under grace (*sub gratia*). For that periodization, see (inter alia) *Contra Faustum*, XII.xiv.

[7] *De Cat. Rud*. XXII: *ut iam spiritalis gratia, quae paucis tunc patriarchis et prophetis nota erat, manifestaretur omnibus gentibus: ne quisquam deum nisi gratis coleret, non uisibilia praemia seruitutis suae et praesentis uitae felicitatem, sed solam uitam aeternam, in qua ipso deo frueretur, ab illo desiderans; ut hac sexta aetate mens humana renouetur ad imaginem dei, sicut sexta die homo factus est ad imaginem dei.* And a bit later: *omnia ergo bona terrena contemsit homo factus dominus christus, ut contemnenda monstraret; et omnia terrena mala sustinuit, quae sustinenda praecipiebat: ut neque in illis quaereretur felicitas, neque in istis infelicitas timeretur*. / "So Christ, the Lord made human, condemned all these earthly goods in order to show that they should be condemned. And He

Here Augustine makes clear the hexaemeral pattern of his historiography. He does in a way that is at once triumphalist and unsettling. Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ has risen—and the result is that no one will be made happy in this life by worshipping Him. His arrival has ended any correlation there was between divine favor and historical destiny. But, as Augustine would add, Christ will come again, and so humanity should turn its gaze to timelessness rather than falling into temporal despair.

When it comes time to discuss the 'joints' of the ages in the *City of God*, the context of the discussion might strike us as odd. Just as, in Book IX, Augustine introduced his notion of "cardinal causes" within a reflection on angels and demons, so in Book X we find the *articuli temporis* cropping up during a debate about theurgy, the practice of influencing earthly outcomes by manipulating 'divine' means. This issue was more pressing for Augustine than it might seem to be for us today. He was especially troubled by the fact that, in the late antique Mediterranean, even an intellectually sophisticated polytheist could be swayed to dabble in theurgic rituals. His exemplar here was Porphyry, the third-century disciple of Plotinus who wrote in favor of Neoplatonic philosophy against Christianity. What seems to have made Porphyry so dangerous, at least to someone like Augustine, was that the philosopher had come so close to the insights of Christianity without being able to acquiesce to its most embodied teachings.

Though there were many points of intellectual and moral intersection between Porphyry and Augustine, a doctrine like the Incarnation struck the student of Plotinus as inherently foolish. How could the highest divine principle of all knowledge and existence, which is in some sense beyond even the category of 'being' itself, come down into a human body and hang around some

---

endured all the earthly evils, which we are commanded to endure so that we do not seek happiness in them or fear unhappiness from them."

backwater settlements in Judaea? None of that would make much sense at all. If there was to be any mediation between the earthly and the godly, it would have to operate by way of the various tiers of being and intellect that stand between divinity and base materiality. Certain material rituals, then, might be able to invoke quasi-material intermediaries, which could then carry some human message or entreaty up the chain of being to what lies beyond all material constraints. Such theurgic practices, according to Porphyry and others, fit into a Neoplatonic worldview much more neatly than did the crude doctrine of the God-man.

That kind of thinking stood as a threat to Augustine's understanding of how Christianity allows us to attain mediation with God without debasing our own corporeality. In his eyes, despite how close Porphyry had come to approximating a Christian position, the philosopher had still fallen short on at least three counts. First, he devalued the body without sufficient reason. Second, he failed to appreciate the universality of Christianity's appeal. Third, and most relevant for our purposes, he misinterpreted his own age in history. Porphyry lived through much of the third century before dying at the dawn of the fourth, and so he had been alive during the persecutions enacted by Decius and Valerian. Regardless of what Porphyry actually witnessed, Augustine surmises that his denigration of Christianity was in part motivated by his attempt to ride the wave of a historical reaction against its rise. Not unlike a demon, he tried to interpret the signs of the times and was deceived by his own hubris.

This association of Porphyry with demons brings us back to the question of theurgy. As Augustine saw it, if humanity seeks mediation with God through means other than the Incarnate Mediator, there are two possible outcomes. The first is that our worship (*latreia*) will be directed at angels, which is a category mistake. Angels are good, but they are not for worshipping; only God receives that kind of treatment. The second possible outcome is that humanity makes

contact with demons. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is a losing gambit. Porphyry's relationship with Christianity was colored not only by his own historical judgments about its prospects, but also by his demonic inquiries into its value (or the lack thereof). In either case, whether relying on his own reason or the powers of a higher intelligence, he arrived only at the fantasy of a false future.

What Porphyry could not see were the joints of time lying concealed within the mechanism of history. If he had had access to those, he could have understood both the actual articulations that define our mediated relationship with the divine and the fact that we cannot uncover any such articulations within the current age—whether on our own or with demonic assistance. For Augustine, the *articuli temporis* can be found only in the Scripture that Porphyry would have rejected as too base in thought and low in style to deserve much scrutiny. Setting pride aside, humanity has to turn away from the vagaries of saecular history and look back to the story of the "people of God," the city that "is increased through certain joints of the times, which are like the stages of life, so that it rises from temporal things to the eternal things to be grasped, and from visible things to invisible things."[8] And so we are back to the *articuli temporis* that mark out the *aetates*, the phases in the education of humankind, through which we are taught to look for something beyond any age.

Ordo Saeculorum

Augustine does not have much more to say about these joints in Book X, but they will prove important for understanding the books to come. With Book XI, we are back to angels and demons. What begins as a seemingly long aside into the allegorical depths of the creation

---

[8] For the full Latin, see *CD* X.xiv: *Sicut autem unius hominis, ita humani generis, quod ad Dei populum pertinet, recta eruditio per quosdam articulos temporum tamquam aetatum profecit accessibus, ut a temporalibus ad aeterna capienda et a visilibus ad invisibilia surgeretur*. In X.xv, Augustine will add that it is through these *articuli temporum* that divine providence "orders the course of the times" (*ordinare temporum cursum)*.

account in Genesis turns out to serve as a prologue to the story of the two 'cities.'[9] Whereas Book X saw Augustine mapping the hexaemeron onto history, in Book XI he collapses it into a single 'day' of divine activity.[10] The multiplicity of the world results not so much from a bit-by-bit buildup within time, but from a quasi-timeless procession and return, through which time itself first comes into play. As Augustine writes:

> If time [*tempus*] is correctly discerned from eternity—time is never without some mobile change while there is no change in eternity—who does not see that there would be no times [*tempora*] unless there were a creature changing something with its motion? Who does not see that time [*tempus*] follows from this motion and change, as when one thing withdraws and another comes in (since they cannot be there at the same time), with either brief or drawn-out intervals of delay? So since God, the Creator and Arranger of times [*temporum*], is entirely without change in His eternity, I don't see how we could say that He created the world after a span of time, unless we say that there was already some creature by whose motions the times could pass by.[11]

As was the case with Book XI of the *Confessions*, we have to be careful not to rush through this argument of Augustine's too rashly. Though he is not always a systematic thinker, his use of language often remains precise. Here, again as in *Conf.* XI, he is heading off some 'Manichaean' attacks on the doctrine of creation, which were grounded on the implausibility of God deciding to make the world at some one point in time rather than at another. The main thrust of his response is that there simply could not have been any spans of time (*tempora*) before creation, since time-spans are measurable only with reference to creatures.

---

[9] Augustine does not blatantly frame it as such a prologue until *CD* XI.xxxiv, however.
[10] *CD* XI.vii-ix.
[11] *CD* XI.vi: *Si enim recte discernuntur aeternitas et tempus quod tempus sine aliqua mobili mutabilitate non est, in aeternitate autem nulla mutatio est, quis non videat quod tempora non fuissent nisi creatura fieret quae aliquid aliqua motione mutaret, cuius motionis et mutationis cum aliud atque aliud, quae simul esse non possunt, cedit atque succedit, in brevioribus vel productioribus morarum intervallis tempus sequeretur? Cum igitur Deus, in cuius aeternitate nulla est omnino mutatio, creator sit temporum et ordinator, quo modo dicatur post temporum spatia mundum creasse non video, nisi dicatur ante mundum iam aliquam fuisse creaturam cuius motibus tempora currerent.*

As so often, Augustine's language runs the risk of being misinterpreted. It could seem as though, in his defense of creation, he has merely equated time itself with the motion of bodies. And though that was a popular option in ancient thought, we should recall that Augustine ruled this out back in *Conf.* XI. There, it was made clear that time was not the motion of bodies, but rather that by which the motion of bodies could be measured. Here, though, we might take Augustine to be saying that time is constituted by motion. Such an interpretation remains possible—there is ambiguity in the text—but it is not probable. Augustine may disagree with himself about many topics, but when it comes to issues of temporality, he tends to watch his language. What he actually says here is that time "follows" (*sequeretur*) from motion and change, much in the way that a logical consequent follows its premises. Wherever there is movement, there must be time—but that does not necessarily mean that movement itself constitutes time. What motion and change do constitute, though, are *tempora* or time-spans, those measurable durations ("intervals of delay") that we posit between events. Recall too the Aristotelian analogy: if *tempus* itself is the continuous line within which things happen, then *tempora* are the segments of the line that we can mark out by positing singular points along the continuum.

Acknowledging such subtleties in Augustine's language need not be the idle exercise of an overly curious mind. The distinction between time and times does seem to be operative in *Conf.* XI and in many passages throughout the *City of God*. Augustine is trying to walk a fine line between what he would take to be 'pagan' and 'Manichaean' options, between reducing time to physical motion and making God Himself subject to the time He creates. To do so, he must admit that the units of time we use for measuring—days, months, seasons—are themselves derived from motion and change. He also has to leave room for talking about time itself as the

distentio animi that conditions every aspect of created existence, without thereby being reducible to any one part of it. If we want to follow Augustine's way of speaking about this, then, we should say that time and movement are not the same thing, though they are utterly contemporaneous.[12]

In the context of the *City of God*, though, Augustine is less concerned with the fineries of the philosophy of time than with the definition of the two cities within time. In Book XI, he makes clear this dual division begins not with human history, but with the quasi-temporality of angels and demons. The demons, as we have heard, wander through our world after their Fall, lasting forever but still plagued by unruly passions. The angels, meanwhile, may not be capable of much more by nature, though they are held to an incomparable stability by the gift of God's grace. In the context of the creation narrative, they come into being as the "light that took the name 'day.'"[13] The good angels were born into divine illumination and fixed their gaze upon it. The *lux* looked back to its *lumen*. The other angels, of course, did not, and for them all was lost. The result is that the angels know the order of all temporal things in the Word of God, while the demons merely cast about for signs of the times.

Our situation does not appear much better than that of the demons. Our Fall, too, proved decisive. We look at history as it has been and as it continues to happen, hoping to discern a meaningful pattern but usually turning away in failure or even disgust. Providence conceals itself, and there seems to be no correlation between the value of human acts and their earthly outcomes. Our frustration with this leads us to question the whole framework of a divine order. What kind of God would allow history to pile up all of these tragedies and travesties? With

---

[12] This is another way of saying that time and the world are created together. It is a judgment of simultaneity, rather than of priority or causality.
[13] *CD* X.ix: *ipsi sunt illa lux quae diei nomen accepit*.

questions like that, we enter into the realm of theodicy. Augustine's justification of God, which builds on all of his previous arguments about the human inability to gauge historical justice, might strike us as oddly aesthetic:

> God would not create any angel or human He knew was going to be evil unless He knew equally how He would fit them in for the use of the good, and how He would adorn the order of the ages [*ordinem saeculorum*] with certain antitheses, like the most beautiful song. Such antitheses, as they are called in an elaborate locution, are quite attractive. In plain Latin terms, we could call them oppositions or, to speak more clearly, counterpoints.[14]

Human moralizing about history does not, then, rob it of its inherent order. This *ordo saeculorum,* as Augustine calls it, is in fact an exemplar not only of orderliness but even of beauty. "The beauty of the age," he adds, "is composed through the opposition of contraries." It is something like the most melodic song or the most rhythmic poem. And yet it is more than either a song or a poem, because it is everything. "The beauty of the age is an eloquence of things," according to Augustine, "not of words."[15]

---

[14] *CD* XI.xviii: *Neque enim Deus ullum, non dico angelorum, sed vel hominum crearet, quem malum futurum esse praescisset, nisi pariter nosset quibus eos bonorum usibus commodaret atque ita ordinem saeculorum tamquam pulcherrimum carmen etiam ex quibusdam quasi antithetis honestaret. Antitheta enim quae appellantur in ornamentis elocutionis sunt decentissima, quae Latine ut appellentur opposita, vel, quod expressius dicitur, contraposita.*

[15] Both of these lines are taken from the continuation of the passage cited just above, *CD* XI.xviii: *non est apud nos huius vocabuli consuetudo, cum tamen eisdem ornamentis locutionis etiam sermo Latinus utatur, immo linguae omnium gentium. His antithetis et Paulus apostolus in secunda ad Corinthios epistula illum locum suaviter explicat, ubi dicit: 'Per arma iustitiae dextra et sinistra: per gloriam et ignobilitatem, per infamiam et bonam famam; ut seductores et veraces, ut qui ignoramur et cognoscimur; quasi morientes, et ecce vivimus, ut coherciti et non mortificati; ut tristes, semper autem gaudentes, sicut egenii, multos autem ditantes, tamquam nihil habentes et omnia possidentes.' (2 Cor. 6:7-10) Sicut ergo ista contraria contrariis opposita sermonis pulchritudinem reddunt, ita quadam non verborum, sed rerum eloquentia contrariorum oppositione saeculi pulchritudo componitur. Apertissime hoc positum est in libro ecclesiastico isto modo: 'Contra malum bonum est et contra mortem vita; sic contra pium peccator. Et sic intuere in omnia opera Altissimi, bina bina, unum contra unum.'* (Eccl. 33:14-15) / "We are not in the habit of using this figure of speech, though Latin does use eloquent locutions too, as do the languages of all peoples. Even the Apostle Paul demonstrates this nicely in his second letter to the Corinthians. He writes: 'Through the arms of justice, right and left; through glory and ignobility, through infamy and good fame; like seducers and like honest people; like those who do not know and like those who know; it is as if we are dying, and yet look, we are alive; like we have been punished, but not killed; like we are sad, but we are always happy; like we are needy, but making so many people rich; like we have nothing but possess everything.' The beauty of the age is composed through the opposition of contraries, just like Paul's speech gets its beauty from contraries opposed to contraries. But the beauty of the age is an eloquence of things, not of words. In a certain way, the book of

But who could ever hear this song? Who could enjoy this eloquence?[16] It is hard to dance to the drum-beats of death, and the harmonies of historical violence are not easy to pick up. To take in this cosmological beauty would require a perspective on things that was no longer limited by historical conditions or temporal constraints, insofar as the cosmos remains fundamentally historical and temporal for Augustine. To grasp its beauty would take some kind of consciousness that was neither afflicted by *distentio animi* nor broken down into a tense-logic of past, present, and future. It would take a perspective on time that was eternal, in the strictest possible sense. It would take a God, as described by Augustine:

> His focus [*intentio*] does not pass over from thought to thought. In his bodiless watching-over [*contuitus*], everything He knows is all there together at once. He knows the times, but not through any temporal kind of knowing. And He sets temporal things in motion, but without any temporal movements.[17]

Ecclesiastes has put this most clearly: 'Good is against evil and life against death. So the sinner is against the religious. So look at all the works of the Most High, two by two, one against the other.'"

[16] On the demanding challenge presented by this shift in the mode of divine eloquence, see Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 29: "The ability to read God's deeds in the Old Testament as his speech (*eloquentia divina*), and the ability to read God's creatures in the world as telling of their creator (*eloquentia rerum*), both require the right disposition or intention as Augustine would say. The disposition to see things as signs, with a meaning beyond their obvious, immediate appearances is an intention to 'put them to the question'. Meaning is not obvious to us: our understanding is clouded. Fallen human beings as we are, we are permanently liable to failing to communicate and failing to be communicated with. In this life we are denied the transparency of mutual understanding which would allow direct communication between us and other minds."

[17] *CD* XI.xxi: *Neque enim eius intentio de cogitatione in cogitationem transit, in cuius incorporeo contuitu simul adsunt cunta quae novit; quoniam tempora ita novit nullis suis temporalibus notionibus, quem ad modum temporalia movet nullis suius temporalibus motibus*. See also the rest of the passage leading up those lines, also in *CD* XI.xxi: *non enim more nostro ille vel quod futurum est prospicit, vel quod praesens est aspicit, vel quod praeteritum respicit; sed alio modo quodam a nostrarum cogitationum consuetudine longe alteque diverso. Ille quippe non ex hoc in illud cogitatione mutata, sed omnino incommutabiliter videt; ita ut illa quidem quae temporaliter fiunt, et futura nondum sint et praesentia iam sint et praeterita iam non sint, ipse vero haec omnia stabili ac sempiterna praesentia conprehendat; nec aliter oculis, aliter mente; non enim ex animo constat et corpore; nec aliter nunc et aliter antea et aliter postea; quoniam non sicut nostra, ita eius quoque scientia trium temporum, praesentis videlicet et praeteriti vel futuri, varietate mutatur, 'apud quem non est inmutatio nec momenti obumbratio.'* [James 1:17] / "God does not do it like we do it. He does not look to the future or look at what is present or look back at the past. Rather, He does it in a certain other way, far and away unlike our way of thinking. He sees without his thoughts changing from this to that. He sees entirely without change in such a way that He comprehends everything that happens in time—what has not yet come to be and what is already present and what is already past—in a stable and everlasting presence. He does not see one way with His eyes, another way in His mind. He is not made up of body and soul. There is no 'now' and 'before' and 'afterward,' since His knowledge of the three times—present, past, future—is not changed and varied like ours is. 'With Him there is no change or shadow of movement.'"

With passages like this, reading the *Confessions* and the *City of God* alongside one another can be most fruitful. The eleventh books of both works use this language of temporality—of *intentio*, *contuitus*, and so on—for different but linked ends. In the earlier work, Augustine's emphasis tends to fall more on the effects of time on the soul. In the later work, his concerns are more broadly historical. In both, however, he reads the opening of Genesis in light of the way temporality conditions human experience on any scale.

It is God, then, whose *intentio* is afflicted by no *distentio*. It is the divine *contuitus* that truly 'sees things together,' whereas our crude attempts fall short before they even begin. What, then, are we to do? How are we to sing along with the song of creation if we do not even know the words? Augustine is adamant that our response should not be to hubristically write in our own lyrics. Humility, not pride, is demanded.

> That is why divine providence warns us not to criticize things unwisely, but to inquire carefully after the usefulness of things. When our talent, or our weakness, is unable to find any usefulness, divine providence warns us that we should trust that there is a hidden usefulness, as there has been for certain things that we could scarcely find a use for. This hiddenness of usefulness is either an encouragement towards humility or an obstacle to exaltation.[18]

If our view on the *ordo saeculorum* is at best skewed and at worst illusory, then the best strategy would seem to be to proceed cautiously. Careful consideration of things here trumps rash judgments about historical rights and wrongs. To make such judgments with any high degree of certainty, we would require a perspective on time that could take it all in at once. As it stands, we could only appreciate the full song when it has come to an end. That was already clear from

[18] *CD* XI.xxii: *Unde nos admonet divina providentia non res insipienter vituperare, sed utilitatem rerum diligenter inquirere, et ubi nostrum ingenium vel infirmitas deficit, ita credere occultam, sicut erant quaedam quae vix potuimus invenire; quia et ipsa utilitatis occultatio aut humilitatis exercitatio est aut elationis adtritio.*

Book XI of the *Confessions*, but here we can see the full weight of Augustine's insight and the reasons why, even then, he linked the temporality of song to the whole history of humankind.

Historical understanding, then, will come to us only belatedly. This is no longer the proximate belatedness that undermines every apparent 'moment' of our lives in time, but a broader, eschatological belatedness. We already caught a glimpse of this kind of extreme delay in the *Gift of Perseverance*. And perseverance 'to the end' matters here in the *City of God*, too, though it might not exactly be the main theme.[19] Our view of the *ordo saeculorum*, like our perspective on our own lives, will not gain in clarity until this *saeculum* has itself come to an end. Only then, looking back on everything, will we be able to speak of true justice without any hesitation. What God sees beyond any aspect of time, we will see in retrospect. Then the song will be sung and the beauty of the image will sharpen into view. Then we might understand what Augustine is trying to say when he writes: "The universe of things is like a picture where dark colors have their place, too. If someone could see it, it would be beautiful even with sinners…"[20]

The Limits of Scriptural History

With Book XII of the *City of God*, Augustine continues his transition towards the Scriptural approach to history. While much of Book XI had been taken up by discussions of how angels and demons relate to the order of ages, the next book is able to focus in more closely on the place of humanity in all this. Despite this shift, Augustine finds much thematic continuity

---

[19] See, e.g., *CD* XI.xii: *Qui licet de suae perseverantiae praemio certi sint, de ipsa tamen perseverantia sua reperiuntur incerti. Quis enim hominum se in actione provectuque iustitiae perseveraturum usque in finem sciat, nisi aliqua revelatione ab illo fiat certus qui de hac re iusto latentique iudicio non omnes instruit, sed neminem fallit?* / "Whoever is certain about the reward for their own perseverance is still found to be uncertain about that perseverance itself. What person knows that they are going to persevere until the end in the doing of justice and its increase? That would require being made certain by some revelation from God. In His just, though concealed, judgment He does not inform everyone about such things. But He deceives no one." Pollmann, "Moulding the Present," 176-178, represents one reading that does indeed attend to perseverance in the *City of God*.

[20] *CD* XI.xxiii: *sicut pictura cum colore nigro loco suo posito, ita universitas rerum, si quis possit intueri, etiam cum peccatoribus pulchra est.*

between the two topics. Just as was the case with angels and demons, a correct understanding of how humankind relates to history requires us to look into both the hiddenness of the *ordo saeculorum* and the implications of a *tempus-tempora* distinction. Covering this ground anew in Book XII also helps to make tangible what might have seemed like vague intimations in Book XI.

Regarding the *ordo saeculorum,* Augustine picks up where he left off in his previous book. Things arise, things pass away; good things happen to bad people, bad things happen to good people; the hard rain is justly distributed all over. The language of arising and passing away is reminiscent of Book IV of the *Confessions*.[21] There, as we saw, Augustine was working out his distraught feelings about his dead friend by reflecting on the cosmological fragility of everything temporal. Here, too, he suggests that acknowledging an order of things means accepting that all things withdraw so that others can come in to take their place:

> There is, then, an order of transient things, but the beauty of this order does not therefore delight us. We cannot experience the whole of it, but only part of it, since we are woven into it with our mortal condition. Yet the little parts that offend us fit well enough, even beautifully into this whole. That is why the foresight of the Creator is taken to be rightly trusted by us, who are ill suited for contemplating the whole. Otherwise, with bold human vanity, we might dare to find some fault with the work of such a great craftsman.[22]

---

[21] Recall *Conf*. IV.x, especially.

[22] See the full passage at *CD* XII.iv: *damnabilia putare ridiculum est, cum istae creaturae eum modum nutu Creatoris acceperint ut cedendo ac succedendo peragant infimam pulchritudinem temporum in genere suo istius mundi partibus congruentem. Neque enim caelestibus fuerant terrena coaequanda, aut ideo universitati deesse ista debuerunt, quoniam sunt illa meliora. Cum ergo in his locis ubi esse talia competebat aliis alia deficientibus oriuntur et succumbunt minora maioribus atque in qualitates superantium superata vertuntur, rerum est ordo transeuntium. Cuius ordinis decus nos propterea non delectat, quoniam parti eius pro condicione nostrae mortalitatis intexti universum, cui particulae quae nos offendunt satis apte decenterque conveniunt, sentire non possumus. Unde nobis, in quibus eam contemplari minus idonei sumus, rectissime credenda praecipitur providentia Conditoris, ne tanti artificis opus in aliquo reprehendere vanitate humanae temeritatis audeamus.* / "It is ridiculous to think that these creatures are to be condemned, since they received their limits at the whim of the Creator, so that by withdrawing and coming in they would act out the deepest beauty of the times, as it fits all the parts of this world together in its way. Earthly things were not to be equated with heavenly things, but they did not have to be absent from the universe just because heavenly things are better. When, then, such things come to be, some rise up as others pass away. Earlier things succumb to later. The things that are overcome are turned into attributes of those

Once more, Augustine recommends a humble course. In the fourth book of the *Confessions*, he had struggled to comprehend the *ordo rerum*; in the twelfth book of the *City of God*, he admits that this *ordo rerum transeuntium* is not something we are well suited to grasp in its entirety. The insight has new weight here, since he is no longer merely considering the loss of individual beings, but the rising and falling of whole communities according to the inscrutable *ordo saeculorum*. Even this loss, this material decay of all earthly things, finds its place in the order of things, however unimaginable its beauty might remain for us.[23]

The response to such loss, in Augustine's view, cannot come from within time itself. Only eternity, as timelessness, could truly overcome the temporal fragility of all things. And the only window humanity has been given into the *ordo rerum* (which includes the *ordo saeculorum*) is Scripture. There the eternal Word of God speaks, somehow, in words that we can understand. What it tells us is a narrative of people and events, but, for Augustine, this is not just any story. Scripture contains the *historia* of the *articuli temporis*: the joints of time that both separate the ages off from one another and, ultimately, link them together. And this narrative, Augustine is keen to point out, is best understood as linear. It only plays out one way.

---

that overcome them. There is, then, an order of transient things…" (The rest of the passage is already translated in-text above.)

[23] See *CD* XII.v, where there are again many resonances with the language of *Conf.* IV: *Naturae igitur omnes, quoniam sunt et ideo habent modum suum, speciem suam et quandam secum pacem suam, profecto bonae sunt; et cum ibi sunt, ubi esse per naturae ordinem debent, quantum acceperunt, suum esse custodiunt; et quae semper esse non acceperunt, pro usu motuque rerum, quibus Creatoris lege subduntur, in melius deteriusve mutantur, in eum divina providentia tendentes exitum quem ratio gubernandae universitatis includit, ita ut nec tanta corruptio quanta usque ad interitum naturas mutabiles mortalesque perducit sic faciat non esse quod erat, ut non inde fiat consequenter quod esse debebat.* / "And so all natures, since they are, and so have a limit and a form and a certain 'peace,' are certainly good. When they are there where they ought to be in the order of nature, they guard over their being insofar as they have received it. Those things that have not received everlasting being are subdued by the Law of the Creator for the use and movement of things. They are changed for better or for worse. Through divine providence, they reach out for that end which the reason of the governing universe has enclosed for them. In this way, not even the decay that leads to the destruction of changeable and mortal natures can make what was cease to be, in such a way that what had to be did not follow from it and come to be out of it."

Augustine's return to the *tempus-tempora* distinction occurs within his defense of the linearity of time against the notion of cyclical temporality. Like the equation of time with the heavenly bodies, the possibility that time repeats itself in circles was also tempting to many ancient thinkers. After all, the seasons follow each other in a cycle, according to the motions of the planetary spheres.[24] But, also like the equation of time with bodies, this option is rejected by Augustine for a number of reasons. The cyclical approach, in his estimation, would threaten the security of true happiness.[25] What is the point of deferring eternal beatitude to the end of time, if time is just going to start back up and again and throw us back into the mire of history? Perhaps more important than this eschatological consideration, though, is Augustine's conviction that the order of the *articuli temporis* must play out in linear fashion. The Fall, the flood, the fear and trembling on a mountain—all of these Scriptural events happen in narrative succession, and the meaning of each one depends on its position in the series. They are not repeatable instances. Of all of these turning-points, the most sacrosanct in its uniqueness is the advent of Christ. "Christ died once for our sins," emphasizes Augustine, underlining the *semel* ("once") by foregrounding it in his sentence.[26]

---

[24] Recall how time "circles round according to number" in *Tim.* 38A. In the *Timaeus*, we find a text that is not afraid to define time in terms closely bound up with calendrical measurement and its "spans of time" (*merē chronou*; 37E).
[25] Löwith, 163, writes well on this, saying: Augustine's "final argument against the classical concept of time is, therefore, a moral one: the pagan doctrine is hopeless, for hope and faith are essentially related to the future and a real future cannot exist if past and future times are equal phases within a cyclic recurrence without beginning and end. On the basis of an everlasting revolution of definite cycles, we could expect only a blind rotation of misery and happiness, that is, of deceitful bliss and real misery, but no eternal blessedness—only an endless repetition of the same but nothing new, redemptive, and final." Yet the late ancient refiguration of history will go much further than this eruption of linearity out of the old circle; on this, see the somewhat later take of Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 77: "a distinctly Christian view of history evolved in the discussions among the church fathers, through interpretations of the Christian texts and under the impact of events. Much more was involved than the often cited change from a cyclical to a linear pattern of development, a distinction which holds true only in the widest sense."
[26] *CD* XII.xiv: *Semel enim Christus mortuus est pro peccatis nostris*. Again, see Löwith, 165: "The circle, in the view of the ancients the most perfect because self-contained figure, is a vicious one if the cross is the virtue of life and its meaning bound up with a purpose."

Human history plays out on this same unidirectional plane of temporality, though, as we have seen, there are no longer any obvious turning-points for us to discern. History does not repeat itself, nor does it take the form of an ascending progress towards any better kind of worldly life.[27] Instead, the heterogeneity that marked out the previous five ages of history has given way to the homogeneous duration of the sixth.[28] What all six periods share with one another, though, is that they remain temporal and therefore (according to Augustine) linear.

---

[27] The same would seem to go for any general regression. And perhaps that was the more realistic possibility in the context of Augustine's own time. Once more, Löwith, 166, has captured the nuance of Augustine's position (which stands against certain other, more properly 'progressive' Christian theologies of history): "Augustine's City of God (412-426) is the pattern of every conceivable view of history that can rightly be called 'Christian.' It is not a philosophy of history but a dogmatic-historical interpretation of Christianity. Though he is demonstrating the truth of the Christian doctrine in the material of sacred and profane history, the history of the world has for him no intrinsic interest and meaning. The City of God is not an ideal which could become real in history, like the third age of Joachim, and the church in its earthly existence is only a representative signification of the true, transhistorical city. For Augustine the historical task of the church is not to develop the Christian truth through successive stages but simply to spread it, for the truth as such is established." And to put an even finer point on it, see further on, 166-167: "Apart from such foundation stones of the Christian faith as Abraham, Moses, and Christ, neither Augustine nor Thomas knew, as Joachim did, of a 'history' of the Christian religion in the sense of a successive articulation into meaningful stages of the interim between the first and second coming of Christ." It should be noted here that Augustine does not usually associate Moses with one of his *articuli temporis*. This is likely because of his preference for trying to balance out the number of generations between *articuli*. A more adventurous interpretation, though, might suggest that this corresponds to his critical approach to the Mosaic law, which is a critique that grows in complexity throughout the Pelagian controversy. Regardless of where we stand on such details, the central insight of Löwith, 169, still stands: "For Augustine and all genuine Christian thinking, 'progress' is nothing else than a pilgrimage toward." All of this evidence stands against O'Daly, "Thinking Through History," 54: "And there is evidence that, when polemic is not his immediate aim, Augustine subscribes to a gradualist, progressivist version of history. His version of the biological model of history's, especially biblical history's, development through a series of phases or 'ages' *(aetates)* is used in a limited way in Books 15 and 16 of the *City of God,* with explicit reference to the analogy with the periods of human life in 16.43. Furthermore, human inventions that are the basis of civilized life are located chronologically in Book 18, where Augustine synchronizes events of biblical and secular history."

[28] Markus, 20-21, is quite clear about the way historical homogeneity has supplanted the heterogeneity of discrete turning-points: "Augustine's thought moved with increasing certainty towards the rejection of any attempt to introduce any division derived from sacred history into the history of the age after Christ. … [H]is attack on [chiliasm] displays one of the fundamental themes of his reflection on history: that since the coming of Christ, until the end of the world, all history is homogeneous, that it cannot be mapped out in terms of a pattern drawn from sacred history, that it can no longer contain decisive turning-points endowed with a significance in sacred history. Every moment may have its unique and mysterious significance in the ultimate divine tableau of men's doings and sufferings; but it is a significance to which God's revelation does not supply the clues." And again, more strongly, 23: "There is no other decisive phase to look forward to, no turning-point to fear or to hope for; only the end. On the map of sacred history the time between Incarnation and Parousia is a blank; a blank of unknown duration, capable of being filled with an infinite variety of happenings, of happenings all equally at home in the pattern of sacred history. None are privileged above others, God's hand and God's purposes are equally present and equally hidden in them all. On them all the old prophecies are silent, for their reference is to the Incarnation and to the final fulfillment. The interim is dark in its ambivalence. There is no sacred history *of* the last age: there is only a gap for it *in* the sacred history." Markus' language of "ambivalence" is obviously reminiscent of Marrou, who had already diagnosed some of the peculiar nuances in Augustine's treatment of history.

Going back to the beginning, humankind was created in time by a God beyond time. Any approach to 'the times' must then keep in mind that neither Scriptural nor saecular history is truly cyclical.[29]

Yet humanity remains bewitched by the change of the seasons and the movement of the planets. We even have trouble telling the difference between the time in which motion occurs and the times which correspond to the motion of the planets. We reduce temporality to the calendar. For the angels, the distinction is clearer. As in Book XI, then, Augustine falls back on the angels in order to think his way towards something like 'time itself:'

> But perhaps time [*tempus*] does not derive from the heavens but was in fact there before the heavens—not, of course, as hours and days and months and years, since it is clear that those measurements of temporal spans [*spatiorum temporalium*], which are usually and properly called 'times' [*tempora*], began with the motion of the stars. That is why God, when He set them in place, said, 'They are for signs and for times and for days and for years.' Rather, this would be the time of some changeable motion, where there is first one thing and then something else comes to pass, and they cannot be there together at once.[30]

Time as non-simultaneity, in other words, is not reducible to the spans of time we use to organize and measure our lifetimes. We have to disentangle the various ways we have of keeping track of time from the deeper temporality that destabilizes us at our core, thanks to the force of *distentio*

---

[29] In *CD* XII.xviii, Augustine even refers to the Christian path as the *iter verum et rectum*, as opposed to the philosophers' *circuitus falsus*. At XII.xxi, the former is also called the *via recta*, which Christ himself is for His people.

[30] *CD* XII.xvi: *At si tempus non a caelo, verum et ante caelum fuit, non quidem in horis et diebus et mensibus et annis (nam istae dimensiones temporalium spatiorum, quae usitate ac proprie dicuntur tempora, manifestum est quod a motu siderum coeperint; unde et Deus, cum haec institueret, dixit: 'Et sint in signa et in tempora et in dies et in annos'), [Gen. 1:14] sed in aliquo mutabili motu, cuius aliud prius, aliud posterius praeterit, eo quod simul esse non possunt—si ergo ante caelum in angelicis motibus tale aliquid fuit et ideo tempus iam fuit atque angeli, ex quo facti sunt, temporaliter movebantur, etiam sic omni tempore fuerunt quando quidem cum illis facta sunt tempora.* My rendition of the last part of this passage would be: "If, then, there was something going on in the movements of the angels, and for that reason time was already there and the angels were moved in time from their creation, then they were also there at every time, since the times were created with them." This omni-temporality of the angels would not affect the *tempus-tempora* distinction in any obvious way. Whether time properly began with the angels or with the rest of creation, that time itself is still not the same as measurable time-spans.

animi. If we fail to do so, we risk losing sight of the fact that it is our own temporal instability that keeps us from being able to read the 'signs of the times' with any degree of accuracy.[31]

For Augustine, though, far more meaningful than any calendar is the text of Scripture. There stands the true repository not just of prophecy, but also of 'history' in the most meaningful sense. This is the history of the two cities: one, loving itself even to the point of contempt for God; the other, loving God even to the point of contempt for itself.[32] Augustine makes this division most starkly in Book XIV of the *City of God*, but the work as a whole is in many ways motivated by it. In earlier books, Augustine focuses less intently on this distinction, content to use terms like 'heavenly city' and 'earthly city' in order to illuminate other topics of discussion. On a somewhat superficial level, we could say that Books I-X tell the history of the 'earthly city' and, after a transition in Book XI, we find the story of the 'heavenly city' in Books XII-XXII.

That would be a bit too simplistic, though, since—as we will see in the next chapter—Augustine ultimately emphasizes the way these two cities are entangled and intermingled in this current age of history. Back at the beginning of Book XI, in fact, when he is discussing his outline for the remaining books, Augustine already writes:

> But now I know what is expected of me. I have not forgotten that I ought to discuss (as far as I can) the beginnings, the course, and the deserved ends of the two cities (i.e., the earthly and heavenly). We have said that these two cities are

---

[31] See Breisach, 85: "Neither meaning nor stability could be found in the Earthly City, a sphere of incessant change. […] It followed that Christian historians must use schemes of periodization based on sacred traditions." Augustine's historiographical caution here seems to parallel both his turn away from millenarianism and his retrospective re-evaluation of his personal story. On this, see Fredriksen, "Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse," in Bernard McGinn and Richard K. Emmerson (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 20-37, esp. 33-34: "The pattern of God's actions covertly guiding Augustine to the saving moment in the garden could be recognized retrospectively only once the 'ending'—the conversion—was known. So too with public history. Augustine's brief subjection by the 'mirage of his generation,' the triumphalism of the Theodosian reforms with their coercive antipagan legislation, gave way to a thoroughgoing historical agnosticism from which, again, he never wandered. Scripture alone, he argues, records the unambiguous acts of God in history; but the period corresponding to the record of those actions had, by Augustine's day, long passed. The present might be punctuated by infinite miracles, but it remains nonetheless inscrutable: God's current actions cannot be divined with any security, no matter how strenuous the effort to match prophecies to contemporary events."

[32] See *CD* XIV.xxviii, to which we will have to circle back in the next chapter.

> somehow woven together in this in-between age [*interim saeculum*] and that they are mixed up in turn. But let me step up to this discussion by relying, at every turn, on the help of the Lord of the age, our King.[33]

Part of relying on that divine aid involves prioritizing the interpretation of Scripture. We have already seen how Augustine approaches the preface to the distinction between the two cities—namely, the splitting off of the demons from the angels—on the basis of an exegesis of Genesis 1. In many of the later books of the *City of God*, he will proceed on a similarly exegetical basis. He does so in order to write his own history—not merely of the heavenly city, but also of its earthly counterpart. The two are so entangled that it is not possible to tell their stories separately. Perhaps it would be better to treat this transition in the *City of God* as a shift not from one city to another, but from one kind of historical mindset to another. The first is motivated by the hubristic, even demonic thought that the meaning of history can be fixed from within history itself. The second mindset would then be motivated by the question of whether ongoing history, as we know it, has any inherent meaning at all.

For Augustine, though, it is not as simple as negating the meaning of 'history' as such. Much depends on what kind of history we are aiming to interpret. A proper relationship to this *interim saeculum* of ours depends on our awareness of the other ages of history, as these were articulated in the pages of Scripture.[34] Augustine does not get very clear on how these articulations of time fit together until Books XVI and XVII of the *City of God*. After spending

---

[33] *CD* XI.i: *Nunc vero quid a me iam expectetur agnoscens meique non immemor debiti de duarum civitatum, terrenae scilicet et caelestis, quas in hoc interim saeculo perplexas quodam modo diximus invicemque permixtas, exortua et excursu et debitis finibus, quantum valuero, disputare eius ipsius domini et regis nostri ubique opitulatione fretus adgrediar, primumque dicam quem ad modum exordia duarum istarum civitatum in angelorum diversitate praecesserint.*

[34] Markus, 19, puts it succinctly: "The meaning and structure of history derive from sacred history." Earlier, he allows himself to expand on this a bit more; see ibid., 17: The significant divisions in human history are, for Augustine, the turning-points in the sacred history. His divisions of history into 'ages' are all primarily ways of dividing the sacred history, and only derivatively applicable to universal history. The landmarks of the sacred history are the fixed points in universal history; universal history is articulated in a meaningful structure insofar as its course is projected on to a map defined by the coordinates of the sacred history."

much of Books XII-XV exploring the period from Adam's Fall to Noah's flood—we will come back to these passages in the next chapter—Augustine picks up his historiographical pace when he comes to the post-diluvian era. He begins by admitting that, despite the richness of the Scriptural canon, it does not tell us with any certainty whether members of the city of God were always alive on this earth. After the flood, he concedes, it becomes rather unclear whether the history of that heavenly city is continuous or instead broken up into pieces.[35]

According to Augustine, this lack of clarity continues down to the time of Abraham. The long life of that patriarch somehow constitutes a singular event, which serves as a meaningful turning-point within the overarching plot of Scripture. As Augustine puts it:

> Now then, let us look at the course of the city of God from that joint in time [*ab illo articulo temporis*] that occurred with father Abraham. From that joint, our knowledge of that city began to be clearer. There too we read more plainly the divine promises that we now see to have been fulfilled in Christ.[36]

Augustine seems to take special care here to mark Abraham out as the historical personage best corresponding to an epochal shift. He writes that this joint in time was made 'with' or 'in' Abraham—*in patre Abraham*. From the wording of this passage, it is also clear that Augustine is using *articulus temporis* to refer not simply to 'an age,' but rather to the hinge upon which the ages turn. Scripture here serves as something like the user's manual for the mechanism of

---

[35] *CD* XVI.i: *Post diluvium procurrentis sanctae vestigia civitatis utrum continuata sint an intercurrentibus impietatis interrupta temporibus, ita ut nullus hominum veri unius Dei cultor existeret, ad liquidum scripturis loquentibus invenire difficile est, propterea quia in canonicis libris post Noe, qui cum coniuge ac tribus filiis totidemque nuribus suius meruit per arcam vastatione diluvii liberari, non invenimus usque Abraham cuiusquam pietatem evidenti divino eloquio praedicatam, nisi quod Noe duos filios suos Sem et Iapheth prophetica benedictione commendat, intuens et praevidens quod longe fuerat post futurum*. / "Despite the clarity of scriptural language, it is difficult to uncover whether vestiges of the holy city ran on continuously after the flood or were interrupted by times of irreligiousness that rushed in, so that there existed not one person who worshipped the one true God. According to the canonical books, after Noah—who earned liberation from the devastating flood on his ark, with his wife and three sons and so many daughters-in-law—we find no piety recounted by the clarity of divine eloquence until Abraham. The only exception is Noah commending his sons Shem and Japheth with a prophetic blessing, since he intuitively foresaw what was going to happen in the far-off future."

[36] *CD* XVI.xii: *Nunc iam videamus procursum civitatis Dei etiam ab illo articulo temporis qui factus est in patre Abraham, unde incipit esse notitia eius evidentior, et ubi clariora leguntur promissa divina quae nunc in Christo videmus impleri.*

history, pointing out the location of a joint that would otherwise remain hidden from us. Knowing about these articulations can prove invaluable for breaking down the meaning of the narratives that take place in their wake. In the relatively lucid account that makes up most of Book XVI, Augustine recounts the earthly trials and successes of Abraham and his offspring. Providence stands out as eminently visible here. By and large, pious action is met with earthly rewards. Impious action fares less well.

Augustine's retelling of Scripture continues to operate within these parameters of visible providence all the way down through King Saul. When he comes to David, at the end of Book XVI, he again draws our attention to the way Scripture can highlight the *articuli temporis*. He does so, however, in a rather allusive way. Rather than laying out the whole sequence of the ages of humanity, he refers to them in an almost off-hand way, as if he expected his audience to already possess some familiarity with this scheme:

> With David, there was made a certain joint [*articulus*]: the beginning, in a way, of the youth of the people of God. The adolescence of humankind, if you will, lasted from Abraham down to David. The evangelist Matthew did not recount these generations in vain. He attributed forty such generations to this first interval (from Abraham to David). From adolescence, then, humanity gained the ability to 'generate.' And so the count of generations begins with Abraham, who was made the father of peoples when he received his name change. Before him, then, the people of God were in their childhood (from Noah to Abraham). This is when language (Hebrew, that is) was discovered. People begin to speak in childhood, after all, once infancy is over. 'Infancy,' of course, means 'inability to speak.' Our forgetfulness submerges this first stage of life, just as the first stage of humankind was destroyed by the flood. How many people could there be who can recall their infancy?[37]

---

[37] *CD* XVI.xliii: *In quo [i.e. David] articulus quidam factus est et exordium quodam modo iuventutis populi Dei; cuius generis quaedam velut adulescentia ducebatur ab ipso Abraham usque ad hunc David. Neque enim frustra Matthaeus evangelista sic generationes commemoravit ut hoc primum intervallum quattuordecim generationibus commendaret, ab Abraham scilicet usque ad David. Ab adulescentia quippe incipit homo posse generare; propterea generationum ex Abraham sumpsit exordium; qui etiam pater gentium constitutus est, quando mutatum nomen accepit. Ante hunc ergo velut pueritia fuit huius generis populi Dei a Noe usque ad ipsum Abraham; et ideo in lingua inventa est, id est Hebraea. A pueritia namque homo incipit loqui post infantiam, quae hinc appellata est quod fari non potest. Quam profecto aetatem primam demergit oblivio, sicut aetas prima generis humani est deleta diluvio. Quotus enim quisque est, qui suam recordetur infantiam?* On this sixfold periodization, see Green's

Augustine introduces this six-age analogy in reverse. Starting with the strength of youth (from David onward), he moves back through the reproductive power of adolescence (from Abraham to David), past the linguistic development of childhood (from Noah to Abraham), and into the oblivion of infancy (from Adam to Noah). This is an oblique way of providing the reader with a scheme of historical periodization. It is not immediately obvious why Augustine introduces this parallel between personal and historical life-stages in such an incomplete way here. The most probable explanation, though, might be that the whole outline of humankind's historical life cannot really be grasped until we have worked through the whole thing. Only at the end could we take stock of its joints and movements. *In medias res*, our picture of history could only be partial.

Perhaps that is why Augustine does not lay out his six-age theory in full until the very last passages of the entire *City of God*. If we briefly skip ahead to the end of Book XXII, we can sketch out the final few eras of articulated time. There, Augustine drops the parallel with the six stages of human life (infancy, childhood, and so on), reverting instead to the model of the hexaemeron. "If we calculate the number of the ages as if they were days," he writes, "according to the joints of time [*articulos temporis*] that Scripture seems to make clear, then there will obviously appear to be a Sabbath, since that is the seventh day."[38] Everything, again, begins with Adam. Noah is the hinge between the first and second age; Abraham between the second and

---

introduction in the Loeb edition, ix-x: "This world history is presented in a scheme of six ages. Augustine found a Biblical warrant for his plan in the first chapter of Matthew, where, in the genealogy of Jesus, three periods of fourteen generations each are marked off, beginning with Abraham, David, and the Babylonian Captivity. To complete the scheme Augustine adds two preceding periods beginning with Adam and Noah, and one following, which begins with Christ. These six ages correspond to the six days of creation, and are to be followed by a seventh day, a Sabbath of eternal rest for the people of God. The ages correspond also to six periods of a man's life: infancy, childhood, adolescence, young manhood, settled life and old age (*infantia, pueritia, adulescentia, iuventus, gravitas, senectus*). Though the plan is frequently referred to at different points in the *City of God*, it is nowhere formally presented, but is casually referred to as something presumably familiar to the reader. The pattern, however, is made sufficiently clear at the end of Book XVI."

[38] *CD* XXII.xxx: *Ipse etiam numerus aetatum, veluti dierum, si secundum eos articulos temporis computetur qui scripturis videtur expressi, iste sabbatismus evidentius apparebit, quoniam septimus invenitur.*

third; David between the third and fourth; the Babylonian exile between the fourth and fifth; and, almost finally, Christ between the fifth and sixth.[39] Though Augustine does not do so here, we can correlate each of these periods to the aforementioned stages of life: in addition to infancy, childhood, adolescence, and youth, we now have an entry into adulthood (leading up to the Incarnation) and then the old age of the world (after Christ). The joint connecting this sixth age of senescence to a supposed seventh would have to be the eschaton. That fits in well with the structure of the *City of God*, since, by the end of Book XXII, we will have already become acquainted with the eschatological endpoint of all things. For now, it is enough to note what Augustine has to say about the immeasurability of our *saeculum*. "The sixth age is happening now," he writes, "but it cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it is written: 'It is not for you to know the times that the Father, in His power, put in place.'"[40] The measurable dimensions of the previous ages stand in stark contrast to the hazy outlines of our own. Its contours will remain unclear until the sixth day has come to a close.

But we should not rush ahead to the eschatological climax of Augustine's work. Back in Book XVII, then, Augustine offers up some alternative historical schemata.[41] Sometimes he prefers to divide things up into prophetic and non-prophetic times. The true prophetic age, in his

---

[39] *CD* XXII.xxx: *ut prima aetas tamquam primus dies sit ab Adam usque ad diluvium, secunda inde usque ad Abraham, non aequalitate temporum, sed numero generationum; denas quippe habere reperiuntur. Hinc iam, sicut Matthaeus evangelista determinat, tres aetates usque ad Christi subsequuntur adventum, quae singulae denis et quaternis generationibus explicantur: ab Abraham usque ad David una, altera inde usque ad transmigrationem in Babyloniam, tertia inde usque ad Christi carnalem nativitatem. Fiunt itaque omnes quinque.* / "So the first 'day' or age would be from Adam to the flood; the second from the flood to Abraham. These two are equal not in spans of time, but in number of generations. Both are found to have ten. From here on we have, as Matthew determined in his gospel, three subsequent ages up to the arrival of Christ. He explains that each of these ages has fourteen generations. So the third age runs from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to the Babylonian exile; and the fifth from the exile to the birth of Christ in the flesh. So far we have five altogether."

[40] *CD* XXII.xxx, citing Acts. 1:7.

[41] Breisach, 86, cautions us against overestimating the importance of any such schemata in this work of Augustine's: "It is significant that after all the efforts at periodization Augustine did not subject the *City of God* to a particular scheme of order. He must have found it difficult to contain the dynamic relationship between the City of God and the Earthly City within the limits of such a scheme. Nevertheless, the fact that he elaborated on these schemes gave them considerable status in the eyes of later historians."

estimation, would run from Samuel down to John the Baptist. After that, there could be no prophecy in the old sense. There would be only the advent of Christ and the subsequent *interim saeculum*. In the time that remains of that "mortal *saeculum*," humanity's relationship to its earthly future could only grow less and less assured. At the same time, its outlook would come to be more and more focused on an eschatological future. Augustine reads this transfer of attention from a proximate to a deferred future into another historical shift: that from the visible providence of the Old Testament to the invisible promises of the New.[42]

There is much to be lamented in the trials and failures of this life. Augustine is quick to admit that. His response, however, is not to press harder for speedy success, but to look to the Psalms so as to express that lamentation more eloquently and with a collective voice. As with his reflections on personal conversion, fraught as it is with uncertainty and preserved only through perseverance, here Augustine turns to the idea of an ultimate end. And so he comes back to Psalm 89: "How long will you be turned away, Lord? Until the end?" The possibility is becoming more and more likely. "But when it said 'until the end,'" Augustine asks about this passage, "what does this mean if not 'right up until the end?' This 'end' should be understood as the last time."[43]

---

[42] Here again, Augustine has opened the door for a theology of supersession. Even though he is in no way aiming to disparage the patriarchs of the Hebrew Scriptures, he is still contributing to the creation of a dichotomy between fleshliness and spirituality that will have a long, troubling history in the centuries following him.

[43] For the whole passage, see *CD* XVII.xi: *Post haec autem prophetata ad precandum Deum propheta convertitur; sed et ipsa precatio prophetatio est. 'Usque quo, Domine, avertis in finem?' [Ps. 89:46] subauditur 'faciem tuam,' sicut alibi dicitur: 'Quo usque avertis faciem tuam a me?' [Ps. 13:1] Nam ideo quidam codices hic non habent 'avertis,' sed 'averteris;' quamquam possit intelligi: 'Avertis misericordiam tuam, quam promisisti David.' Quod autem dixit: 'In finem,' quid est nisi usque in finem? Qui finis intellegendus est ultimum tempus, quando in Christum Iesum etiam gens illa est creditura, ante quem finem illa fieri oportebant quae superius aerumnosa deflevit.* / "After prophesying all these things, the prophet is turned to praying to God. But this prayer is also a prophecy: 'Until when, Lord? Are you turned away until the end?' You should also hear 'your face' here, as is said elsewhere: 'How long will you turn your face away from me?' That is why certain manuscripts do not have 'turn away' here, but rather 'will have turned away.' Although we could interpret it also as: 'You are turning away your mercy, which you promised to David.' But when it said 'until the end,' what does this mean if not 'right up until the end?' This 'end'

Earlier, we saw Augustine's growing suspicions about any claims to certainty concerning one's own status as just or unjust, pious or impious in the eyes of God. Before the eschatological judgment of all, such claims are hopelessly premature. If made before someone's death, they are even dangerous. Augustine returns to this theme, on both a historical and a personal level, in Book XVII. The divine judgment of everything is not subject to the fluctuations of someone's life or of everyone's history. God's 'years' stand still as ours fly by.[44] His decision is not informed by the vagaries of the times, but only by their end result. "What changes for better or worse in the intervening time will not be judged," writes Augustine, adding, "What will be judged is what will be found at the very end. That is why it was said: 'Whoever will have persevered until the end will be saved.'"[45] The logic of perseverance, extended even to the most grandiose historical scale, should make us wary of judging anything that happens in the meantime of our *interim saeculum*.

For now, everything is a mortal mix-up. Instead of having direct access to the points of articulation that give shape to history, we can only speculate vainly. Augustine has no trouble finding Scriptural allusions to this human exercise of *vanitas*—a word that is rightly associated with vanity as pride, but which also suggests a kind of emptiness. It is not simply that, in our deciphering of the meaning of history, we are vain. It is also that our attempts to decipher are

---

should be understood as the last time, when even that race [viz. the Jewish people] is going to believe in Jesus Christ. Before this end, all those horrible things lamented above ought to come to pass."

[44] *CD* XVII.iv: *Ibi enim stant anni, hic autem transeunt, immo pereunt; antequam veniant enim, non sunt; cum autem venerint, non erunt, quia cum suo fine veniunt*. / "There, the years stand still, but here they pass by or even perish. Before they arrived, they were not. But when they will have arrived, they will not be, since they arrive with their own ending."

[45] *CD* XVII.iv, citing Matt. 24:13: *quoniam non iudicabuntur quae in melius vel in deterius medio tempore commutantur, sed in quibus extremis inventus fuerit qui iudicabitur. Propter quod dictum est: 'Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit*.' The entirety of the fourth chapter of Book XVII deserves a much fuller analysis than there is room for here. In his reading of the speech of Hannah from 1 Samuel, Augustine tries to weave together his insights into history and inscrutable providence with his teachings about grace, humility, and the process of justification. If we could succeed in weaving together all of those threads in one reading of Augustine, we would probably come as close as is humanly possible to an 'Augustinian' perspective on humanity's place in the world.

always in vain. Divorced from the select turning-points of Scripture, such efforts are quite pointless. Perhaps, in some hypothetical state where humanity had never fallen from paradise, we would not be plagued by these blind spots. "But now, certainly," counters Augustine, "through the sin of the first man, every human nature has fallen from truth to emptiness. On account of this, another psalm says: 'Humanity has become like emptiness; its days pass like shadows.'"[46]

This dim view of our days can only be brightened if we set them next to the illumination of Scripture. Only there, in Augustine's view, do we get something like the beginning and the end of the story. Even if we cannot fill in all the gaps in between—as we indeed cannot when it comes to the oblique history of our *saeculum*—we can still orient ourselves towards the absolute beginning of humanity (in Adam) and its absolute end in the eschaton. If we fail to appreciate how remarkable these extreme bookends are in relation to the rest of history, we will risk deluding ourselves by bringing pseudo-eschatological clarity into the present age.[47]

Augustine makes this clear when he turns to yet another Scriptural passage nearer the end of Book XVII. Leaving aside the Psalms for a moment, he points our attention to a possibly unexpected section of Ecclesiastes. "'Woe to the land whose king is a child and whose princes eat in the morning,'" it says (according to Augustine's version), "'Blessed is the land whose king

---

[46] For the full passage, see *CD* XVII.xi: *Nunc vero omnis quidem humana natura per peccatum primi hominis in vanitatem de veritate conlapsa est, propter quod dicit alius psalmus: 'Homo vanitati similis factus est, dies eius velut umbra praetereunt;' [Psalm 144:4] sed non vane Deus constituit omnes filios hominum, quia et multos a vanitate liberat per mediatorem Iesum, et quos liberandos non esse praescivit, ad utilitatem liberandorum et comparationem duarum inter se a contrario civitatum non utique vane in totius rationalis creaturae pulcherrima atque iustissima ordinatione constituit*. / "But now, certainly, through the sin of the first man, every human nature has fallen from truth to emptiness. On account of this, another psalm says: 'Humanity has become like emptiness; its days pass like shadows.' But God did not create all of the children of humanity in vain. He liberates many from emptiness through Jesus, the mediator. As for those whom He knows in advance are not going to be liberated—He did not create them in vain either. In his most beautiful and just ordering of all rational creation, He created such people for the use of those who will be liberated, so that the two cities could be compared, one against the other."

[47] On these 'bookends,' see Löwith, 168-169: "With reference to these supra-historical points of origin [creation] and destination [eschaton], history itself is an interim between the past disclosure of its sacred meaning and its future fulfilment. … Only by this reference to an absolute beginning and end has history as a whole a meaning."

is the son of nobles and whose princes eat at the proper time, in strength, not in confusion.'"[48] Augustine does not hesitate to associate the child-king with the devil and the son of nobles with Christ. Their respective kingdoms thus correspond to the earthly and heavenly cities, respectively. But here the cities are distinguished not on account of static qualities, but rather with reference to their timing:

> The princes of the devil's city dine 'in the morning,' that is, before the proper hour, since they are not awaiting that opportune happiness that truly is in the age to come. Instead, they rush ahead, wanting to be blessed by fame in this age. But the princes of the city of Christ wait patiently for the time of the happiness that is not false. It says 'in strength, not in confusion,' because the Apostle was not talking about a deceptive hope when he said, 'Hope does not confuse.' And as the Psalm goes: 'those who await You will not be confused.'[49]

The devil's breakfast feasts on false certainty. By trying to drag eschatological clarity back into our own time, his princes use worldly fame and happiness to lure humanity towards an embrace of emptiness. From the earlier books of the *City of God*, we already know how little those kinds of temporal gains matter next to the timeless security of the eternal. The proper stance, according to Augustine, is not a proud seizing of the future for the present, but rather a kind of humble awaiting.[50] Any attempt to disentangle the hidden threads of history before all is said and done can only end in more confusion. Any attempt to break the fast of the *saeculum* can only end in a kind of demonic indigestion. It would seem best to leave the feast for later.

---

[48] *CD* XVII.xx: *'Vae tibi, terra,' inquit, 'cuius rex adulescens, et principes tui mane comedunt. Beata tu, terra, cuius rex tuus filius ingenuorum, et principes tui in tempore comedunt, in fortitudine, et non in confusione.'*

[49] *CD* XVII.xx: *Principes illius civitatis mane manducantes, id est ante horam congruam, quia non expectant oportunam quae vera est in futuro saeculo felicitatem, festinanter beari huius saeculi celebritate cupientes; principes autem civitatis Christi tempus non fallacis beatitudinis patienter expectant. Hoc ait: 'In fortitudine, et non in confusione,' quia non eos fallit spes de qua dicit apostolus: 'Spes autem non confundit;' [Rom. 5:5] dicit et psalmus: 'Etenim qui te expectant, non confundentur.' [Ps. 25:3]*

[50] On awaiting, see J. Kevin Coyle, "Adapted Discourse: Heaven in Augustine's *City of God* and in His Contemporary Preaching," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 205-219, esp. 219: "Perhaps most importantly, Augustine's homilies and the *City of God* hold in common that their author always speaks calmly and with hope of the future—a future where present disasters do not happen, because human minds are no longer able to frustrate the grand design of God. This is no escape mechanism, but an invitation to search for this life's true purpose and to await in God's good time the moment when this life and this being will be transformed."

Conclusion

In his rather poetic rendition of one of Heraclitus' fragments, the writer Guy Davenport gave us the following: "Joints are and are not parts of the body. They cooperate through opposition, and make a harmony of separate forces. Wholeness arises from distinct particulars; distinct particulars occur in wholeness."[51] Something like this understanding of 'joints' might help us get at what Augustine is doing with the *articuli temporis* throughout the *City of God*. When it comes to making sense of history, we feel a need to posit turning-points, hinges around which all other events revolve and from which they gain their significance. We usually do so belatedly, after the fact. But even then, determining which of the multiplicity of past events deserves to be elevated above the rest is no easy task. The historian often struggles to justify that kind of selectivity.[52] And yet, without it, what stories could we tell? Without joints or turning-points, we would seem to be left with the endless onslaught of empty, homogeneous events. There would be no story to tell.

For all their apparent necessity, though, it remains difficult to prove whether these seminal events are really part of the flow of historical time itself. Perhaps, like Aristotle's points on a line, they are merely retrospective markers that we posit in order to give ourselves a more manageable picture. They may not really be there within the past itself, just like a true point has

---

[51] Davenport, *Herakleitos and Diogenes* (San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1981), 30. The fragment comes down to us from Pseudo-Aristotle; see Diels, no. 10. Another imperfect translation would be: "Joinings are wholes and not wholes. What is brought together is brought apart; what is sung together is sung apart. One comes from all while all come from one." Whether or not Davenport's rendering of Heraclitus is philologically acceptable, its poetic resonances remain fitting here.

[52] All of this is related to the question of whether or not Augustine was a good historian or even a historian at all. In response to those who would criticize Augustine for his seeming inability to live up to the standards of ancient historiography, Löwith, 172, wrote: "But it is precisely the absence of a detailed correlation between secular and sacred events which distinguishes Augustine's Christian apology from Bossuet's more elaborate theology of political history and from Hegel's philosophy of history, both of which prove too much by deducing guarantees of salvation and success from historical events. What to us seems a lack in Augustine's understanding and appreciation of secular history is due to his unconditional recognition of God's sovereignty in promoting, frustrating, or perverting the purposes of man."

no place within a pure continuum. Punctual events and historical passage might just be two very different ways of approaching humanity's life in time. Turning points seem to be part of time, in that we can only make sense of time and measure out historical periods by positing them. Yet they are not part of time, in that even our historical awareness is disrupted by the unsteadiness and uncertainty that plague our temporal consciousness at every level. These joints, like those of Heraclitus, are and are not part of the whole which they serve to articulate.

Augustine's *articuli temporis*, though, give him a way of affixing such joints to the mechanism of history itself. For him, the joints marked out by Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, the Exile, and Christ are not relativistic suppositions (though they do remain tellingly retrospective). They are the only signs of true stability and order amid the otherwise incomprehensible disorder of human history. Through Scripture, Augustine is able to regain some degree of certainty, but this comes at a cost. By relying on Scriptural authority to guarantee the integrity of these joints of time, Augustine closes off the possibility of their appearance once the narrative of Scripture has come to a close.[53] After the gospel, after the event of Christ, there is only the dead calm of the *saeculum*. To posit turning-points on the level of the old *articuli temporis* is not merely unadvisable, but even diabolical.

Not even the Sack of Rome, then, would count as a new hinge in history. It remains an event in some colloquial sense, to be sure, but it does not enable the opening of a door to some new age—not even to the *tempora Christiana*, for better or for worse. Augustine's response to his opponents' interpretation of history is not, then, simply the opposite interpretation of that same history. It is instead a questioning of the human capacity to interpret history as we live

---

[53] See Markus, 43: "Augustine had come to see 'sacred history' as confined to the history to be found within the scriptural canon, and he came to deny this status to any other interpretations of historical events. Beyond this, all history is starkly secular, that is to say, it is incapable of being treated in terms of its place in the history of salvation."

through it in our present age, in the *interim saeculum*. Insofar as that is Augustine's approach, he may be drawing close to another fragment of Heraclitus (again, in Davenport's rendering): "Good days and bad days, says Hesiod, forgetting that all days are alike."[54] The sentiment seems to have been passed on by the Stoics. "One day," paraphrased Seneca, "is like any other."[55] Augustine looks to be taking a similar stance, though the conclusions he will draw would be impossible to frame as Stoic. The proper response to the emptiness of history is not to close oneself off from vulnerability to its vacillations. There is no refuge to be found in the present.[56] Instead, Augustine calls us to humbly open ourselves up to the way that temporality conditions us at every level of our lives.

When it comes to personal transformation, we have to remember that the future brings upon us yet more unforeseen upheavals. This teaching is already there in 1 Corinthians: "if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall."[57] When it comes to historical transformation, likewise, we must reserve certain judgments for the very end, when the whole story will have been told. "Do not pronounce judgment before the time," advises Paul, earlier in the same letter.[58] The meaning of history, in its full articulation, will only become clear when its Edenic beginnings are brought to fulfilment in an eschatological climax. Such meaning comes late, in other words—much later than the relatively short-term delay involved in the historian's glance back at the past. Next, we will have to throw these bookends of time and history into

---

[54] Davenport, 27.
[55] Seneca, Epistle XII.vii.
[56] Augustine's approach might then be put into constructive contrast with a number of ancient thinkers, Stoic or otherwise. It remains to be seen whether or not his texts would lend themselves to the kind of retrieval of sources from antiquity attempted by Pierre Hadot. This approach of Hadot's, as well as his affinity for the Stoic take on the present, can be gleaned from the interviews in *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, ed. Jeanne Cartier and Arnold I. Davidson (Stanford UP, 2009).
[57] 1 Cor. 10:12 (NRSV): ὥστε ὁ δοκῶν ἑστάναι βλεπέτω μὴ πέσῃ.
[58] 1 Cor. 4:5 (NRSV): ὥστε μὴ πρὸ καιροῦ τι κρίνετε. Here Paul writes *pro kairou*, which raises the question of how we are to relate Augustine's *articuli temporis* back to the Pauline *kairos*. There is no space to do justice to that relationship here, unfortunately, but it should be marked out as a future field of inquiry.

sharper relief by turning to the remaining books in the *City of God*. By doing so, we will finally be able to say more about Augustine's distinction between the two cities, since we can only grasp the subtlety of that distinction if we set it within the context of an absolute end and an absolute future.

Chapter 7: The Conclusion of History

For Augustine, the search for an absolute end and an absolute future remains an exercise in Scriptural exegesis. We have already seen how much work Genesis does for him in establishing the two cities and setting in motion the articulations of time. Those articulations seem to culminate with the advent of Christ as told of in the New Testament. The *articulus temporis* that came about with Christ serves as a kind of meta-event, including within itself a whole range of temporal transformations: the Incarnation, the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, perhaps even the Pentecost. After that, according to Augustine, we are set adrift in the dark waters of the sixth age, living only by faith in what we do not see. Of course, Scripture does not really end with the gospels, the acts, or even the letters. It ends with the book of Revelation. It ends with the ultimate end.

Augustine's approach to transformation in time and history is ultimately eschatological. That is not to say that he imports into his own age some kind of imminent apocalypticism or millenarianism, though he may have been tempted to do so earlier in his career.[1] By the time of the last books of the *City of God*, though, Augustine's apocalyptic outlook has become more sober, more measured.[2] His is a deferred eschatology, emphasizing the interminable delay that

---

[1] For Augustine's rejection of carnal chiliasm, see *CD* XX.vii-ix. On this, see also Markus, *Saeculum*, 19-20, and Fredriksen, "Tyconius and Augustine," 21: "Against these two extremes, Tyconius and, following him, Augustine introduced in the late fourth and early fifth centuries a reading of John [i.e., Revelation] that affirmed its historical realism while liberating it from the embarrassments of a literal interpretation." On the connection to Tyconius, see also Paul J. Harvey, Jr., "Approaching the Apocalypse: Augustine, Tyconius, and John's Revelation." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 133-151. In tracing Augustine's use of Tyconius through the Dolbeau sermons (not just in the City of God), Harvey builds conservatively but competently on the bases already established by W.H.C. Frend, John Rist, Paula Fredriksen, and especially Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

[2] We can already see his reservations about imminent-apocalyptic interpretations of contemporary events in Sermon 105, preached fairly shortly after the sack of Rome: "So let's not hide from this, brothers and sisters: there will be an end to every earthly kingdom. Only God can see if that end is now. Perhaps it's not yet the end. Perhaps, by some weakness, mercy, or even misery we wish it to be the case that the end is not yet. Even then—does that mean there won't be an end? Fix your hope in God. Desire the eternal. Wait for the eternal."

still lies between our present (wherever it might be) and the end of time as we know it. Christ's return is bound to strike us as a bit late.[3] That is why, even though Scripture does not keep silent about the future, Augustine does not try to rekindle the historiographical project of deciphering the proximate future out of the past.

No matter how fixed the *articuli temporis* dotting that past might be, they have been neutralized by the homogeneity of the *saeculum*. And no matter how boldly the author of Revelation spoke about the last times, his predictions will not help us sift through the heap of historical events as they continue to pile up. As a result, the perspective we are forced to adopt is again one of belatedness. We cannot catch up with history. This belatedness, though, afflicts humanity on a global scale, rather than at the level of each individual human life. It is a belatedness that affects whole communities. We are each of us, according to Augustine, out of step with our own personal changes, awaiting some kind of conclusion that would tell us who we have really become. We might think we reach that conclusion with death. But, as a whole, we remain also out of step with the historical transformations that are always destabilizing our present age. There too we are forced to wait on the end of the story, which would be the passing away not merely of one person, but of the form of the whole world.[4]

---

[3] Marrou, *L'Ambivalence*, 21-22, points out that this apparent 'belatedness' on the part of God is not at all a bad thing: "When is the proclaimed return of the Lord going to come and consummate history? Thanks especially to 1 Thessalonians, we know that the first generation of Christians posed this question keenly and passionately, once the belatedness of the *Parousia* became clear. […] The belatedness of the *parousia* is measured out quite exactly by the delay necessary for the building up of the Church. When the number of saints is complete, history will stop, having reached its end. […] In his prolongation of the texts of the New Testament, to which I will return, Augustine put it plainly: 'if the Judge delays our salvation, this is out of love, not indifference; this is by design, not due to impotence. If he had wanted to, he could arrive at this very instant. But he waits, so that the last of all of our number can be brought to completion.' (*ut numerus omnium nostrum usque in finem possit impleri*; *En. Ps.* 34.2.9)" It is only our attempts to compensate for our own historical belatedness that tempt us to try to fix the date of Christ's arrival.

[4] Cf. 1 Cor. 7:31: παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου.

Gifts Deferred

In Book XIII of the *City of God*, Augustine already sketches out for us the twin bookends of his eschatological history of human life. Death is the reality that links them together. In the beginning, Adam fell from the garden and was cursed with mortality. In the end, all will be brought back to life, spared from the maw of death either to live forever or to die an incomparably worse 'second death.' Augustine has much to say about what happened in the garden of Eden, and here we cannot hope to cover every topic he explores. What is most relevant, for our purposes, is his emphasis on the way that the mortality and sinfulness of all humans is derived from the very first one. Book XIII sees Augustine defending his interpretation of original sin against all comers, including both those who held higher hopes for human capabilities (like Pelagius) and those who simply abhorred the idea of unbaptized infants going to Hell for a crime they did not commit.[5] For Augustine, though, no unsightly outcome could prevent the conclusion that human sinfulness runs so deep that it must be contracted at birth. It is from this kind of debilitating sin that Christ, the Second Adam, came to save us. Augustine would thus greet any attempt to modify his teachings on original sin as a denigration of the decisive event that was the Incarnation.

Moreover, he took Romans 6:23 to heart: "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."[6] Mortality itself, not just sinfulness, was passed down to the current generation of people from Adam. Again, the work of the Second Adam can only be appreciated in light of this. Christ's crucifixion and resurrection constitute a victory over

---

[5] Thomas A. Smith, "The Pleasure of Hell in *City of God* 21," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 195-204, sees Augustine as walking a fine line between a (Tertullian-style) gleeful embrace of a rigorously punishing Hell and the (supposedly more Neoplatonic) Alexandrian Hell of temporary purgation. Nevertheless, most readers would probably find Augustine to be more of a Tertullian than an Origen in *CD* XXI.

[6] This is the NRSH rendering; the SBL Greek New Testament has: τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

death. But the occurrence of such events did not remove all death and decay from our present age. Rather, the full significance of the Christ-event will not be gleaned until a second resurrection has taken place. This is the general resurrection of all, which will take place at the eschaton, once the Second Adam has arrived for a second time. Only with that time-ending event will the advent of death be overcome by the actuality of life without death.

By bookending human history with the first death and the final resurrection, Augustine has reaffirmed the centrality of the body. Back in Book IV of the *Confessions*, we saw that our belatedness in time had much to do with our sense of the flesh. It is the *sensus carnis* that is *tardus*. We might be tempted, then, to think that the solution to such sluggishness would be to slough off the body entirely. It is only the body that dies, after all. Why not greet death as a liberation from slow flesh? Why not let the soul fly away from its corporeal constraints, and perhaps even away from its temporal constraints?

By the time of Book XIII of the *City of God*, Augustine has clearly rejected the vision of humanity as a mass of noble souls trapped in ignoble bodies. To be human is to be embodied. The soul's separation from its body at death is not a liberation, but a painful estrangement. The body is its intimate partner, not its corruptor. In fact, corruption flows the other way. It is the sinful disjunction of the soul that puts the body out of sorts. This could already be seen in Book VIII of the *Confessions*, where it is the *distentio* of the will that keeps Augustine decentered throughout his own temporal experience. The body writhes, but this is only a manifestation of the hidden writhing of the sick soul within.

Belatedness, then, is not really brought about by bodies. It does have to do with the 'flesh,' but this is, more specifically, the flesh that wars against the spirit. It is 'flesh' as a moral, psychological category. The temporal body, then, might indeed be able to overcome belatedness,

but it could do so only if it were somehow made spiritual rather than fleshly. That, according to Augustine, is not possible in this life. But what is impossible now can become possible later, at the eschaton:

> Spirit that serves flesh is not unfittingly called 'fleshly.' Likewise, flesh that serves spirit is rightly called 'spiritual'—not because it is converted into spirit. No one thinks that when they read: 'It is sown an ensouled body, it will rise a spiritual body.' Rather, such flesh is called spiritual because it is subdued by the spirit. It obeys spirit with a supreme and surprising ease, so that the most secure will of indissoluble immortality is fulfilled. Such flesh has lost all sense of trouble, all decay, all belatedness [*tarditas*].[7]

There is a remedy for belatedness, but we do not have it yet.[8] Luckily for us, in Augustine's view, we know who the doctor is. We have faith in Him. We are hoping for the cure to our illness, our sin. We are waiting for it. But we do not have it now. Even the sacrament of baptism does not quicken our pace.[9] Presuming it to have already altered our embodied experience of time would only be pride and self-deception. Better, Augustine thinks, to wait on grace.

---

[7] *CD* XIII.xx: *Sicut enim spiritus carni serviens non incongrue carnalis, ita caro spiritui serviens recte appellabitur spiritalis, non quia in spiritum convertetur, sicut nonnulli putant ex eo quod scriptum est: 'Seminatur corpus animale, surget corpus spiritale,' sed quia spiritui summa et mirabili obtemperandi facilitate subdetur usque ad implendam immortalitatis indissolubilis securissimam voluntatem, omni molestiae sensu, omni corruptibilitate et tarditate detracta*.

[8] See also *CD* XIII.xxiv: *Sed homines ad Dei gratiam pertinentes, cives sanctorum angelorum in beata vita manentium, ita spiritalibus corporibus induentur ut neque peccent amplius neque moriantur, ea tamen inmortalitate vestiti quae, sicut angelorum, nec peccato possit auferri, natura quidem manente carnis, sed nulla omnino carnali corruptibilitate vel tarditate remanente*. / "Yet people who belong to the grace of God, fellow-citizens of the holy angels who remain in the blessed life, will be dressed in spiritual bodies so that they no longer sin or die. Though they, like the angels, will have put on the immortality that no sin can take away, the nature of the flesh will still remain. But none of the decay or belatedness of flesh will remain."

[9] *CD* XIII.xxiii: *Hoc apostolus ita posuit ut nunc quidem in nobis secundum sacramentum regenerationis fiat, sicut alibi dict: 'Quotquot in Christo baptizati estis Christum induistis.' Re autem ipsa tunc perficietur cum et in nobis quod est animale nascendo spiritale factum fuerit resurgendo. Ut enim eius itidem verbis utar: 'Spe salvi facti sumus.'* / "The Apostle puts it this way so that it now happens in us according to the sacrament of rebirth. As he says elsewhere, 'However many of you are baptized in Christ have put on Christ.' But such a thing will only be perfected when what is animal in us by birth is made spiritual in us by resurrection. If I might use his words again: 'We have been saved by hope.'" That is not to say that Augustine denigrates the role of baptism, as can be seen later in XX.vi, when he is discussing the fate of those who will not persevere: *Mala quippe egerunt, quoniam male vixerunt; male autem vixerunt, quia in prima, quae nunc est, animarum resurrectione non revixerunt, aut in eo quod revixerant non in finem usque manserunt*. / "They have done evil, since they lived in an evil way. But they lived in an evil way because they were not reborn in the first resurrection of souls, which happens now. Or if they had been reborn, they did not remain until the end."

For now, though, body and soul strike us as out of step with one another. They do not share the same tempo. To see why, we have to leap back to the primordial events that led up to this disjunction. And so, with Book XIV, Augustine brings us back (yet again) to Genesis, where creation and history coincide. He reminds us that the beginning of sin—both historically and in principle—lies not in the flesh, but in the mind. Its name is pride. Such *superbia* consists in the error of making yourself your own *principium*, as if you did not derive from something prior, as if a fundamental passivity did not condition your entire existence.[10] It is this corruption of the mind that, through the story of Adam, leads to the decay of the body. Our thoughts, then, are more deserving of the pejorative 'carnal' than are our bodies. The problem with those bodies is not their corporeality, but rather their decay unto death over time. As that decay grows, as we die all those little deaths along the way, we are not able to keep up with our own mutability. And all of this, again, is only a consequence of the soul's original sin.

The result of this disjunction within temporal life is, in Augustine's words, a "disobedience to ourselves." The most obvious way to frame this is in terms of a three-tiered hierarchy: God is at the top, then comes the soul, and at the bottom we find the body. The body should, ideally, obey its soul, as the soul should do the same in relation to God. But when, in Eden, the soul disobeyed its God, the body turned on its soul. This is an accurate description of Augustine's position, so far as it goes. But this hierarchical model can also be misleading. It is not simply that our stubborn members resist our will to move them, but that our will itself cannot will what it thinks it wants. This is the deeper effect of our ongoing punishment for Adam's sin. "What disobedience would there be in the punishment of that sin, save for retributive disobedience?" asks Augustine, "What other human misery is this besides our own disobedience

[10] *CD* XIV.iii.

to ourselves? The result is that, since we do not want to do what we can do, we want to do what we cannot do."[11] There is a disjunction here between volition and possibility. Our ambition is pushing us out beyond the confines of our condition.

As we know already from Book VIII of the *Confessions*, though, the problem runs deeper than that. It is not simply that we want to do things that we cannot quite manage to pull off. Worse still is that we cannot even will ourselves to will. Again, Augustine challenges us with a question:

> Who could count how many things humanity wants to do that it cannot do? Meanwhile, it does not obey itself. That is, its soul, and through that its inferior flesh, does not obey its will. Against our will, the soul is often disturbed. Against our will, the flesh undergoes pain and grows old and dies and suffers whatever else it might suffer. But we would not suffer against our will, if only our nature would obey our will in every way and in all of its parts.[12]

Such obedience remains impossible in this life, where volitional *distentio* unsettles even the most heartfelt of conversions. From this, the full wages of sin start to become clear. The problem is not that we are corporeal; the body is a good, as the Incarnation itself so blatantly reminded us. The problem is not that we are temporal; Adam seems to have moved about in something like time, insofar as he was living neither in divine peace with the angels nor in the timeless stasis of God. The problem is not even limited to impermanence, since death itself can have a redemptive

---

[11] For the full passage, see *CD* XIV.xv: *Denique, ut brevitur dicatur, in illius peccati poena quid inoboedientiae nisi inoboedientia retributa est? Nam quae hominis est alia miseria nisi adversus eum ipsum inoboedientia eius ipsius, ut, quoniam noluit quod potuit, quod non potest velit? In paradiso enim etiamsi non omnia poterat ante peccatum, quidquid tamen non poterat, non volebat, et ideo poterat omnia quae volebat. Nunc vero, sicut in eius stirpe cognoscimus et divina scriptura testatur, 'homo vanitati similis factus est.'* / "Lastly, to put it briefly, what disobedience would there be in the punishment of that sin, save for retributive disobedience? What other human misery is this besides our own disobedience to ourselves? The result is that, since we do not want to do what we can do, we want to do what we cannot do. Even in paradise before sin, humanity could not do all things. Still, it did not want whatever it could not do. And so it could do all the things it wanted to do. But now, as divine scripture attests, 'humanity has become like emptiness.' We can recognize this in its offspring." Augustine is citing Psalm 144:4.

[12] *CD* XIV.xv: *Quis enim enumerat quam multa quae non potest velit dum sibi ipse, id est voluntati eius ipse animus eius eoque inferior caro eius, non obtemperat? Ipso namque invito, et animus plerumque turbatur et caro dolet et veterescit et moritur, et quidquid aliud patimur, quod non pateremur inviti si voluntati nostrae nostra natura omni modo atque ex omnibus partibus oboediret*.

value. Rather, the core of the problem is that we are out of step with ourselves, with our own wills. Our ongoing temporal experience is always destabilized from within, not only by the absence of any present moment, but also by the tension of our wills. "From this," writes Augustine, "the misery of humanity becomes clear: we cannot live as we want to live."[13] For us, at least, *distentio animi* is always accompanied by volitional *distentio*.

It would not be so for the "blessed," contends Augustine. But who are the blessed? Even those who appear just to us remain subject to time and confusion and passivity in this life. They "want to live but are forced to die," just like the rest of us.[14] All throughout their lives, they still cannot live as they think they want to live. The earlier books of the *City of God* taught that true happiness (*felicitas*) is not attainable in this life, because there is no safe harbor from its unforeseen trials. Claiming to be truly happy now would only open us up to deception and bring us further away from the thought of a felicity beyond the tumult of time. Here, in Book XIV, Augustine is applying much the same logic to the language of blessedness (*beatitudo*). As he writes:

> If it [blessedness] is loved as much as it ought to be loved—for whoever does not love the blessed life as it ought to be loved is not really blessed—then it cannot

---

[13] *CD* XIV.xxiv; the full passage is: *Donatus est itaque homo sibi quia deseruit Deum placendo sibi, et non oboediens Deo non potuit oboedire nec sibi. Hinc evidentior miseria qua homo non vivit ut vult. Nam si ut vellet viveret, beatum se putaret; sed nec sic tamen esset si turpiter viveret*. / "Deserting God and pleasing itself, humanity was given over to itself. Disobedient to God, it could not obey itself either. From this the misery of humanity becomes clear: we cannot live as we want to live. If we could live as we want to live, we would think that we were blessed; but still we would not be blessed if we lived shamefully."

[14] See *CD* XIV.xxv: *Quamquam si diligentius adtendamus, nisi beatus non vivit ut vult, et nullus beatus nisi iustus. Sed etiam ipse iustus non vivet ut vult nisi eo pervenerit ubi mori falli offendi omnino non possit eique sit certum ita semper futurum. Hoc enim natura expetit, nec plene atque perfecte beata erit nisi adepta quod expetit. Nunc vero quis hominum potest ut vult vivere quando ipsum vivere non est in potestate? Vivere enim vult, mori cogitur*. / "Although, if we pay careful attention: only the blesed live as they want to live. And no one is blessed unless they are just. But even the just will not live as they want to live unless they arrive there where they cannot be harmed or killed or deceived at all, there where they can be certain they will always be so. This is what nature seeks after, but it will not be fully and perfectly blessed until it has attained what it seeks. But what person is now able to live as they want to live? Living itself is not even in our power. We want to live but are forced to die."

> happen that whoever loves it thus would not want it to be eternal. Only then will life be blessed—when it is eternal.[15]

Both happiness and blessedness are best understood as deferred until the very end. It is not surprising that Augustine would resonate with himself here. For him, *felicitas* and *beatitudo* are closely bound up with one another. They are not discrete concepts, but different names for the same, atemporal state of pure security. That is why they are to be approached only in eschatological terms, so as to avoid mistaking them for temporal phenomena.[16]

It is this mistake—to grab hold of the temporal as if it were timeless—that ultimately marks the distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities. Book XIV is, after all, where we find the passage usually cited as a proof text for the two-city model:

> Two loves, then, made two cities. Love of oneself, up to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city. Love of God, up to the point of contempt for oneself, made the heavenly city. One is glorified in itself, the other is glorified in God.[17]

---

[15] *CD* XIV.xxv: *Porro si tantum amatur quantum amari digna est (non enim beatus est a quo ipsa beata vita non amatur ut digna est), fieri non potest ut eam qui sic amat non aeternam velit. Tunc igitur beata erit quando aeterna erit.* Cf. Avramenko, 783-784: "Theologically speaking, insofar as (temporal) man has fallen, he has fallen utterly away from (eternal) God, and therefore the human-divine unity required for true happiness becomes all but impossible. For the mature Augustine, this position becomes the basic experience of human existence and serves as the cornerstone for much of his political philosophy." Much of Avramenko's argument is formulated in conversation with John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

[16] Cf. Sermon 105, where Augustine exhorts his audience concerning the deferral of God's gifts: "Knock! He wants to give. But he defers what he wants to give you. When it's delayed, you deserve it all the more. If it were given too quickly, it would be worthless."

[17] *CD* XIV.xxviii: *Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui. Denique illa in se ipsa, haec in Domino gloriatur*. In XV.xviii, Augustine adds that the two cities can also be distinguished by two hopes—in humanity and the world (*transcursus saeculi mortalis*) or in God and the other-world (*immortalitas beatitudinis sempiternae*). Frend, 11-14, provides a helpful summary of how Augustine's two-cities doctrine was influenced by—while differing from—the exegetical work of the Donatist Tyconius. Tyconius already has the *duae civitates*, but, Donatist as he was, draws close to identifying the *civitas dei* with Donatist congregations. Augustine, rejecting that degree of apocalyptic clarity, works hard to undermine any such easy identifications. Markus, in *Saeculum*, 45-47, traces the development of the two-cities notion through Augustine's own earlier works, such as *De Vera Religione*, while also arguing that the two cities received a new kind of emphasis after the Sack of Rome. See also Harvey, "Approaching the Apocalypse," 148: "But Augustine's prominent use of Revelation in *City of God* does not imply that he followed Tyconius blindly. For while Tyconius offered—as we can see in the Budapest fragment of his *Commentary*—a method for comprehending Revelation within a recent historical framework, Augustine preferred less historical specificity in his reading of difficult *libri sancti.* Thus would Revelation be of greater utility to any Christian community, present or future, because it was, in modern critical parlance, an open text, suitable for any age."

The difference between temporal and eternal blessedness is reflected in the distinction between these two loves. Humanity's error is not merely a category mistake. It is misdirected affection. In the earlier books of the *City of God*, we saw the consequences of loving temporal goods as if they lasted forever. We saw this in Augustine's own mourning of his dead friend in Book IV of the *Confessions*. But here, after working through the story of Adam, we can now glimpse the summit of misdirected love for something that is bound to die: "love of oneself, up to the point of contempt for God." This is pride, in the specific and Edenic sense of taking ourselves to be our own starting-point (*principium*). It is the rejection of humility and the seizing of glory for ourselves—now, not later. But the cure for this self-deception, as we have seen, only comes later. Until then, we are entangled in the tensile strands of our own willing, while the concord of true happiness remains deferred.

Divisions Deferred

We have finally drawn closer to what all this talk of two cities is trying to accomplish. The dichotomies can now be strung together: heavenly city, earthly city; love of God, love of self; humility, pride; and so on. But the strange thing about this dualism is that it is not static. The boundaries of these two states do not appear to us as fixed across time and space. They seem to be shifting. Given how deeply Augustine sees temporality running beneath every aspect of human life, this should not surprise us. Our awareness of our own communities is just as unsettled and provisional as is our awareness of ourselves.

Augustine's story of the two cities does not really get going until Book XV of the *City of God*. By then, we have already become acquainted with the angels and demons as prolegomena to the coming division. And Augustine has already sketched out for us the bookends of eschatological time: the absolute past of Adam's fall and the absolute future of the final

resurrection. What remains is to bring us from the exceptional scene of the garden to the monotonous drone of historical time. For the first five ages, we know, Augustine can rely on Scripture for his Archimedean points. In Book XV, he begins to lay his narrative out in terms of these *articuli temporis*, taking us from Adam's sons to Noah's flood.[18] According to the six-part scheme, this is the first age, the infancy of humankind.

The character of that infancy was made clear as soon as the first child ever born was killed by the second. Cain, the first founder of 'cities' in the literal sense, inaugurated the history of the earthly city (in Augustine's sense) by slaying Abel. In doing so, he foreshadowed the fratricide at the heart of Rome, the greatest city of Augustine's own time. From initial concern over the possibility of Rome's violent demise, the *City of God* has taken us back to the violence that scarred its founding. In some sense, Augustine's relative devaluation of the historical destiny of states can be read all the way back into this critique of the violence that makes states possible. Even Rome, however dear it may have been to Augustine or his audience, could not escape being marked by the curse of Cain.

Yet, for all that, we cannot simply identify Rome with the 'earthly city.' To do so would be to attribute a level of visibility to providence that it cannot have for us, while at the same time opening ourselves up to an unacceptably high risk of historiographical *superbia*. Even within the relatively lucid history of the first age, Augustine admits, the division between the two cities was not at all obvious. After the Fall, there could be no more correlation between earthly successes and ultimate fates. The evil spread out to cover the earth, while the good are lost in the mix. Cain's statecraft is only an early example of how meaningless worldly gains can be.

---

[18] Significantly, in *CD* XV.iii-iv, Augustine steps out of his chronological order so that he can bring in a Pauline-allegorical interpretation of the children of Abraham. This helps him to acquaint his reader with the idea that God might favor certain 'lineages' (however defined) over others. With XV.v, we rejoin the linear chronology with a discussion of Cain.

The infancy of humankind, our first attempt at history, thus ends in total confusion and apparent failure. Only a divine incision could separate out the good from the bad, the worthy from the unworthy, in the world built up by Adam's offspring. That incision would come only in the form of Noah's flood. The divine violence of the deluge cut off the rotten majority of the human family, leaving only a small remnant to re-start the story of the heavenly city on earth. The seed of Cain looks to have been wiped out, while the lineage of Adam's third son, Seth, lives on through Noah. The end of Book XV thus arrives at the flood, the second joint in time, as a quite visible discerning of the two cities.

But just before that, Augustine feels compelled to make a special remark about one of the relatives connecting Adam to Noah: Enoch, who was somehow carried off to God, apparently without having to die in this life.[19] This story about Enoch could prove problematic for Augustine's purposes. It seems to take a razor to his eschatological framework, slicing out the time of delay that separates us from the very end. If Enoch can be directly translated into some heavenly realm, we might ask, why is it that we have to wait so long? Heading off such worries, Augustine is quick to make Enoch into an exceptional case:

> The translation of Enoch has prefigured the deferral [*dilatio*] of our own dedication. To be sure, this was done in Christ, our head, who rose to die no more, and was also translated. Yet another dedication remained for the universal house that has Christ as a foundation. This dedication is deferred until the end [*differtur in finem*], when all will be resurrected to die no more.[20]

---

[19] See Genesis 5:21-24, which can, of course, be interpreted in other ways.

[20] *CD* XV.xxiv: *Sed huius Enoch translatio nostrae dedicationis est praefigurata dilatio. Quae quidem iam facta est in Christo, capite nostro, qui si resurrexit ut non moriatur ulterius, sed etiam ipse translatus est. Restat autem altera dedicatio universae domus cuius ipse Christus est fundamentum, quae differtur in finem, quando erit omnium resurrectio non morturorum amplius. Sive autem domus Dei dicatur sive templum Dei sive civitas Dei, id ipsum est nec abhorret a Latini eloquii consuetudine*. The last sentence can be rendered as: "But whether we say 'house' or 'temple' or 'city' of God, it is all the same and we should not bristle against our customary Latin eloquence."

Augustine is emphatic about the delay that stands between us and this "dedication" of the house of Christ.[21] *Differre* is the operative verb here. Augustine repeats that the decisive dedication must be "deferred." To assume that we are already within the walls of such a divine house would be premature, even infantile. Instead, we might say that the rest of the heavenly city will have to await its confirmation at the eschaton—precisely in the way that Enoch did not.

For now, though, the residents of both cities are caught up in the same historical net, to borrow one of Augustine's idiosyncratic analogies. Caught fish that we are, we must wait to be sorted out on the eschatological shore. Once arrived there, the sun of justice will shine on all, dividing up that which is currently so intermingled. Augustine does not unfold the implications of this until deep into Book XVIII of the *City of God*. Having used Books XVI and XVII to retell the Scriptural *historia* up to the dawn of the end of the fifth age, he next tries to collate this timeline with that of the Roman historians. This leads him into a protracted discussion of relative chronology, the details of which will not detain us here. As he brings this long exercise to completion, he begins to reflect more deeply on how the two cities relate, beyond the question of chronology.

Late in Book XVIII, then, we find Augustine's fish analogy. The intermingling of the two cities in this world conditions even the constitution of the Church itself. Though Augustine of course held the institution of the Church in high regard, by the latter books of the *City of God* he has come out utterly against simply identifying it with the 'heavenly city.' The true city of god is made up of those who are truly chosen. But not even the Church itself—as a community or as an

[21] On this, see Frend, 14: "These ideas [about the deferral of the division of the two cities to the eschaton], together with the conviction that he himself had been saved from permanent error and self-seeking by an act of divine grace, were to provide the basis for his alternative vision of Christian destiny to the bland acceptance of the permanence of the *tempora Christiana* sustained by the Roman Empire."

institution—can identify all of those who have been chosen from all of those who have not. This is how Augustine describes the current situation:

> Many of the rejected are mixed in with good people. Both are gathered up in the Church, as if it were a net. Both swim in the sea of this world, and both are indiscriminately caught in the same net. But when they arrive at the shore, the evil will be separated out from the good. And 'God will be all in all' in the good, as if in His temple.[22]

The dedication of the house of God will, then, occur only on that eschatological shore. Until then, we are caught writhing about in the mixed net of the *saeculum*.[23] Even the visible Church is subject to invisible providence, and so it will continue to be deluged by a baffling mix of adversity and prosperity.

As usual, this calls for a humble response. But a particular kind of humility is needed. It cannot be the false, self-defeating humility that says, 'We are humble, they are proud.' As Augustine well knows, those kind of humble airs lead only to a more perverse pride and a more deadly sickness in the soul. Instead, what is needed is the humility to understand the provisional and relative status of such 'us against them' dichotomies. Those kinds of judgments are relative not on account of moral relativism or some other anachronistic liberality on Augustine's part. Rather, they remain provisional precisely because they are time-bound and so remain subject to temporal upheavals and reversals until the very end.

---

[22] *CD* XVIII.xlix: *multi reprobi miscentur bonis et utrique tamquam in sagenam evangelicam colliguntur et in hoc mundo tamquam in mari utrique inclusi retibus indiscrete natant, donec perveniatur ad litus, ubi mali segregentur a bonis et in bonis tamquam in templo suo 'sit Deus omnia in omnibus.'* Here Augustine cites 1 Cor. 15:28. Cf. XV.xxii, where Augustine, when discussing the Nephilim (of all things), attributes this process of intermingling to free choice: *Hoc itaque libero voluntatis arbitrio, genere humano progrediente atque crescente, facta est permixtio et, iniquitate participata, quaedam utriusque confusio civitatis*. / "As humankind moved forward and grew, a mixing-together occurred through this free choice of the will. With the full participation of injustice, a certain confusion took place between the two cities."

[23] See Markus, *Saeculum*, 133: "The saeculum for Augustine was the sphere of temporal realities in which the two 'cities' share an interest. In Augustine's language, the saeculum is the whole stretch of time in which the two cities are 'inextricably intertwined;' it is the sphere of human living, history, society and its institutions, characterized by the fact that in it the ultimate eschatological oppositions, though present, are not discernible…"

The pressing question that follows from all of this talk of the end is: when will it happen? If so much rests on the eschatological climax of history, then surely we ought to probe into its timeframe in some detail. Here again, though, Augustine advises caution. Wild-eyed apocalypticism, though tempting to so many Christians, is just another example of how we hubristically presume to read the signs of the times. And, once again, Augustine arrogates the voice of Scripture in order to back up his position. It was the disciples—all but one of whom were seemingly the most Christian of Christians—who first posed this daring question to Christ. This was His response: "It is not for you to know the times that the Father, in His power, put in place."[24] Augustine holds contemporary preachers of apocalyptic imminence to be in violation of this Scriptural precept.[25]

That did not at all mean that he had nothing to say about the last times. Revelation is part of his canon. He stands ready to acknowledge that, one day, the Anti-Christ will come to persecute all who claim to be Christian and, sometime after that, Christ will return to overturn this final persecution. But none of that tells us anything about when such things might take place. Closer to the end of Book XVIII, Augustine responds to our need to ask about the time of the end by retelling the story of the disciples' questioning of their messiah:

> People usually ask, 'When will this be?' That is a very untimely question. If it profited us to know that, where would inquisitive students learn about it if not from God the teacher? And those students were not silent when He was around. When He was present, they asked Him, 'Lord, will you bring back the kingdom of Israel in this age?' But He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times that the Father, in His power, put in place.' And they did not even ask about the hour or

---

[24] Acts 1:7-8, cited in *CD* XVIII.l: *ubi rursus eis de adventu eius novissimo requirentibus respondit atque ait: 'Non est vestrum scire tempora quae Pater posuit in sua potestate; sed accipietis virtutem Spiritus sancti supervenientem in vos, et eritis mihi testes in Hierusalem et in totam Iudaeam et Samariam et usque in fines terrae.'* / "When the Apostles asked him again about His Final Coming, He replied: 'It is not yours tot know the times that the Father, in His power, set in place. Instead, you will receive the strength of the Holy Spirit. It will come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and right up to the ends of the earth.'"

[25] This is where Augustine's sense of eschatological belatedness comes into closest contact with his well-known anti-Donatist sensibilities.

> the day or the year. When they received that response, they were asking about the time.[26]

The times swirl about and tear us apart, but we do not know their number. We cannot know their number. Desiring to know this is, above all, an act of supreme hubris. It is also a forgetting of Scripture, the preeminent means Augustine thinks we have for the measurement of historical periods. Like the *articuli temporis*, the eschaton is to be approached only through exegesis. Continuing from above, Augustine writes:

> If we try to calculate or set the bounds for the years this world has left, we do so in vain. We hear from the mouth of truth that it is not for us to know this. Yet still people say that four hundred or five hundred or a thousand years could come to pass between the ascension of the Lord and His final coming. It would take too long to show how someone builds up an opinion about this. It would also be unnecessary. They use human conjectures, but these do not provide them with something certain from the authority of canonical Scripture. But when Jesus said, 'It is not for you to know the times that the Father, in His power, has put in place,' He was prying apart the fingers of those who count up the years and commanding them to give it a rest.[27]

Apocalyptic reckoning of the future makes the same mistake that demonic prognostication did. Instead of gazing upon the Word of God, these forecasters try to judge from the signs of things present. They are making an unwise wager. The angels, as we saw, do know the order of times, but not through signs. They have privileged access to the Word that God is.

Humankind, for its part, lies somewhere in the midst of all this. At our best, we should refuse to play the game of demonic historiography. Still, we lack angelic access to the beatific

---

[26] *CD* XVIII.liii: *Hic quaeri solet: 'Quando istud erit?' Inportune omnino. Si enim hoc nobis nosse prodesset, a quo melius quam ab ipso Deo magistro interrogantibus discipulis disceretur? Non enim siluerunt inde apud eum, sed a praesente quaesierunt dicentes: 'Domine, si hoc tempore repraesentabis regnum Israel?' At ille: 'Non est,' inquit, 'vestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.' Non utique illi de hora vel die vel anno, sed de tempore interrogaverant, quando istud accepere responsum.* The reference is to Acts 1:6-7.

[27] *CD* XVIII.liii: *Frustra igitur annos qui remanent huic saeculo computare ac definire conamur, cum hoc scire non esse nostrum ex ore Veritatis audiamus; quos tamen alii quadringentos, alii quingentos, alii etiam mille ab ascensione Domini usque ad eius ultimum adventum compleri posse dixerunt. Quem ad modum autem quisque eorum astruat opinionem suam, longum est demonstrare et non necessarium. Coniecuturis quippe utuntur humanis, non ab eis aliquid certum de scripturae canonicae auctoritate profertur. Omnium vero de hac re calculantium digitos resolvit et quiescere iubet ille qui dicit: 'Non est vestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.'*

vision. We, too, must proceed by way of signs. When it comes to history, though, we must not take recourse to just any signs we see. This remains true even if, as Augustine suggests in *De Doctrina Christiana,* all things are ultimately signs relative to the divine referent.[28] The only signs that count for determining historical significance are those found in the Word as we, in our own human way, know it. And these signs are the words of Scripture.

Though these signs are silent about the amount of time we have remaining, they do have a fair deal to say about the end itself. Augustine ends Book XVIII by reminding us that the two cities will stay tangled up with one another until that end arrives. Without announcing their meaning in advance, prosperity and adversity will continue to assail both kinds of citizens. Sinful humanity might want a more decisive sorting-out to arrive sooner rather than later, but this decision does not lie in our power. The power of decision rests only with the judge who will preside over the final judgment.

Before we get to the very end, though, Augustine wants to talk about the respective ends of the two cities. While Books XX through XXII will get into the mechanics of the final separation of the earthly from the heavenly, Book XIX tries to tell us what it means to live a temporal life while also being oriented beyond time. For Augustine, getting straight on the distinction between time and eternity will prove crucial to our understanding of how the two cities differ. To rehearse this distinction—which we have already seen him dabble in earlier—Augustine returns to a theme that motivated much of what he had to say in the first ten or so books of the *City of God*: the nature of true happiness.

Taking the whole scope of Augustine's work into view, it might seem odd to introduce such a 'philosophical' topic here. He has just taken us through a tour of both secular and sacred

[28] See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford UP, 2008), esp. Book I.

history, setting us up for the big eschatological climax. And yet here he hesitates, if only for one book. He goes back to the philosophers—to Varro, to Porphyry—and dredges up the old question of what the happy life truly is. It seems right for the reader to pause here, too, if only to reflect on how all the weight of Augustine's argument from Scripture is not meant simply to overburden us with authoritative doctrine. By locating the logic of history in Scripture alone, he is opening his audience up to the possibility that the way they think about their own temporal lives could be unfounded and presumptuous. Bringing us back to the fundamental question of human happiness, Book XIX steps in to remind us that we might be deluding ourselves about what we think we are accomplishing (or failing to accomplish) in our time on earth.

The search for happiness, in Augustine's view, is what true philosophy is all about. For the philosophies he takes to be best, the blessedness of finally becoming happy has to do with the attainment of the supreme good (however that might be defined).[29] Christian thought's greatest strength, Augustine thinks, is its insight that such a supreme good would have to be eternal. He is convinced that any temporal candidate for the supreme good would turn out to be temporary, and that anything temporary cannot be relied upon to sustain proper beatitude. Any provisional felicity it could afford would have to remain vulnerable and reversible. Time itself would not let such happiness close itself off from the threat of an unknown future. That is why even many of the Neoplatonists, who otherwise come so close to this insight, fall short. By allowing for the possibility of reincarnation, they set in motion a cycle of life and death that, even if it does not want to be called time, remains quasi-temporal precisely because it lies open to the future. Metempsychosis would disrupt the secure stasis needed to preserve our happiness.

[29] *CD* XIX.i-iii.

As far as the city of God is concerned, then, the supreme good can lie only in a life that is eternal. Supreme evil, likewise, would be eternal death. True happiness comes from attainment of the supreme good, which is given only to the just. In this life, however, we struggle not only to be just, but even to know what it would mean to be just. All we know is that "'the just person lives by faith,' since we do not yet see what is good for us."[30] The ability to become just is given to those who live faithfully in this way. That is a relatively uncontroversial role for God's grace to play. But for Augustine, as we have seen, grace runs much deeper than that. It is not merely additional aid, but the giving of faith itself to those who believe. The path to true happiness thus begins and ends in the agency of divine grace.

This is a difficult teaching for many to accept. It seems much more straightforward to posit some kind of visible moral economy, which would parcel out worldly prosperity and adversity in accordance with our conduct. A balance-sheet like that would bring more clarity both to our sense of morality and our perspective on history. As Augustine writes:

> But those who think that the ends of good and bad people are in this life, placing the supreme good in the body or the soul or both—or, to be more comprehensive, in pleasure or virtue or both; in rest or in virtue or both; in pleasant rest or virtue or in both; in the basics of survival or in virtue or in both—all such people want to be blessed here. With shocking vanity, they want to be beatified by themselves. The Truth mocks such people when it says through a prophet: 'the Lord knows

---

[30] See the whole discussion at *CD* XIX.iv: *Si ergo quaeratur a nobis, quid civitas Dei de his singulis interrogata respondeat ac primum de finibus bonorum malorumque quid sentiat, respondebit aeternam vitam esse summum bonum, aeternam vero mortem summum malum, propter illam proinde adipiscendam istamque vitandam recte nobis esse vivendum. Propter quod scriptum est: 'Iustus ex fide vivit,' [Hab. 2:4, Romans 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38] quoniam neque bonum nostrum iam videmus, unde oportet ut credendo quaeramus, neque ipsum recte vivere nobis ex nobis est, nisi credentes adiuvet et orantes qui et ipsam fidem dedit, qua nos ab illo adiuvandos esse credamus.* / "So if someone asks us what the city of God would have to say about all this [the highest good and highest evil, etc.], and especially about what it feels about the ends [goals] of good people and bad people, it will respond that the supreme good is eternal life. But the supreme evil is eternal death. So we should live rightly for the sake of attaining the former and avoiding the latter. That is why it is written: 'The just person lives by faith,' since we do not yet see what is good for us. We have to seek it by believing. We cannot live rightly on our own, unless someone helps those who believe and pray. The one who helps us is He who gave that very faith in which we believe that He is going to help us."

> human thoughts.' Or, as Paul put it in his testimony: 'the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, since they are vain.'[31]

Augustine thus comes out firmly against any localization of the supreme good within the world itself. He even seems to head off any notion of an otherworldly supreme good that would merely be an extrapolation of worldly goods, even such high ideals as virtue or pleasure. In both cases, the same mistake is made: we fail to appreciate the temporality of our condition relative to the superiority of that which is beyond time.

Virtue is the temporal good that gives Augustine the most trouble in Book XIX. So many of the texts he reveres—both Scriptural and extra-Scriptural—sing the praises of virtuous action, sometimes even for its own sake, without reference to any further end. We might be tempted, then, to think that a life lived in virtue is the closest humankind can come to the peaceful and happy life. Augustine fights this temptation. Virtue, he finds, is not very peaceful at all. Even its proponents make it fairly clear that virtue is a kind of warfare.[32] Prudence, for example, fights off our vices and urges with the aid of temperance. Reason, too, is brought in to guide and

---

[31] *CD* XIX.iv: *Illi autem, qui in ista vita fines bonorum et malorum esse putaverunt, sive in corpore sive in animo sive in utroque ponentes summum bonum, atque, ut id explicatius eloquar, sive in voluptate sive in virtute sive in utraque, sive in quiete sive in virtute sive in utraque, sive in voluptate simul et quiete sive in virtute sive in utrisque, sive in primis naturae sive in virtute sive in utrisque, hic beati esse et a se ipsis beatificari mira vanitate voluerunt. Inrisit hos Veritas per prophetam dicentem: 'Dominus novit cogitationes hominum,' vel, sicut hoc testimonium posuit apostolus Paulus: 'Dominus novit cogitationes sapientium, quoniam vanae sunt.'* Here Augustine cites first Ps. 94:11, then 1 Cor. 3:20.

[32] *CD* XIX.iv: *Porro ipsa virtus, quae non est inter prima naturae, quoniam eis postea doctrina introducente supervenit, cum sibi bonorum culmen vindicet humanorum, quid hic agit nisi perpetua bella cum vitiis, nec exterioribus, sed interioribus, nec alienis, sed plane nostris et propriis, maxime illa quae Graece sophrosune, Latine temperantia nominatur, qua carnales frenantur libidines ne in quaeque flagitia mentem consentientem trahant?* / "Virtue itself is not naturally primordial, since it is introduced through education. It is a later addition to nature. So when it claims to be the culmination of human godness, what does this amount to other than a perpetual war against vices? These vices are not exterior to us, but interior. They are not foreign; they are our very own. Yes, this war is what the Greeks call *sophrosune* and we call temperance. It is the reigning-in of the pleasures of the flesh, so that they do not drag the consenting mind towards certain passions."

strengthen the virtues, struggling to rein in the unruly passions.[33] Even in the best possible case, this violent contest of virtue and vice will bear an uncertain outcome.

Augustine goes on to argue that this violence of virtue is further complicated when we take into account our fallen condition. Perhaps, if we had a weaker doctrine of sin, we could see virtue's campaign as a 'just war' against vice, a necessary evil that excuses its own excesses. But, according to Augustine's understanding of the depths of sin's effect on the soul, virtue can only be fighting blind. Here in Book XIX, Augustine returns to the weakness of the will occasioned by volitional *distentio*. Quoting Paul, he writes:

> There is vice when, as the Apostle says, 'the flesh desires against the spirit.' Virtue is opposed to this vice when, as the Apostle continues, 'the spirit desires against the flesh. These two oppose each other in turn, so that you would not do the things you want to do.' But what do we want to do when we want to be perfected by the end of the supreme good, if not that the flesh no longer desires against the spirit, and that this vice the spirit desires against is no longer in us? Although we want to do it in this life, we cannot.[34]

---

[33] Later, in *CD* XIX.xxvii, Augustine will emphasize the inadequacy of reason in this fight: *Quia enim Deo quidem subdita, in hac tamen condicione mortali et corpore corruptibili quod adgravat animam, non perfecte vitiis imperat ratio, ideo necessaria est iustis talis oratio. Nam profecto quamquam imperetur, nequaquam sine conflictu vitiis imperatur; et utique subrepit aliquid in hoc loco infirmitatis etiam bene confligenti sive hostibus talibus victis subditisque dominanti, unde si non facili operatione, certe labili locutione aut volatili cogitatione peccetur.* / "In this mortal condition and corruptible body that weighs down the soul, reason cannot completely dominate the vices, even when it is subjugated to God. So it remains necessary for the just to pray such a prayer. Even if the vices are dominated to a degree, it is never without a struggle on their part. In this place of weakness, even when we fight well or dominate certain enemies so that they are beaten and subdued, something creeps in so that we sin, if not by doing it with ease, then by a slip of the tongue or a flicker of thought." At XXI.xvi, he adds that only the grace-given love of God can finally overcome the vices: *Tunc itaque victa vitia deputanda sunt cum Dei amore vincuntur, quem nisi Deus ipse non donat nec aliter nisi per mediatorem Dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum qui factus est particeps mortalitatis nostrae ut nos particeps faceret divinitatis suae.* / "And so vices should be thought to be overcome only when they are overcome by the love of God. God, meanwhile, only gives this life through the mediator between God and humanity, the man Jesus Christ. He was made to share our mortality so as to make us share in His divinity."

[34] *CD* XIX.iv: *Neque enim nullum est vitium, cum, sicut dicit apostolus, 'caro concupiscit adversus spiritum;' cui vitio contraria virtus est, cum, sicut idem dicit, 'spiritus concupiscit adversus carnem. Haec enim,' inquit, 'invicem adversantur, ut non ea quae vultis faciatis.' [Gal. 5:17] Quid autem facere volumus, cum perfici volumus fine summi boni, nisi ut caro adversus spiritum non concupiscat, nec sit in nobis hoc vitium contra quod spirtius concupiscat? Quod in hac vita, quamvis velimus, quoniam facere non valemus, id saltem in adiutorio Dei facimus, ne carni concupiscenti adversus spiritum spiritu succumbente cedamus, et ad perpetrandum peccatum nostra consensione pertrahamur. Absit ergo ut, quamdiu in hoc bello intestino sumus, iam nos beatitudinem ad quam vincendo volumus pervenire adeptos esse credamus. Et quis est usque adeo sapiens ut contra libidines nullum habeat omnino conflictum?* The rest of the passage reads: "But at least we can do it with God's help, so that our spirits do not succumb and we do not yield to the flesh that desires against the spirit, and so that we do not consent to be dragged

The result is an "internal war" that looks interminable. We saw above that this rupture between spirit and flesh leads to discord between soul and body, even though the rupture itself runs along the soul's own fault-line. Virtue's campaign takes place within this theatre of inner conflict. Even justice, the virtue that seeks to set everything at rest in its own proper place, is continually disrupted by this ongoing warfare. Like prudence, temperance, and whatever other virtuous titles we might want to invoke, justice remains at best a work in progress.[35]

True justice, meanwhile, would require true peace.[36] All things would be given the place they deserve and—this is crucial—they would stay there. This would be a secure peace. Another name for it would be 'divine order.' As we have seen, Augustine did not think that this *ordo* was visible in his own time. Perhaps it is not visible in any time. Yet, counters Augustine, we can always hope for it. The orientation of such hope, however, presumes that we adopt an

---

towards sins to be committed. But as long as we are still within this internal war, far be it from us to believe that we have already attained that blessedness at which we want to arrive once we have won. Who is so wise that they are not engaged in any conflict with their lusts?"

[35] Augustine sums up his critical appraisal of prudence, temperance, and justice later in *CD* XIX.iv: *Quid illa virtus, quae prudentia dicitur, nonne tota vigilantia sua bona discernit a malis, ut in illis appetendis istisque vitandis nullus error obrepat, ac per hoc et ipsa nos in malis vel mala in nobis esse testatur? Ipsa enim docet malum esse ad peccandum consentire bonumque esse ad peccandum non consentire libidini. Illud tamen malum, cui nos non consentire docet prudentia, facit temperantia, nec prudentia nec temperantia tollit huic vitae. Quid iustitia, cuius munus est sua cuique tribuere (unde fit in ipso homine quidam iustus ordo naturae, ut anima subdatur Deo et animae caro, ac per hoc Deo et anima et caro), nonne demonstrat in eo se adhuc opere laborare potius quam in huius operis iam fine requiescere?* / "There is a virtue called prudence. If it is being utterly vigilant, does it not discern good things from evil, so that no error creeps in between what is to be sought out and what is to be avoided? Does it not thereby testify to the fact that we are amidst evils, or that evils are in us? Prudence teaches us that consenting to sin is evil and that not lustfully consenting to evil is good. Still, although prudence teaches us not to consent to evil and temperance makes us actually not consent, neither prudence nor temperance can take evil out of this life. Then there is justice, whose lot it is to assign to each their own. That is why there happens to be a certain just order of nature even within a person, so that soul might be subjugated to God and flesh to the soul, and thereby soul and flesh might both be subjugated to God. Is it not obvious that justice is still laboring at its work, rather than resting at the end of its work?"

[36] Regarding virtue more broadly, see *CD* XIX.x: *Sed tunc est vera virtus, quando et omnia bona quibus bene utitur et quidquid in bono usu bonorum et malorum facit, et se ipsam ad eum finem refert, ubi nobis talis et tanta pax erit qua melior et maior esse non possit*. / "But at this time, virtue is true when it refers all the good things it uses well, whatever good or bad thing it puts to good use, and even itself to that end where there will be so much peace of such a kind that there could not ever be a better or greater peace."

eschatological point of view.[37] Hoping for temporal happiness tomorrow or a year from now is no better than hoping for it right now. The point is to let your thoughts be carried away from temporal constraints towards the idea of the end of time and an unimaginable entry into timelessness.

True happiness can only be glimpsed through this eschatological lens. Even then, the glimpse would be imperfect and fleeting. Entry into blessed peace is not a possession to be secured in advance, but something to be awaited. It is a matter of hope, endurance, and perseverance. "Just as we are saved by hope, then, so are we blessed by hope," writes Augustine, "And just as we do not have a hold on salvation at present, so we do not yet have a hold on blessedness. Rather, we are waiting on the future, and we are doing this patiently."[38] Leaping ahead to the eschaton would be the worst possible plan of action. 'Hope' should not be cheapened into a kind of sham-certainty. Rather, what is called for is *sollicitudo*: a kind of disturbed anxiety about our lack of certainty concerning ourselves and our world. This sense of being shaken afflicts everyone, as Augustine tells us:

> Even the saints, even those who faithfully worship the one true and highest God, have not been made secure from deception and manifold temptation. But in this place of weakness, in these malicious days, such disturbance is not useless. Its usefulness is to make us seek with a more fervent desire that security, where peace is most full and most certain.[39]

---

[37] Every aspect of virtue has to be seen from this same point of view, as Augustine writes in *CD* XIX.iv: *Si enim verae virtutes sunt, quae nisi in eis quibus vera inest pietas, esse non possunt, non se profitentur hoc posse ut nullas miserias patiantur homines in quibus sunt (neque enim mendaces sunt verae virtutes ut hoc profiteantur), sed ut vita humana, quae tot et tantis huius saeculi malis esse cogitur misera, spe futuri saeculi sit beata, sicut et salva. Quo modo enim beata est quae nondum salva est?* / "If they are true virtues—and virtues can only be true when they have true piety in them—they do not profess to be able to eliminate the suffering of miseries for those who have them. True virtues do not profess lies. Rather, they profess that human life, which is forced into misery by so many great evils in this age, might be blessed and even saved by hope for a future age. And how can what has not yet been saved be 'blessed?'"

[38] *CD* XIX.iv: *Sicut ergo spe salvi, ita spe beati facti sumus, et sicut salutem, ita beatitudinem non iam tenemus praesentem, sed expectamus futuram, et hoc per patientiam…*

[39] *CD* XIX.x: *Sed neque sancti et fideles unius veri Dei summique cultores ab eorum fallaciis et multiformi temptatione securi sunt. In hoc enim loco infirmitatis et diebus malignis etiam ista sollicitudo non est inutilis, ut illa securitas, ubi pax plenissima atque certissima est, desiderio ferventiore quaeratur*.

It is all right to be shaken, because we need to be shaken up if we are to be shaken out of our self-delusions about life in time. Christian hope, for Augustine, is not a restoration of the certainty of those who think they are just and virtuous in themselves. It is instead an uneasy hope, an anxious thought that these temporal gains we seek might not wind up being ends in themselves.

Properly speaking, then, merely living virtuously has little to do with virtue. In its truest sense, virtue would have to point beyond itself to the supreme good, which takes us beyond this temporal world. Any seemingly virtuous act that did not do so would in fact be vice.[40] This goes even for the worthiest of worldly projects: attaining and maintaining worldly peace. For all of its obvious faults, something like the *pax Romana* would seem to stand as a beacon of hope for the possibility that, given favorable conditions and the right kind of government, humanity might be able to make its own brand of lasting tranquility.[41] But Augustine is becoming all too aware that such arrangements seldom outlast the ravages of time. Even if calm stretches do crop up in history now and again, they are brought about only through other forms of violence and injustice. Because of that, they simply add to the evidence of humanity's perversity. "This is how pride perversely imitates God," writes Augustine, "It hates to share equality under God with its peers,

---

[40] On this conversion of virtue into vice, look ahead to *CD* XIX.xxv: *Proinde virtutes quas habere sibi videtur, per quas imperat corpori et vitiis, ad quodlibet adipiscendum vel tenendum rettulerit nisi ad Deum, etiam ipsae vitia sunt potius quam virtutes. Nam licet a quibusdam tunc verae atque honestae putentur esse virtutes, cum referuntur ad se ipsas nec propter aliud expetuntur, etiam tunc inflatae ac superbae sunt, ideo non virtutes, sed vitia iudicanda sunt. Sicut enim non est a carne sed super carnem, quod carnem facit vivere, sic non est ab homine sed super hominem, quod hominem facit beate vivere, nec solum hominem, sed etiam quamlibet potestatem virtutemque caelestem.* / "So whatever virtues someone appears to have, which they use to keep control over their body and their vices, are in fact vices rather than virtues if they are referred to some other goal to be attained or held onto rather than to God. Some people allow that virtues are thought to be true and honest when they are not sought out on behalf of something else, but are referred only to themselves. Still, even then they are inflated and proud, and so they should not be judged virtues but vices. Just as what makes flesh live does not come from flesh but is rather above flesh, so what makes humanity live blessedly does not come from humanity but rather above humanity. And this goes not just for humanity, but also for every kind of heavenly power and virtue."

[41] Augustine appraises the prospects of a *pax Babylonis* at *CD* XIX.xxvi.

but it wants to install its own domination over them instead of His. So it hates God's just peace and loves its own unjust peace."[42]

Standing against these illusions of false peace is the unqualified stability of God's eternity. Though various cities and states have devised inventive schemes for maintaining order and safeguarding justice, there is, in the end, only one just order. This is the divine *ordo rerum*, which we have encountered in several guises throughout Augustine's writings. It serves as a kind of order so pervasive that even the perverse, even the disordered fits squarely into its cohesive structure. "The peace of all things," says Augustine,

> is the tranquility of order. Order is the arrangement of all things, equal and unequal, which assigns to each its place. So the miserable, who are absolutely not at peace insofar as they are miserable, lack this tranquility of order where there is no disturbance. But still, since they are deservedly and justly miserable, they cannot be outside of the order, even in their misery. To be sure, they are not joined together with the blessed, but nevertheless they are separated from the blessed according to the law of order.[43]

Here, in some strange way, cosmology and ethics collide. 'Justice' is not simply a set of dictates meant to orient legal proceedings, but the right ordering of all things within the purview of creation. Happiness and peace ultimately have little to do with figuring out the right form of virtue or justice, then applying that to the rule of some state. Properly understood, they are eschatological possibilities to be realized only in the supreme good of eternal life. In that life, all things will be just because all will be set in proper order. Of course, that order, as timeless, is

---

[42] *CD* XIX.xii: *Sic enim superbia perverse imitatur Deum. Odit namque cum sociis aequalitatem sub illo, sed inponere vult sociis dominationem suam pro illo. Odit ergo iustam pacem Dei et amat iniquam pacem suam.*

[43] *CD* XIX.xiii: *pax omnium rerum tranquillitas ordinis. Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio. Proinde miseri, quia in quantum miseri sunt utique in pace non sunt, tranquillitate quidem ordinis carent, ubi perturbatio nulla est; verum tamen quia merito iusteque sunt miseri, in ea quoque ipsa misera sua praeter ordinem esse non possunt, non quidem coniuncti beatis, sed ab eis tamen ordinis lege seiuncti.* A bit earlier, in XIX.xii, Augustine makes a similar point regarding the 'peace' even of disordered things: *Quod autem perversum est, etiam hoc necesse est ut in aliqua et ex aliqua et cum aliqua rerum parte pacatum sit, in quibus est vel ex quibus constat; alioquin nihil esset omnino*. / "But even what is perverse must necessarily find its peace in some parts of things or from some part of things or with some part of things, within whatever things it is within or out of whatever things it is constituted. Otherwise, it would not be anything at all."

'already' set in place. What matters for us, though, is that we do not have access to it yet. We know not the order of the times. But time will end. The order of things will be revealed to us. Until then, our main task is to learn how to wait.[44]

The End Deferred

We have just seen Augustine claim that the blessed are not joined to the "wretched" (the un-blessed), yet they are separated according to a certain "law of order." This just *ordo* is, in some sense, both a joining and a disjoining. According to a divine judgment, all things are positioned within an overarching structure. Some things receive more enviable placements than others, to be sure, but the value of each position is relative to the rest of the structure as a whole. The blessed are most blessed in light of the wretched; the wretched are most wretched in light of the blessed. Judgment is what positions these groups relative to one another, and we can dub the structure that results a 'just order.'

If, however, we cannot see how this order fits together until the end of time, then it is obvious that its justice will not become apparent before then. But, Augustine tells us, this hazy, unarticulated *saeculum* of ours will culminate in the most meaningful 'event' of all: the Final Judgment, the ultimate unveiling of the divine justice that was there all along. Book XX of the

---

[44] On the political ramifications of the deferred division of the two cities, see Gregory W. Lee's recent article, "Using the Earthly City: Ecclesiology, Political Activity, and Religious Coercion in Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016), 41-63, which builds on the work of Robert Dodaro in "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's *City of God* in a 'Postmodern' World," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 77–137, and "*Ecclesia* and *Res Publica*: How Augustinian Are Neo-Augustinian Politics?," in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?*, ed. L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, and M. Wisse, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 219 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 237–271. Lee, 63, also gives up his own quite clear conclusion on the matter: "The ecclesiological principles Augustine develops in his anti-Donatist writings illuminate Augustine's position on Christian participation in non-Christian political orders, and his use of civic authorities to impose his beliefs against his enemies. If Christ can preserve the wheat among the tares within the church, so also can Christ preserve his citizens in exile among the reprobate of the earthly city. Christians are to separate spiritually, but not bodily, from non-Christians within the church until Christ distinguishes between them at the final judgment. Christians do not separate bodily from non-Christians outside the church either, except in matters of religion, and can even use the benefits of the earthly city for heavenly ends."

City of God is devoted to the question of how we ought to orient ourselves relative to this revelation of justice, at least insofar as a Scripturally founded methodology permits.

Augustine holds it as an inviolable article of his faith that, at the end of time, Christ will come to judge the living from the dead. He is less certain about the precise length of time such judgment would take. While Scripture talks of a "day" of Judgment, Augustine is happy to take that as a figurative term, much as he did with the "days" of creation in Genesis. He wants to make it clear that God's judging of the world is not at all limited to some span of time. From our point of view, He is always judging. "The reason why we add 'final' and 'last' when talking about this day of God's judgment," Augustine clarifies, "is that even now God is judging. He has been judging from the beginning of humankind, when He dismissed the first people, who committed the great sin, from paradise and separated them from the tree of life."[45] Due to divine atemporality, the final judgment will consist in the revelation of timeless justice, not some spur-of-the-moment legal decision.

The event of the last judgment, however ill-defined its temporal limits may be, seems to serve as the final hinge of historical time. In light of its occurrence, the whole divine order will become apparent in retrospect. In an unthinkable instant, the sublime mess of the *saeculum* will be cleaned up, reorganized, and laid bare for all to see. Then and only then will there be a correlation between what we deserve and what we get. Augustine expresses this rather bluntly: "The day when there will be no place for ignorant whining about why the unjust are happy while the just are unhappy is most properly called the day of judgment. Only then will there appear true and full happiness for all who are good, with deservedly supreme unhappiness for those who are

---

[45] *CD* XX.i: *Ideo autem, cum diem iudicii Dei dicimus, addimus ultimum vel novissimum, quia et nunc iudicat et ab humani generis initio iudicavit dimittens de paradiso et a ligno vitae separans primos homines peccati magni perpetratores…*

evil."[46] To expect such a correlation between virtue and happiness now is a sick delusion. The healing remedy comes from accepting the eschatological delay that conditions our lives. "But now," writes Augustine,

> we are learning to bear with equanimity those evils that even good people suffer. And we are learning not to give too much weight to those good things that even evil people attain. That is why, even in matters where divine justice is not apparent, divine teaching remains healthy.[47]

The final judgment will confirm this healthy suspicion concerning temporal goods. It will do so not just by revealing the concealed order of things, but also by revealing why it was just of God to conceal that order in the first place.[48] The result will be a total justification of God by God Himself. To demand such an explanation before the time would be to submit God, the source of justice, to some historically conditioned notion of what is just and what is not. Even worse, it would be to accuse God's justice of arriving too late. But as we have seen time and again, Augustine always cautions us to appreciate the inescapability of belatedness, of the way that life fails to sharpen into view for us until it has come to a close.

When it comes to the details of the last days, Augustine is willing to affirm what he finds in Scripture. There will be a general resurrection, as Paul suggests. Baptism in this life can be

---

[46] *CD* XX.i: *Iste quippe dies iudicii proprie iam vocatur, eo quod nullus ibi erit inperitiae querellae locus cur iniustus ille sit felix et cur ille iustus infelix. Omnium namque tunc nonnisi bonorum vera et plena felicitas et omnium nonnisi malorum digna et summa infelicitas apparebit*.

[47] *CD* XX.ii: *Nunc autem et mala aequo animo ferre discimus quae patiuntur et boni, et bona non magnipendere quae adipiscuntur et mali; ac per hoc etiam in his rebus in quibus non apparet divina iustitia, salutaris est divina doctrina*. Scripturally speaking, here Augustine has recourse again to Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (NRSV)

[48] *CD* XX.ii: *Cum vero ad illud Dei iudicium venerimus, cuius tempus iam proprie dies iudicii et aliquando dies Domini nuncupatur, non solum quaecumque tunc iudicabuntur, verum etiam quaecumque ab initio iudicata et quaecumque usque ad illud tempus adhuc iudicanda sunt, apparebunt esse iustissima. Ubi hoc quoque manifestabitur quam iusto iudicio Dei fiat ut nunc tam multa ac paene omnia iusta iudicia Dei lateant sensus mentesque mortalium, cum tamen in hac re piorum fidem non lateat iustum esse quod latet*. / "But when we come to that judgment of God—the time of which is properly called the 'day of judgment,' though sometimes the 'day of the Lord'—whatever will be judged, has been judged, or will have been judged up to that time will appear as utterly just. Then it will also be made clear how, through God's just judgment, it occurs that so many—almost all—of God's just judgments are now concealed from the senses and minds of mortals. Still, though, in this matter it is not concealed from the faith of religious people that whatever is concealed remains just."

referred to as a kind of 'first resurrection,' but it is not the only or even the most crucial kind of rebirth. That comes with the bodily resurrection of all humankind at the eschaton. Augustine is quite clear on the tangible corporeality of this final rebirth, which eventually leads him to weigh in on some of the more obscure questions surrounding the particular appearance of such 'spiritual bodies.' For our purposes, it is enough to note that this resurrection, which occurs just before the final judgment, will be a rebirth either to eternal life or a second death. The final division of humanity into the just and the unjust will be made physically apparent in the flesh of the saved and the damned.

Before the resurrection and judgment come about, there are a few smaller events that have to take place. Augustine gleans these, somewhat awkwardly, from passages in Revelation, 1 Thessalonians, and elsewhere in Scripture. The Anti-Christ will have to show up at some point. He will have to inaugurate a global persecution of any Christians still left alive, only to be defeated by Christ in the end. A universal conflagration will also have to break out, burning away the superficial form of this world and preparing the way for something else. Augustine affirms that all of these events (and a few others) will come to pass. Here and there, he even speculates as to their exact order. In the end, though, he admits that their sequence is not really known to us.[49] It is enough merely to note their Scriptural provenance, so as to focus on what is more decisive: the sorting out of the healthy fish from the sick on the eschatological shore.

Entangled as we are in the net of the *saeculum*, we have great difficulty telling fish from fish. Even within the walls that are said, against the hubris of Victorinus, to define the Church, it

---

[49] This will all be summed up at *CD* XX.xxx: *Quae omnia quidem ventura esse credendum est; sed quibus modis et quo ordine veniant, magis tunc docebit rerum experientia quam nunc ad perfectum hominum intellegentia valet consequi. Existimo tamen eo quo a me commemorata sunt ordine esse ventura*. / "We should believe that all these things are going to happen. But the experience of things in that time will teach us more completely about how and in what order they will come to pass than human understanding can now achieve. Still, I think that they are going to happen in the order in which I recounted them."

remains undecided who will truly stand among the blessed in the end. The divine decision about this has, being timeless, already been made, as far as we are concerned. But we ourselves lack the criteria needed to mimic such a decision. And this lack of criteria is directly linked to our temporal condition. About those who fall away from the Church, Augustine writes:

> It should not bother us that the devil often seduces even those who have already been reborn in Christ and are walking the paths of God. 'The Lord knows who are His.' No one from that group is seduced into eternal damnation by the devil. The Lord 'knows' them as God: nothing, not even the future, is concealed from Him. He does not 'know' them like people know other people. We see other people when they are present—if indeed we see them, since we do not see their hearts. But we do not see what they are going to be like later, just as we do not even see what we ourselves are going to be like later.[50]

Just as each of us is a question to ourselves, so too do our communities remain in question. The temporal open-endedness of our lives lends a certain undecidedness to the boundaries of our communities. Already, in the *Gift of Perseverance*, we saw that this future-oriented openness could leave room for redemption.[51] Even those who turn back to their old ways could change

---

[50] *CD* XX.vii: *Nec moveat quod saepe diabolus seducit etiam illos qui regenerati iam in Christo vias ingrediuntur Dei. 'Novit' enim 'Dominus qui sunt eius;' [2 Tim. 2:19] ex his in aeternam damnationem neminem ille seducit. Sic enim eos novit Dominus, ut Deus, quem nil latet etiam futurorum, non ut homo, qui hominem ad praesens videt (si tamen videt, cuius cor non videt), qualis autem postea sit futurus nec se ipsum videt.* Cf. his exegesis of the 'seal' from Rev. 20:1-6 earlier in XX.vii: *'Et clusit,' inquit, 'et signavit super eum ut non seduceret iam gentes donec finiantur mille anni.' 'Clausit super eum' dictum est 'interdixit ei ne posset exire,' id est vetitum transgredi. 'Signavit' autem, quod addidit, significasse mihi videtur quod occultum esse voluit qui pertineant ad partem diaboli, et qui non pertineant. Hoc quippe in saeculo isto prorsus latet, quia et qui videtur stare, utrum sit casurus, et qui videtur iacere, utrum sit surrecturus, incertum est.* / "'God sealed the devil in and put a sign on him,' says John, 'so that he could not seduce the nations until a thousand years had passed.' 'He sealed him in' means 'He forbade him from being able to get out,' i.e. from being able to transgress this boundary. But John adds 'He put a sign on him,' and to me this seems to signify that John wanted it to be hidden who belongs to the devil's portion and who does not. By all means, this is concealed in this age, since it is uncertain whether those who seem to be standing might fall, while it is equally uncertain whether those who seem to have fallen might still get up again."

[51] Augustine underlines the importance of perseverance a fair number of times throughout the last books of the *City of God*; see, e.g., XXI.xxv. Marrou, 77-78, also connects perseverance to the problem of defining communities in time, pointing us all the way back to Book I of the *City of God*: "Perhaps we can identify the City of God with the visible Church in some way (I wouldn't dare say otherwise), but we cannot simply identify it with the those who 'visibly belong the visible Church.' St. Augustine never stops repeating this to his people. There are among us, in our churches, some bad Christians and sinners and, most formidable of all, future reprobates. Austere Augustinian spirituality willingly meditates upon the anguishing mystery of perseverance until the end. Outside the Church, even among its persecutors there are hidden some 'predestined friends who still don't know themselves.'" (Here Marrou cites *CD* I.xxxv.)

again in the years to come.[52] Here, though, Augustine places more emphasis on the other possibility: that those who appear to be just and virtuous will later turn out to be quite different.

Augustine is equally emphatic that this temporal undecidedness of our lives and communities is not to be understood as a shifting back and forth between the heavenly and earthly cities. What is at stake is a kind of citizenship that is granted atemporally by God Himself. Our documents have already been drafted, in other words, though we have no access to them. The question remains one of reading and intepretation. That is why, later in Book XX, Augustine brings us to the topic of 'books.'

He takes his lead from Revelation 20:12, which makes references to books both of the dead and of life: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books."[53] The books of the dead are many, but there is only one book of life. The difference between these volumes will become apparent at the scene of Christ's judgment. Only then, in some kind of time-bending mental awakening, will opaque disorder succumb to lucid order. "So," according to Augustine,

> we should understand that there will be a certain divine force that will make it so that everyone's works, whether good or bad, will all be called back into their memories. With astonishing speed, these works will be sorted out via a mental intuition. Knowledge will accuse or excuse them according to conscience. In this way, each and every person will be judged simultaneously. No wonder, then, this divine force has received the name 'book.' In it, whatever is recalled through its effectivity is, in a way, 'read.'[54]

---

[52] Again, look to *CD* XX.vii: "it is uncertain whether those who seem to be standing might fall, while it is equally uncertain whether those who seem to have fallen might still get up again."

[53] NRSV; the SBL Greek is: καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικρούς, ἑστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, καὶ βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν· καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοίχθη, ὅ ἐστιν τῆς ζωῆς· καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

[54] *CD* XX.xiv: *Quaedam igitur vis est intellegenda divina qua fiet ut cuique opera sua, vel bona vel mala, cuncta in memoriam revocentur et mentis intuitu mira celeritate cernantur ut accuset vel excuset scientia conscientiam atque ita simul et omnes et singuli iudicentur. Quae nimirum vis divina libri nomen accepit. In ea quippe quodam modo legitur quidquid ea faciente recolitur*.

Even the books of the dead, then, might as well be closed to us. Their ink is too faded to read. But that does not make their pages blank. And according to Augustine, what is needed to properly interpret a human life is not a more well-rounded human perspective on life, but a divine force. Nothing but this could discern the depths of human memory.

The book of life is likewise mysterious. Its effect is made clear in Revelation 20:15: "anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."[55] With the words of Revelation, the separation of the two cities ends in a grotesque climax. That would be difficult to dispute. While Augustine might show interpretive flexibility elsewhere, in the closing books of the *City of God* he is primarily interested in re-narrating the tangible effects of his eschatology. It is flesh, then, that will burn without end. There is little hint of a metaphor here.

Finding out the content of this book of life would thus seem to be a fairly desirable goal. But that is precisely why we have to hold on to this distinction between the knowable and the unknowable. While Augustine is blunt when describing the flames of everlasting punishment, he is reserved when it comes to throwing our own contemporaries into the fire prematurely. Doing so would only be justifiable if we had access to the text of the book of life. In Augustine's view, we do not. If the many books of the dead are a collapsing of temporally disordered human lives into a condemnable lump, the sole book of life is the atemporal decision of the divine, which stands beyond all that disorder. The purpose of that book is not to be read by God, but to be opened up for us at the very end:

> But this book does not 'remind' God, as if He would otherwise forget and be mistaken. Instead, this book signifies the predestination of those whom He is

[55] NRSV; the SBL Greek is: καὶ εἴ τις οὐχ εὑρέθη ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός.

> going to give eternal life. It is not that God is ignorant of them and so needs to read this book so that he comes to know about them. Rather, His foreknowledge of them, which cannot be mistaken, is this book of life. That they have been written in this book means that they have been known in advance.[56]

With its fixed but unreadable text, the book of life remains both decisive for us and unknown to us. Knowing about it serves to clarify the relationship between humanity and God. Augustine's reading of Revelation here affirms the priority of grace as it follows from the timelessness of divine agency. But it does so while pulling back from another potentially dangerous consequence: the hubristic supposition that we might already have taken hold of this book before the time.

Augustine's portrait of the end is painted with Scriptural colors, as we have seen. But he does not limit himself to Revelation alone or even to the New Testament. Much of the rest of Book XXII deals with the grounds for a doctrine of final judgment in Isaiah, Daniel, and the Psalms.[57] One of his most telling comments about this eschatological sorting-out, though, comes from his reading of the minor prophet Malachi.[58]

Augustine turns to Malachi as part of a long discussion of what it means for God to "discern" His people, to tell them apart from the rest, like the sheep from the goats.[59] Here too there is talk of a "book of remembrance," a ledger that will have kept track of the just and the unjust. But the definition of justness, Augustine emphasizes, is all bound up with the agency of divine choice. Quoting Malachi, he writes:

---

[56] *CD* XX.xv: *Non Deum liber iste commemorat ne oblivione fallatur; sed praedestinationem significat eorum quibus aeterna dabitur vita. Neque enim nescit eos Deus et in hoc libro legit, ut sciat; sed potius ipsa eius praescientia de illis, quae falli non potest, liber est vitae, in quo sunt scripti, id est ante praecogniti*.
[57] For those particular parts of Scripture, see especially *CD* XX.xxi-xxiv.
[58] *CD* XX.xxv-xxviii.
[59] See *CD* XX.xxiv, where Augustine's version of Psalm 50:3-5 has God 'judging between' or 'discerning apart' the people: *'Discernere' porro 'populum suum,' quid est nisi per iudicium separare bonos a malis, tamquam oves ab haedis?* / "What does 'to discern His people' mean if not 'to judge and separate the good from the evil,' like judging sheep from goats?"

> "'They will be mine,' says all-powerful God, 'on the day I make them my acquisition and pick them out, like someone picks out which child will serve them. I will turn[60] and you will see what lies between a just person and an unjust person, between someone who serves God and someone who does not.'"… This distance between reward and punishment, which divides the just from the unjust, is not discerned in the vanity of this life under the sun. But when it will shine in the clarity of life under the sun of justice, then there will be a judgment like there never was before.[61]

The dimness of this world is nothing like the blinding brightness of its eschatological end. The sun in the sky counts for little next to the Sun in heaven. The distinctions we draw under this sun are empty, vain. In this *interim saeculum*, we struggle to see what lies between (*quid sit inter*) the heavenly city and its earthly counterpart. But there remains a gap, a *distantia*, a diremption. Augustine is challenging us to think through the consequences of this situation we find ourselves in: there is a difference between the just and the unjust, but we cannot quite tell what it is.

This invisibility of justice in the *saeculum* brings us back to the work Augustine has already done in the first ten books of the *City of God*. It rains on the just and the unjust, as we recall. Those who are prosperous and attribute that prosperity to their own just behavior are usually undone by their own pride, whether in this life or in the next. Those who suffer adversity while claiming to be just, meanwhile, are often undone by their questioning divine justice. That resentment of God, for Augustine, is perhaps even more dangerous than blind hubris.

Near the end of Book XX, then, Augustine comes back to this human reluctance to accept the notion of hidden providence. He does so by weaving his interpretation of Malachi in with his reading of the Psalms. In Psalm 73, Augustine finds the Psalmist bemoaning the fact that his just

---

[60] This appears to be a manuscript error, since the citation should read, "You will turn…"

[61] *CD* XX.xxvii: *'Erunt mihi, dicit Dominus omnipotens, in die qua ego facio in adquisitionem, et eligam eos sicut eligit homo filium suum qui servit ei; et convertar et videbitis quid sit inter iustum et iniquum, et inter servientem Deo et eum qui non servit.' ... Haec distantia praemiorum atque poenarum iustos dirimens ab iniustis, quae sub isto sole in huius vitae vanitate non cernitur, quando sub illo iustitiae in illius vitae manifestatione clarebit, tunc profecto erit iudicium quale numquam fuit*. Augustine has already introduced the theme of *vanitas* from his invocation of Eccl. 2:13-14 at *CD* XX.iii: "'Vanity of vanities!' said Ecclesiastes, 'Vanity of vanities, all things are vanity. What profit is there for humanity in all the work it labors at under the sun?'"

behavior seems to produce no discernible gains. Other, manifestly more unjust people, meanwhile, are greeted with nothing but success. "'I have made my heart just and washed my hands in innocence,'" quotes Augustine, roughly:

> "Was this in vain?" This difficult question occurred to him when he saw that good people were miserable and bad people were happy. In order to resolve this question, he added, "This work will remain in front of me until I enter into God's sanctuary and understand the last things." In the last judgment, then, this will no longer be the case. Things will appear quite differently than they do now. The misery of the unjust will be obvious, while the happiness of the just will be equally obvious.[62]

Augustine emphasizes the futurity of the revelation of justice in a way that might not be demanded by the psalm itself. He does so because he is reaffirming the present invisibility of providence, to which he has already introduced his readers in the earlier books. The relation between our *saeculum* and the eschaton is not one of slowly increasing visibility. It is an unimaginable rupture. The revelation of the distance between the just and the unjust will be the advent of heterogeneity that finally breaks the empty homogeneity of time as we live it. Until then, the pages of history might as well be blank.

Augustine does not, of course, think that we currently live as if all that were true. Even now, we love to draw our distinctions quite firmly. This is especially the case when it comes to questions of community: who is in, who is out, who gets to police the boundaries, and so on. Augustine's Church was continually faced with such questions. He himself was not averse to engaging in polarizing disputes, as the Donatist controversy made so painfully clear. But, at least by the time we get to the closing books of the *City of God*, the fixing of boundaries begins to be undermined by the entanglement of the two cities. If true distinctions must be deferred until the

---

[62] *CD* XX.xxviii: *diceret etiam: 'Numquid vano iustificavi cor meum et lavi in innocentibus manus meas?' Ut autem solveret hanc difficilliam quaestionem, quae fit cum videntur boni esse miseri et felices mali: 'Hoc,' inquit, 'labor est ante me, donec introeam in sanctuarium Dei et intellegam in novissima.' Iudicio quippe novissimo non sic erit; sed in aperta iniquorum miseria et aperta felicitate iustorum longe quam nunc est aliud apparebit.*

eschaton, then we are thrown back into the impossible task of defining stable communities within unstable time. The ghost of Victorinus still haunts us with his questions of walls and boundaries.

Augustine, for his part, is drawn back into this mess by his unblinking look into the fate of those who will turn out to be members of the earthly city. He devotes all of Book XXI to examining the basis—inseparably Scriptural and philosophical—for the doctrine of everlasting punishment in the fires of Hell.[63] His conclusion, ultimately, is that all those whose names are not found in the book of life will be given their bodies back only to burn forever in the most material sense. These flames, he underlines, will be not purgative but punitive. They are not meant to heal. He dismisses those "perversely merciful" Christians who would balk at this, concerned that even the truly unjust would not deserve such pain. In Augustine's eyes, though, this is what we all deserve. Adam's free founding of sin—that truest instance of injustice—ensured that all of humanity would stand on its own merits as a *massa damnata*: a condemned lump, lying there in its indolence and intransigence. The only way anyone will escape the fire is through God's merciful grace. The priority of the divine is again inviolable. Everlasting punishment, then, simply drives home the futility of humanity's complaints about justice.

If so much relies on grace, then, we might next want to know if there is any way we can assure ourselves of receiving it in this life. This would seem to be the apparent appeal of the Church. As Augustine affirms, only his Church preserves the true *historia* that led up to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The total event that was the Incarnation provides the only path out of the world of sin. The new Adam came to liberate us from the old. But though Christ's life and death and rebirth were quite visible, their effects are not yet so. The closest we get to visible

[63] For a reading of *City of God* XXI which weaves together these threads of punitive intensity and divine grace, see Pollmann, "Moulding the Present," 171-176.

grace in this life are instead the sacraments. Yet for Augustine, as we can tell from works like the *Gift of Perseverance*, grace was a force that went well beyond the realm of the sacraments alone. Baptism, for example, serves as a kind of rebirth in this life. But there is no guarantee that the baptized will stand as members of the city of God.[64] Augustine is clear on that. The rolls of citizenship, as we have seen, will not be made open for viewing until the final, far more definitive rebirth of the general resurrection.

Augustine is then utterly convinced of both the necessity of grace and the efficacy of Christ. And yet, because of the pervasive inscrutability of both, the Church would seem to err if it were to use either as a tool for shoring up its own fortifications.[65] The mercy of God (for some) is assured, but it should not be so easily weaponized. What keeps it from being used that way is, ultimately, the fact that our communities are temporal. For Augustine, that means they are mutable, fluid, and provisional. While all of humanity sinned in the first Adam, it is true that only some will be reborn through the second.[66] "But no one ought to confess that they have passed over from that evil to this good," Augustine reminds us, "unless they have arrived there where no temptation remains, unless—through so many different kinds of battles—they have

---

[64] Recall Augustine's reservations about this in XIII.xxiii, cited above.

[65] The Church itself remains in tension between past and future, as Markus writes in *Saeculum*, 185-186: "the Church does not transform societies into the Kingdom of God—though it must support, and sometimes inspire, creative initiatives for their transformation into better societies—but it subjects all worldly institutions as well as all programmes to a critical scrutiny in the perspective opened by the hope of that Kingdom. Seen in this way, everything essential in the Church's life, everything that constitutes it [as] what it is, as a sign (which is nothing unless it does its work of pointing), is shot through with a tension between what is already accomplished in Christ and what is still awaiting fulfillment at the end: 'The pilgrim, if he walks in faith, is not yet at home; he is on the way… Our joy is not yet achieved: it is held in hope… Yet let us even now place ourselves in that victory which is still to come…'" (Cf. Augustine, *Ennarrationes in Psalmos*, CXXIII.ii, iv.)

[66] *CD* XXI.xv: *Sicut enim per unum hominem peccantem in hoc tam grave malum devenimus, ita per unum hominem eundem Deum iustificantem ad illud bonum tam sublime veniemus.* / "Just as we came down so heavily into this evil through one man who sinned, so we will come to such a sublime good through one man, who was also the God who justifies."

arrived at peace from the war of flesh desiring against spirit and spirit against flesh."[67] This goes both for the conversion claims of individual Christians and for the attempts of the Church as a whole to define itself. Though humankind is always in flux, its attempts to neatly pinpoint its own transformations continue to meet with frustration.

Those within the walls of the Church can always pass beyond them, as Augustine constantly cautions us. Yet he also holds—perhaps with less frequency—that the fates of those outside the walls remain unknown to us, as well. They could quite easily reenter the fold sometime between today and the eschaton. That is why they must be prayed for rather than rooted out. It is difficult to say whether Augustine observed such openness in his daily practice, but the force of his argument does nevertheless lead us in this direction.[68] Of the Church, he writes:

> So, for now, it prays for those people it holds to be enemies, since it is the time of fruitful repentance. Why would it pray for them at all, if not so that, as the Apostle says, 'God might give them repentance so they are rescued from the snares of the devil, who was holding them captive on account of their own wills?' Lastly, if the church were so certain that it knew who in this life was predestined to go into eternal fire with the devil, it would pray neither for them nor for the devil. But since it is certain about no one, to this extent the church prays for all its embodied enemies. Still, its prayers are not always heard. The church's prayers for its enemies are only heard when those who are opposed to the church are nevertheless predestined, so that the church's prayers on their behalf are heard and they are made children of the church.[69]

---

[67] *CD* XXI.xv, following the line cited just above: *Nec quisquam se debet ab isto ad illum transisse confidere, nisi cum ibi fuerit ubi temptatio nulla erit, nisi pacem tenuerit quam belli huius, in quo caro concupiscit adversus spiritum et spiritus adversus carnem, multis et variis certaminibus quaerit.*

[68] We cannot escape the fact that Augustine wrote the words "compel them to come in." If we are to entertain the possibility of an Augustinian openness, it cannot be taken as some kind of twenty-first-century open-mindedness. Augustine was not particularly 'tolerant.' Instead, he passes through the timeless certainty of the divine decision and comes out the other side, into the temporal realm of human uncertainty about that very decision. That is why he is able to hold at once to both fixed predestination and communal openness. It is not that communities do not have boundaries at all, but that we lack any proper criteria for determining those boundaries from within history itself. For a subtle sketch of the development of Augustine's position on coercion, see Markus, *Saeculum*, 134-135 and 141-145.

[69] *CD* XXI.xxiv: *Nunc enim propterea pro eis orat quos in genere humano habet inimicos quia tempus est paenitentiae fructuosae. Nam quid maxime pro eis orat, nisi 'ut det illis Deus,' sicut dicit apostolus, 'paentitentiam et resipiscant de diaboli laqueis, a quo captivi tenentur secundum ipsius voluntatem?' Denique si de aliquibus ita*

Here Augustine is able to set the stability of the divine decision right alongside our inability to take hold of that stability for ourselves. These might at first strike us as competing claims. On the one hand, Augustine is telling us to pray for outsiders, since we do not know who will turn out to be on the inside in the end. On the other hand, he is saying that our prayers will not be heard if God has not already chosen those outsiders as His own. The work of human hands seems to bristle against the timeless decision of the divine.

The *City of God*, however, sees no such competition between humanity and its God. We can only understand this if we appreciate Augustine's take on the fundamental interpretive difficulties of historical life. The *saeculum* greets us as emptied of meaning not because there really is no order at all, but because that order is concealed. Justice strikes us as impossible not because it is impossible, but because it is impossible for us to fully grasp it now. Providence is kept hidden, but God is still provident. We cannot see grace descend upon us as a dove, yet it continues to count for everything. What Augustine is doing here is thinking his way through the relationship between a timeless decision and lives lived in time.

By passing through the logic of timelessness, rather than navigating around it, Augustine is forced to confront some awkward aspects of his faith, not the least of which is the priority of predestination. Yet, by doing this, he is eventually able to come out on the other side of timelessness and go back into the dim world of temporality. That part is crucial. It is not enough to acknowledge the decisiveness of God's timeless judgment. We also have to acknowledge our own inability to access that judgment before the time. That is how Augustine, so near to the end

---

certa esset, ut qui sint illi etiam nosset qui, licet adhuc in hac vita sint constituti, tamen praedestinati sunt in aeternum ignem ire cum diabolo, tam pro eis non oraret quam nec pro ipso. Sed quia de nullo certa est, orat pro omnibus dumtaxat hominibus inimicis suis in hoc corpore constitutis, nec tamen pro omnibus exauditur. Pro his enim solis exauditur qui, etsi adversantur ecclesiae, ita sunt tamen praedestinati ut pro eis exaudiatur ecclesia et filii efficiantur ecclesiae. The apostolic reference is to 2 Tim. 2:25-26.

of the *City of God*, arrives at his understanding of communal boundaries as deferred, passible, and open.[70] This is as true for us as it is untrue for God.

Book XXII, finally, closes the *City of God* with a speculative account of what the heaven of heavens will be like for those who are predestined to life. They too will receive their bodies back anew. Rather than being burned forever, though, they will be granted the ultimate gift: the beatific vision of God.[71] This too will be embodied, affirms Augustine, and he then proceeds to detail the mechanics underlying such 'spiritualized' flesh.[72] For our purposes, it is enough to note that only in this eschatological state will (part of) humankind be able to bring the war between spirit and flesh to an end.[73] True closure concerning this destiny of the heavenly city will, however, have to be deferred, just as was the case with the end of the earthly city. For now, life

---

[70] Appreciating Augustine on the temporality of communities might help us get at why Markus' interpretation of the *saeculum* proves so resilient against those who want to mobilize the two-cities model for a more virulent critique of 'secular' society. Wetzel sums this debate up with concision; see "Tale of Two Cities," 17: "When Markus attempts to make a political virtue out of the invisibility of the *civitas peregrina*, the godly but foreign city, he gets criticized by a number of astute theologians for secularizing Augustine's theology and blunting the church's critique of the world." These theologians include figures as diverse as: Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: a Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19-20 (1987), 55-72; Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 48-72; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, esp. 411. Markus responded to such criticisms in *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame: UND Press, 2006). He had already argued for his position quite eloquently in *Saeculum*, 71: "The new emphasis [on the two-cities model] is part of Augustine's most mature reflection on the secular components of human life and flows from his understanding of the *saeculum*, not as a no-man's land between the two cities, but as their temporal life in their interwoven, perplexed, and only eschatologically separable reality."

[71] *CD* XXII.xxix.

[72] See, e.g., *CD* XXII.vii-x (for a defense of the possibility of resurrection), as well as xii-xvii and xix-xxi (on the qualities of resurrected bodies).

[73] *CD* XXII.xxiii: *In illo autem regno, ubi semper cum corporibus inmortalibus erimus, nec proelia nobis erunt ulla nec debita. Quae nusquam et numquam essent, si natura nostra sicut recta creata est permaneret. Ac per hoc etiam noster iste conflictus, in quo periclitamur et de quo nos victoria novissima cupimus liberari, ad vitae huius mala pertinet, quam tot tantorumque testimonio malorum probamus esse damnatam*. / "But in that kingdom, where we will always have immortal bodies, we will have no more battles or debts. There would never have been any battles or debts at all if our nature had remained as it was rightly created. And so even this conflict of ours, in which we are put to the test and from which we desire to be freed at the final victory, belongs to the evils of this life. By the testimony of so many great evils, we prove that this life has been condemned."

remains a bewildering struggle. Volitional *distentio* reigns, "and so we do not do what we want to do."[74]

The depths of the deferral that conditions our temporal experience will be made most evident at the eschaton, if only to the blessed. Returning to Paul's reservations about judgment in 1 Corinthians, Augustine writes of the beatific vision:

> Our thoughts will also be opened up for us in turn. Then what the Apostle said will be fulfilled: 'Do not judge anything before the time.' Immediately, he added: '… until the Lord comes, illuminating what is hidden in the darkness and making the heart's thoughts manifest. Then there will be praise for each person from God.'[75]

The final revelation will then lift the veil not just from God's plan as a whole, but also from the hidden thoughts of each person caught up in that plan. From Ambrose, we already learned about how our thoughts were not in our power. Here we find that the blindness brought about by such primordial passivity is to be healed in light of the vision of God. True illumination comes not now, but with the rising of the sun of justice, whose just ordering of the world remains covered in darkness, strange as that may seem.

Conclusion

As was hinted at earlier, Augustine returns to the order of the times in the closing lines of Book XXII. The lack of any *articuli temporis* in this *saeculum* corresponds nicely to the invisibility of providence and justice. It is not simply that we have a vague feeling that things are

---

[74] This is of course a frequent refrain, but see particularly *CD* XXII.xxiii: *Praeter haec autem mala huius vitae bonis malisque communia habent in ea iusti etiam proprios quosdam labores suos quibus adversus vitia militant et in talium proeliorum temptationibus periculisque versantur. Aliquando enim concitatius, aliquando remissius, non tamen desinit caro concupiscere adversus spiritum et spiritus adversus carnem, ut non ea quae volumus facimus, omnem malam concupiscentiam consumendo*. / "But besides the bad things of this life that are held in common by both good and bad people, the just have certain struggles of their own. They wage war on the vices and are turned to the trials and dangers of such battles. Sometimes the situation is fiercer, other times calmer, but the flesh never ceases to desire against the spirit, nor the spirit against the flesh. And so we do not do what we want to do." (Cf. Gal. 5:17)

[75] *CD* XXII.xxix: *Patebunt etiam cogitationes nostrae invicem nobis. Tunc enim implebitur, quod apostolus, cum dixisset: 'Nolite ante tempus iudicare quicquam,' mox addidit: 'Donec veniat Dominus, et inluminabit abscondita tenebrarum et manifestabit cogitationes cordis, et tunc laus erit unicuique a Deo.*

not how they should be. We lack, on a much more fundamental level, any criteria for making sense of the historical world as we live through it. Just as we have trouble affixing reliable boundaries to our communities, so we stumble when we try to erect boundary-markers within the monotonous march of time. Both kinds of frustration are symptoms of our underlying lack of comfort with our own temporal condition. Both result from trying to gain a timeless, godlike perspective on things while remaining thoroughly time-bound ourselves.[76]

Here again, then, Augustine holds the fixed periods of Scriptural *historia* up against the muddled homogeneity of our time. Adam leads us to Noah, Noah to Abraham, Abraham to David, David to Babylon, and Babylon to Christ. Then comes our *saeculum*. The contrast is

---

[76] From certain moralizing standpoints, a rather sizable criticism could be levelled at Augustine here. Historiographical humility—at least if embraced to excess—could conceivably produce political quietism. For an expression of this kind of concern, see Virginia Burrus, "An Immoderate Feast: Augustine Reads John's Apocalypse," *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999), 183-194, esp. 193: "What I am attempting to say—with [Catherine] Keller but in contrast to much scholarship on Augustine—is that Augustine's text fails most dramatically in the direction of these very intentions, that his strategies of displacement and deferral continue to inscribe a deep and deeply misogynistic mistrust of the flesh of history even while resisting the lure of asceticism's utopianism. These 'failures' are not, moreover, accidental but inherent to the structure of his apocalypticism." This deeper concern about the relationship between Christianity and politics also animates Peter Iver Kaufman's "Patience and/or Politics: Augustine and the Crisis at Calama, 408-409," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 1 (2003), 22-35, which builds on more foundational contributions such as: Ernst Dassmann, "*Fuga Saeculi*: Aspekte frühchristlicher Kulturkritik bei Ambrosius und Augustinus", in *Wege der Theologie: An der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1996); Claude Lepelley, "*Spes Saeculi*: Le milieu sociale d'Augustin et ses ambitions seculières avant sa conversion," *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 24-26 (1987), 99-117; Lepelley, "Un aspect de la conversion d'Augustin: La rupture avec ses ambitions sociales et politiques," *Bulletin de litterature ecclésiastique* 88 (1987), 229- 46; Ernst Fortin, "Justice and the Foundation of the Political Community: Augustine and his Pagan Models," in *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, ed. Christoph Horn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997); Jean-Claude Fredouille, "Les sermons d'Augustin sur la chute de Rome," in *Augustin Prédicateur*, ed. Goulven Madec (Paris: Institut des Études Augustiniennes, 1998), 339-48; Robert Dodaro, "Augustine's Secular City," *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. Dodaro and George Lawless (London: Routledge, 2000), 235-259; and Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). For his part, Kaufman, 34-35, connects Augustine's conduct concerning Calama back to the broader movements of the *City of God*: "He questioned the value of civic virtue and flatly denied that 'care for the city' and civil service reaped celestial rewards. What Ernest Fortin says of Augustine's sprawling *City of God* applies equally well to his correspondence on the crisis at Calama, for it, too, 'cast[s] in the sharpest possible light the intrinsic limitations of political life.'" Lee, "Using the Earthly City," 42, offers an updated summary: "In '*Ecclesia* and *Res Publica*: How Augustinian are Neo-Augustinian Politics?,' Robert Dodaro highlights the range of contemporary appropriations Augustine's political thought has animated. On Peter Kaufman's 'minimalist' view, Augustine harbors no illusions for lasting political reform and hopes for little beyond Christian rulers making corrupt systems less bad. For John Milbank, Augustine not only condemns non-Christian political communities as irredeemably vicious but also presents the church as a kind of 'perfect society' capable of furnishing for itself all spiritual and political goods. Finally, Robert Markus sees in Augustine warrant for a 'liberal' approach whereby Christians and non-Christians can overcome their divergence on ultimate ends to advance a shared view of society's goods." Coleman, 337-339, sees Augustines as almost a proto-Hobbesian figure.

clear. Augustine has been working out its consequences for much of the *City of God*. The final few books then bring us to the end of the *saeculum* and the dawn of a "seventh day," the eschatological Sabbath.[77] It will prove more restful for some than for others. At that point—perhaps we could call it the final articulation of time—the six-day schema will both culminate and evaporate. By grace and grace alone, temporal humankind will draw as near as it possibly can to timelessness, as the true citizens of the heavenly city enter into the heaven of heavens.[78]

---

[77] See again the whole passage from *CD* XXII.xxx: *Ipse etiam numerus aetatum, veluti dierum, si secundum eos articulos temporis computetur qui scripturis videtur expressi, iste sabbatismus evidentius apparebit, quoniam septimus invenitur; ut prima aetas tamquam primus dies sit ab Adam usque ad diluvium, secunda inde usque ad Abraham, non aequalitate temporum, sed numero generationum; denas quippe habere reperiuntur. Hinc iam, sicut Matthaeus evangelista determinat, tres aetates usque ad Christi subsequuntur adventum, quae singulae denis et quaternis generationibus explicantur: ab Abraham usque ad David una, altera inde usque ad transmigrationem in Babyloniam, tertia inde usque ad Christi carnalem nativitatem. Fiunt itaque omnes quinque. Sexta nunc agitur nullo generationum numero metienda propter id quod dictum est: 'Non est vestrum scire tempora quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.' Post hanc tamquam in die septimo requiescet Deus, cum eundem diem septimum, quod nos erimus, in se ipso Deo faciet requiescere. De istis porro aetatibus singulis nunc diligenter longum est disputare; haec tamen septima erit sabbatum nostrum, cuius finis non erit vespera, sed dominicus dies velut octavus aeternus, qui Christi resurrectione sacratus est, aeternam non solum spiritus, verum etiam corporis requiem praefigurans. Ibi vacabimus et videbimus, videbimus et amabimus, amabimus et laudabimus. Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine. Nam quis alius noster est finis nisi pervenire ad regnum cuius nullus est finis?* / "If we calculate the number of the ages as if they were days, according to the joints of time that Scripture seems to make clear, then there will obviously appear to be a Sabbath, since that is the seventh day. So the first 'day' or age would be from Adam to the flood; the second from the flood to Abraham. These two are equal not in spans of time, but in number of generations. Both are found to have ten. From here on we have, as Matthew determined in his gospel, three subsequent ages up to the arrival of Christ. He explains that each of these ages has fourteen generations. So the third age runs from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to the Babylonian exile; and the fifth from the exile to the birth of Christ in the flesh. So far we have five altogether. The sixth age is happening now, but it cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it is written: 'It is not for you to know the times that the Father, in His power, put in place.' After this age, as if on the seventh day, God will rest. That is, He will make this 'seventh day'—which we are—come to rest. Right now, though, we are far from discussing each of these ages carefully. Still, this seventh day will be our Sabbath. Its end will not be an evening, but rather the eighth day: the Lord's eternal day. The eighth day was made sacred by the resurrection of Christ, and it prefigured the eternal rest not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we will be emptied out and we will see. We will see and we will love. We will love and we will praise. Look at what will be in the end without end! What is the end for us, if not to arrive at the kingdom that has no end?" (The reference is, once again, to Acts 1:7.) Augustine here brings in the eighth day, usually associated with Christ's resurrection on the day after the Sabbath. Associating it with the general resurrection would not work within the bounds of this passage, since that resurrection will have already occurred at the end of the sixth age. Instead, the relation between the seventh and eighth day seems to mark the breakdown of temporal categories upon entry into the sempiternal heaven of heavens. On the timing of the resurrection, cf. XXII.x: *Christus resurrexit a mortuis et inmortalitatem resurrectionis in sua carne primus ostendit, quam nobis adfuturam vel in principio novi saeculi vel in huius fine promisit.* / "Christ rose from the dead and first showed the immortaliy of resurrection in His own flesh. And He promised that this resurrection will be there for us, either in the beginning of a new age or in the end of this one."

[78] At *CD* XX.xx-xxii, Augustine uses the word *sempiternus* rather than *aeternus* to describe humankind's eschatological everlastingness, probably in order to differentiate it from God's eternity. Divine *aeternitas* would

To claim such a timeless perspective now, though, would be a perverse imitation of God. That is what Augustine means when he talks about pride in this context. To reject or ignore the belatedness that afflicts our temporal lives on every level would be to set ourselves up for another deception and another fall. Belatedness, we could say, is what names the difference between our perspective and God's. On the scale of one person, we saw how our experience of our own lives always strikes us as out of step. We are never able to steady ourselves in the river so that we can orient ourselves properly. To think that we have already done so is to judge ourselves—innocent, most likely—before the time.[79]

A similar lack of orientation afflicts our historical self-awareness as communities. All of the judgments we make about others—whether we find them guilty or innocent—suffer from a lack of a judicial framework that would fully justify them in the present.[80] As a result, the walls we try to build around ourselves will fail to sharpen into focus until the last time. Here our belatedness is stretched to its eschatological breaking-point. We are out of step not only with the present instant of time, but also with our present age of history. Caught up in the order of times, we know not what they mean. Instead, we have only the meaningless barrage of apparent events that make up the *saeculum*. Meaning, order, and closure will arrive late for us, in the most extreme sense. The times will settle into place only 'when' there is no longer any time. The song

---

have to be completely atemporal, whereas the status of humanity after the eschaton might be more like the quasi-temporality or omni-temporality of the angels.

[79] Marrou, 80, holds this up as one of the basic lessons to take from Augustine's approach to historical meaning: "This is what I would propose we call the mystery of history. It's easy to perceive the practical consequences of such a doctrine. It preserves us from all easy puritanism and its resulting pharisaism." But then see also ibid., 81: "But to stop here would be to make this truth into a very base idea, unworthy of God, as if its only advantages were some kind of pedagogy. The Lord has hidden the details of history's realization not to excite us with zeal and give us an occasion for merit. He refused to reveal to us 'the day and the hour' of history's completion. This mystery is inscribed deeply within the nature of things."

[80] On the need for closure in the appraisal of human actions, see Marrou, 82: "The value of our acts and their long-term consequences cannot be measured until history has attained its completion."

will be appreciated once it has been sung.[81] As we have seen, then, Augustine's emphasis on the eschatological deferral of judgment retrospectively colors his whole portrayal of human history. It is not simply that, until we have the ending in hand, we are left unsatisfied with an unfinished story. Augustine goes further than that. Until the very end comes, there will be no story to be found in the *saeculum* at all.

[81] We have seen Augustine's musical analogies come up again and again. On this, see Marrou, 83: "Every musical work—be it melody or fugue or symphony—unfolds in time. It recites its notes, its lines, and its harmonies, linking them together. These elements, as perceived through the ear of the listener, inscribe themselves in the memory, where, little by little, a perception of the whole ensemble is built up—a musical judgment, which constitutes the sense and meaning of the work as heard. But this judgment and this sense are not given from the beginning. If the work is truly rich, it is definitely received only with the final rhythm, the completed *stretto*, and the last chord. Until then, the melody can always bounce back, alter itself, switch directions, restart, or come back to life anew."

Bibliography

Ando, Clifford. "Pagan Apologetics and Christian Intolerance in the Ages of Themistius and Augustine." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 171-207.

Archambault, Paul. "Augustine, Memory, and the Development of Autobiography." *Augustinian Studies* 13 (1982): 23-30.

Aristotle. *Physics*. Translated by P.H. Wicksteed and F.M. Cornford. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929-1934.

Asiedu, F.B.A. "Following the Example of a Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386." *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 276-306.

Augustine. *Answer to the Pelagians IV*. Translated by Roland Teske. Hyde Park NY: New City, 1999.

Augustine. *City of God*. Translated by R.W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

———. *City of God*. Translated by George McCracken, William M. Green, David Wiesen, Philip Levine, E.M. Sanford, and William C. Greene. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1957-1972.

———. *Confessiones*. Edited by James J. O'Donnell. Accessed online. http://www.stoa.org/hippo/.

———. *Confessiones*. CCSL 27. Edited by Luc Verheijen. Turnhout: Brepols, 1981.

———. *Confessions*. Translated by William Watt. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1912.

———. *Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, De Ordine, De Magistro, De Libero Arbitrio*. CCSL 29. Edited by W.M. Green and K.D. Daur. Turnhout: Brepols, 1970.

———. *De Civitate Dei*. CCSL 47-48. Edited by B. Dombart and A. Kalb. Turnhout: Brepols, 1955.

———. *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*. CCSL 44. Edited by A. Mutzenbecher. Turnhout: Brepols, 1970.

———. *De Dono Perseverantiae*. In *Opera Omnia*, vol. X, Patrologia Latina XLV, 933-1034. Paris: Migne, 1865.

———. *De Fide Rerum Inuisibilium, Enchiridion ad Laurentium de Fide et Spe et Caritate, De Catechizandis Rudibus, Sermo ad Catechumenos de Symbolo, Sermo de Disciplina Christiana, De Utilitate Ieiunii, Sermo de Excidio Urbis Romae, De Haeresibus*. CCSL

46. Edited by M.P.J. van den Hout, M. Evans, J. Bauer, R. Vander Plaetse, S.D. Ruegg, M.V. O'Reilly, C. Beukers. Turnhout: Brepols, 1969.

———. *De Trinitate*. CCSL 50. Editd by W.J. Mountain and F. Glorie. Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.

———. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. CCSL 38-40. Edited by E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont. Turnhout: Brepols, 1990.

———. *Later Works*. Translated by John Burnaby. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955.

———. *On Christian Teaching*. Translated by R.P.H. Green. Oxford UP, 2008.

———. *On Genesis*. Translated by Edmund Hill. Hyde Park NY: New City, 2002.

———. *On The Trinity*. Translated by Edmund Hill. Hyde Park NY: New City, 1991.

———. *Sermons*. Volume III. Translated by Edmund Hill. Brooklyn NY: New City, 1992.

Avramenko, Richard. "The Wound and Salve of Time: Augustine's Politics of Human Happiness." *Review of Metaphysics* 60 (June 2007): 779-811.

Ayres, Lewis. *Augustine and the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.

Barrett, Lee C. *Eros and Self-Emptying: the Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

Bennington, Geoffrey. "A Moment of Madness: Derrida's Kierkegaard." *Oxford Literary Review* 33, no. 1 (2011): 103-127.

Bouton-Touboulic, Anne-Isabelle. *L'ordre Caché: la Notion de l'Ordre chez saint Augustin*. Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2004).

Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Bubacz, Bruce. "Augustine's Account of Factual Memory." *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975): 181-192.

Burns, J. Patout. *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980.

Burns, J. Patout, and Robin M. Jensen. *Christianity in Roman Africa: the Development of its Practices and Beliefs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Burns, Paul C. "Augustine's Use of Sallust in the *City of God*: the Role of the Grammatical Tradition." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 105-114.

Burrus, Virginia. “An Immoderate Feast: Augustine Reads John’s Apocalypse.” *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 183-194.

Byers, Sarah. “Augustine on the ‘Divided Self:’ Platonist or Stoic?” *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 105-118.

Cameron, Michael. *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine’s Early Figurative Exegesis*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Casiday, A.M.C. “Grace and the Humanity of Christ according to St. Vincent of Lérins.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 59, no. 3 (2005): 298-314.

Cavadini, John. “The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine’s Thought.” *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 119-132.

Chin, Catherine. “Christians and the Roman Classroom: Memory, Grammar, and Rhetoric in *Confessions* X.” *Augustinian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2002): 161-182.

Coleman, Janet. *A History of Political Thought*. London: Blackwell, 2000.

Conybeare, Catherine. “Terrarum Orbi Documentum: Augustine, Camillus, and Learning from History.” *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 59-74.

Corrigan, Kevin. *Reason, Faith, and Otherness in Neoplatonic and Early Christian Thought*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Courcelle, Pierre. *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950.

Coyle, J. Kevin. “Adapted Discourse: Heaven in Augustine’s *City of God* and in His Contemporary Preaching.” *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 205-219.

Craig, William Lane. “Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will.” *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984): 41-63.

Cress, Donald A. “Hierius and St. Augustine’s Account of the Lost ‘*De Pulchro et Apto*:’ *Confessions* IV.13-15.” *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976): 153-163.

Cullmann, Oscar. *Christus und Zeit*. Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946.

Daly, Christopher T., John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth, eds. *Augustine and History*. Lanham MD: Lexington, 2008.

Dassmann, Ernst. “*Fuga Saeculi*: Aspekte frühchristlicher Kulturkritik bei Ambrosius und Augustinus.” In *Wege der Theologie: An der Schwelle zum dritten Jahrtausend*, edited by Günter Risse, Heino Sonnemans, and Burkhard Thess. Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1996.

Davenport, Guy. *Herakleitos and Diogenes*. San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1981.

De Bruyn, Theodore S. "Ambivalence within a 'Totalizing Discourse:' Augustine's Sermons on the Sack of Rome." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 405-421.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.

den Boeft, Jan. "*Aeterne Rerum Conditor*: Ambrose's Poem about 'Time.'" In *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hillhorst*, edited by Florentino Garcia Martinez and Gerald P. Luttikhuizen, 27-40. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

———. "Daemon(es)." In the *Augustinus-Lexikon*, edited by Cornelius Mayer et al. Basel: Schwabe, 1986- .

———. "Some Etymologies in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* X." *Vigiliae Christianae* 33, no. 3 (1979): 242-259.

Derrida, Jacques. *Given Time*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. *Writing and Difference.* Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Dodaro, Robert. "Augustine's Secular City." In *Augustine and His Critics*, edited by Dodaro and George Lawless, 235-259. London: Routledge, 2000.

———. "*Ecclesia* and *Res Publica*: How Augustinian Are Neo-Augustinian Politics?" In *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?*, edited by L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, and M. Wisse, 237-271. Leuven: Peeters, 2009.

———. "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's *City of God* in a 'Postmodern' World." *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 77–137.

Doignon, Jean. "Oracles, Prophéties, 'on-dit' sur la chute de Rome: les réactions de Jérôme et d'Augustin." *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 36, no. 1 (1990): 120-146.

Doucet, Dominique. "L'*Ars Memoriae* dans les *Confessions*." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 33 (1987): 49-69.

Ferrari, Leo. "Paul at the Conversion of Augustine." *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 5-20.

———. "The Barren Field in Augustine's *Confessions*." *Augustinian Studies* 8 (1977): 55-70.

———. *The Conversions of Saint Augustine*. Villanova PA: Villanova UP, 1984.

Fitzgerald, Allan, et al., eds. *Augustine through the Ages*. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999.

Flasch, Kurt. *Was Ist Zeit? Augustinus von Hippo: Das XI Buch der Confessiones*. 3rd edition. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2016.

Fortin, Ernst. "Justice and the Foundation of the Political Community: Augustine and his Pagan Models." In *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, edited by Christoph Horn, 41-62. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997.

Fredouille, Jean-Claude. "Les sermons d'Augustin sur la chute de Rome." In *Augustin Prédicateur*, edited by Goulven Madec, 339-348. Paris: Institut des Études Augustiniennes, 1998.

Fredriksen, Paula. *Augustine and the Jews: a Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.

Frend, W.H.C. "Augustine and Orosius: on the End of the Ancient World." *Augustinian Studies* 20 (1989): 1-38.

———. *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Futch, Michael. "Augustine on the Successiveness of Time." *Augustinian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 17-38.

Gilson, Etienne. *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. Translated by L.E.M. Lynch. New York: Octagon, 1960.

Gundersdorf von Jess, Wilma. "Augustine: a Consistent and Unitary Theory of Time." *New Scholasticism* 46 (1972): 337-351.

Hadot, Pierre. *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*. Edited by Jeanne Cartier and Arnold I. Davidson. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.

Hankey, Wayne. "'Knowing as We are Known' in *Confessions* 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian, and Christian Obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi Seauton*, from Socrates to Modernity." *Augustinian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 23-48.

Harrison, Carol. *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

———. "Getting Carried Away: Why Did Augustine Sing?" *Augustinian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 1-22.

Harvey, Jr., Paul J. "Approaching the Apocalypse: Augustine, Tyconius, and John's Revelation." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 133-151.

Hochschild, Paige E. *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

Hollerich, Michael. "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular.'" *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 311-326.

Hübner, Wolfgang. "Die *Praetoria Memoriae* im zehnten Buch der *Confessiones*: Vergilisches bei Augustin." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* (1981): 245-263.

Humphries, Thomas L. "Distentio Animi: Praesens Temporis, Imago Aeternitatis." *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 75-101.

Jordan, Robert. "Time and Contingency in St. Augustine." *Review of Metaphysics* 8 (1955): 394-417.

Kaufman, Peter Iver. "Patience and/or Politics: Augustine and the Crisis at Calama, 408-409." *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 1 (2003): 22-35.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Johannes Climacus: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1985.

Kirschner, Robert. "Two Responses to Epochal Change: Augustine and the Rabbis on Ps. 137 (136)." *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 242-262.

Kretzmann, Norman, and Eleonore Stump. "Eternity." *Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981): 429-458.

Lacey, Hugh M. "Empiricism and Augustine's Problems about Time." *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968): 219-245.

Lee, Gregory W. "Using the Earthly City: Ecclesiology, Political Activity, and Religious Coercion in Augustine." *Augustinian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 41-63.

Lepelley, Claude. "*Spes Saeculi*: Le milieu sociale d'Augustin et ses ambitions seculières avant sa conversion." *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 24-26 (1987): 99-117.

———. "Un aspect de la conversion d'Augustin: La rupture avec ses ambitions sociales et politiques." *Bulletin de litterature ecclésiastique* 88 (1987): 229-246.

Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.

Madec, Goulven. "*Tempora christiana:* Expression du triomphalisme chretien ou recrimination paienne?" In *Scientia Augustiniana: Studien iiber Augustinus, den Augustinismus und*

den Augustinerorden: Festschrift A. Zumkeller GSA zum 60. Geburtstag, edited by C. P. Mayer and W. Eckermann, 112-136. Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1975.

Maier, Harry O. "The End of the City and the City without End: the City of God as Revelation." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 153-164.

Marion, Jean-Luc. *In the Self's Place: the Approach of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012.

Markus, R.A. *Christianity and the Secular*. Notre Dame: UND Press, 2006.

———. "Marius Victorinus and Augustine." In *Cambridge History of Late Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong, 402-405. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967.

———. *Saeculum*: *History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

———. *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity*. Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Marrou, Henri-Irénée. *Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique*. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1983.

———. *L'Ambivalence du Temps de l'Histoire chez Augustin*. Montreal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1950.

Mathewes, Charles. "A Worldly Augustinianism: Augustine's Sacramental Vision of Creation." *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 333-348.

———. *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times*. Grand Rapis: Eerdmans, 2010.

McGinn, Bernard, and Richard K. Emmerson, eds. *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.

McLynn, Neil B. "Augustine's Roman Empire." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 29-44.

Mendelson, Michael. "*Venter Animi* / *Distentio Animi*: Memory and Temporality in Augustine's *Confessions*." *Augustinian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2000): 137-163.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

Miner, Robert. "Augustinian Recollection." *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007): 435-450.

Nightingale, Andrea. "Augustine on Extending Onself to God through Intention." *Augustinian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2015): 185-209.

———. *Once Out Of Nature: Augustine on Time and the Body*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Nirenberg, David. *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition*. New York: Norton, 2013.

O'Daly, G.J.P. "Thinking through History: Augustine's Method in the *City of God* and its Ciceronian Dimension." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 45-57.

O'Donovan, Oliver. "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19." In Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, 48-72. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

O'Loughlin, Thomas. "The Development of Augustine the Bishop's Critique of Astrology." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1999): 83-103.

O'Meara, J.J. *The Young Augustine: the Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1954.

Ogliari, D. *Gratia et Certamen: the Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-Called Semipelagians*. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Oppel, Catherine. "'Why, my soul, are you sad?': Augustine's Opinion on Sadness in the *City of God* and an Interpretation of His Tears in the *Confessions*." *Augustinian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 199-236.

Otten, Willemien. "Bach's Passions in a Secular World: Comments about Bach, Ambrose, and Augustine in Honour of Ton Koopman." In *Studies in Baroque: Festschrift Ton Koopman*, edited by Albert Clement. Bonn: Dr. J. Butz, 2014.

Plato. *Parmenides*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1926.

———. *Timaeus*. Translated by R.G. Bury. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929.

Plotinus. *Enneads*. Translated by A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1967.

Pollmann, Karla. "Moulding the Present: Apocalyptic as Hermeneutics in City of God 21-22." *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 165-181.

Pollmann, Karla, and Willemien Otten, eds. *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

Pranger, M.B. *Eternity's Ennui: Temporality, Perseverance, and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

———. "Inside Augustine." *Augustinian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 1-16.

———. “Time and the Integrity of Poetry: Ambrose and Augustine.” In *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity: the Encounter between Classical and Christian Strategies of Interpretation*, edited by Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Quinn, John M. “Four Faces of Time in Augustine.” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 26 (1992): 181-231.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. I. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

———. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. III. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Rist, John. *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Rogers, Katherin A. “Eternity Has No Duration.” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 1-16.

———. “St. Augustine on Time and Eternity.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1996): 207-223.

Ross, Donald L. “Time, the Heaven of Heavens, and Memory in Augustine’s *Confessions*.” *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 191-205.

Russell, Bertrand. *Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948.

Schiller, Friedrich von. *Two Essays by Friedrich von Schiller: ‘Naïve and Sentimental Poetry’ and ‘On the Sublime.’* Translated by Julius A. Elias. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966.

Seneca. *Epistles*.Vol. I. Translated by Richard Gummere. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1917.

Smith, Gregory A. “How Thin is a Demon?” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 479-512.

Smith, Thomas A. “The Pleasure of Hell in *City of God* 21.” *Augustinian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 195-204.

Sorabji, Richard. *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD*. Vol. II. Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2005.

———. *Time, Creation, and Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.* Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1983.

Strobach, Niko. *The Moment of Change*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998.

Strozynski, Mateusz. “Time, Self, and Aporia: Spiritual Exercise in Saint Augustine.” *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 103-120.

Studer, Basil. “History and Faith in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.” *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 7-50.

Teske, Roland. *Paradoxes of Time in St. Augustine*. Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1996.

———. “The World-Soul and Time in St. Augustine.” *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 75-92.

Ticciati, Susannah. “Augustine and Grace Ex Nihilo: the Logic of Augustine’s Response to the Monks of Hadrumetum and Marseilles.” *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2010): 401-422.

Tilley, Maureen A. *The Bible in Christian North Africa: the Donatist World*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Van Dusen, David. *The Space of Time: A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions X to XII*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

van Nuffelen, Peter. *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

van Oort, Johannes. *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities.* Leiden: Brill, 1991.

von Heyking, John. *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*. Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

Webb, Melanie. “‘On Lucretia Who Slew Herself:’ Rape and Consolation in Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*.” *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 37-58.

Wetzel, James. “A Tangle of Two Cities.” *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1-2 (2012): 5-23.

Wetzel, James. “The Force of Memory: Reflections on the Interrupted Self.” *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 147-159.

Wetzel, James. “Time after Augustine.” *Religious Studies* 31, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 341-357.

Wetzel, James. *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.

Williams, Rowan. “Politics and the Soul: a Reading of the *City of God*.” *Milltown Studies* 19-20 (1987): 55-72.