

Augustine

& the Paradox of the Present

In the eleventh book of the *Confessions* we see Augustine—indeed, in a rare feat of protracted analysis—exploring the enigma of time according to a schema of three questions: 1) What is time? 2) How can it be measured? 3) How is it related to eternity? Central to the investigation and eventual solution of this enigma is the concept of 'the present' (*praesens*). Although I am of the opinion that Augustine's treatment and proposed solution to the enigma of time offer valuable insights, as well as mark an advance vis-à-vis pre-Augustinian thought, I will argue in this essay that he ultimately gives it an inadequate answer due to operating with a fundamentally paradoxical view of the present—a paradoxicality of which he is insufficiently aware.*

1. METAPHYSICO-OBJECTIVE EXPLORATION OF TIME

After having posed the question as to what time is (11.14.17), he goes on to explore its possible objective, metaphysical status:

Arg. I

- (1) Time (*tempus*) consists of the past (*praeteritum*), the present (*praesens*) and the future (*futurum*)
- (2) The past, however, no longer exists, and the future does not exist yet
- (3) Only the present can exist.

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But since the present is not always present but passes over into the past, it cannot truly be said to exist—to be. Rather, one must say that the present, that time itself, exists only in the sense that it aims at non-being: It is in order not to be. This conclusion is related to what he views as constituting true being (*vere esse*). For to truly be in Augustinian metaphysics is, among other things, to be immutable (*immutable*; *incommutable*), self-identical (*idipsum*) and simple (*simplex*).¹

To amplify:

Arg.II

- (1) Seeing that the past and future do not exist, they can neither be immutable, self-identical nor simple
- (2) Although the present is, it does not remain present but passes, or goes, over (*transiret*) into the past
- (3) The present cannot be immutable, self-identical or simple.

In fact, if the present did not pass away into the past but remained one with itself—if it were always present (*semper praesens*)—, it would indeed exist but no longer be time: It would be eternity (*aeternitas*; *sempiternitas*). For Augustine (11.1.1ff.) true being and its corresponding properties, including that of eternity itself (=timelessness), is co-extensive with being uncreated, i.e. with the subject 'God' (cf. e.g. 11.11.13).² This argument clearly implies a dualistic cut (based dialectically on the notion of creation) between the immutable, self-identical and simple present ('timelessness,' 'God') and the mutable, transient present ('time,' 'creature'). And although the latter *itself* is not multiform (for it wouldn't be a present then), his way of arguing clearly presupposes that it is

¹ For a treatment of the concept of being in Augustine, see Narve Strand, *The God of Augustine* (Oslo, 1998), ch. 1 ("Being and Essence"). See also *Conf.* book 11.

² Cf. *En. in Ps.* 102.2.10: "... eternity is the very substance of God (*aeternitas, ipsa Dei substantia est*), which has nothing changeable; there nothing is past, as if it were no longer; nothing is future, as if it existed not as yet. There is nothing there but Is... whatever is there, simply Is."

viewed as an atom in time (*atomus in tempore*),³ a part of a distended, continuous line (cf. 11.14.17ff.). The present, then, is incontrovertibly related to manifoldness, and thus to succession:

Arg. III

- (1) The present does not remain immutably itself, does not truly exist, but passes over at once into non-existence (=the past)
- (2) Time is neither non-existent, nor eternity itself.
- (3) If there is to be continuity (as well as time), another present must follow the one which recedes into the past
- (4) Time involves manifoldness and succession (11.11.13; cf. *De Ciu. Dei* 11.6)

Related to continuity and succession are extension and length. The eternal present always stands still (*semper stantis aeternitatis*)(*ibid.*); is always itself. But even if it lacks succession (cf. *En. in Ps.* 90.76), extension (or distension) and length (e.g. 11.31.41), it must possess some kind of continuity or duration (*manentia*). For if it did not abide, it would not exist. The duration of eternity consists exactly in its timeless (cf. *Conf.* 12.28.38; *Contra serm. Arian.* 24.20), i.e. simultaneous quality (cf. e.g. *En. in Ps.* 90.15). Time on the other hand cannot, due to its mutable, successive and manifold nature, possess simultaneous duration (11.11.13. Cf. *Ep.* 138). Consequently, if time is to possess continuity (duration), it must be able to display some kind of extension, or length. But this, in turn, is problematic:

Arg. IVa

- (1) What does not exist can neither have extension nor length
- (2) The past and the future does not exist
- (3) The past and the future can neither possess extension nor length (11.15.18)

³ *Serm.* 362.20. See also Strand (1998), ch. 1.4 ("Eternity, ideas & Omniscience").

Arg. IVb

- (1) The notion of length and extension implies succession, manifoldness and divisibility
- (2) The present, qua a present, neither succeeds itself, nor is many, nor is divisible
- (3) The present lacks extension (*spatium; mor(ul)a*), cannot be long (*longum*)
(11.15.19+20)

Seeing that the past, the present, and the future as such lack extension and length, how can time be said to possess duration? If it can't, as seems to be the case, how can it exist? Further, this being the case, how can it be related to eternity? How can it be measured? This seems counterintuitive; for it is a matter of experience and common-sense that we do measure temporal intervals (*interualla temporum*) and find some 'short,' others 'long;' and by comparing state that interval 'X' is, say, double or triple the length of 'Y' (11.16.21).

What about conceiving it as (continuous) motion and change? But how can this be if time cannot be associated with extension or succession?

Arg. Va

- (1) What neither exists, nor possesses extension or length cannot move or change
- (2) The past and the future neither exist, nor possess extension or length
- (3) The past and the future cannot move or change

Arg. Vb

- (1) What exists in some sense but neither possesses extension nor length, cannot move or change
- (2) The present exists in some sense, but neither possesses extension nor length
- (3) The present cannot move or change

So it seems that neither the past, the present, nor the future *in themselves* can be associated with motion and change. The last argument (*Arg. Vb*) is very

important in that it seems to contradict what Augustine has said before, viz. that the present passes over into the past (cf. *Arg. II*). For how, one may object, can that change or move from one state into another which is void of extension, length—indeed which is without limits (*sine terminos*)(11.27.34)? Can time, then, move or change from what exists not as yet (the future), through that which lacks extension (the present), into that which is no longer (the past)(11.21.27)? Consequently, motion and change cannot be accounted for *relatively*.

This way of arguing engenders yet another surprising conclusion:

Arg. VI

- (1) Time is co-extensive with the past, the present and the future
- (2) Motion and change have been found to be inapplicable to time because (a) the past and the future do not exist, (b) the present lacks extension, length and limits
- (3) Things or events can only take place in what exists, i.e. the present
- (4) Thing or events taking place in the present can neither change nor move.

This is a very damaging objection, because it not only destroys an objective view of time, but also because it ends up with seemingly denying the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, something which clearly contradicts what Augustine as a Christian thinker is committed to.⁴ Not only that, it also apparently contradicts the notion of finitude itself, something which we have seen is linked with mutability, lack of self-identity and simplicity (cf. *Arg. II*). Must we concede that time does not exist objectively, i.e. in itself, but only in the mind of God—or not at all?

⁴ For a treatment of the notion of creation out of nothing, see Strand (1998), chs. 3.3 ("Omnipotence & creation") and 4.2.2 ("Speaking about God narratively: the seven days of creation & rest").

Arg. VII

- (1) What exists is either God or creature
- (2) Creature, change, motion, successive manifoldness, lack of self-identity
are co-extensive
- (3) God, immutability, immobility, simultaneity, self-identity and eternity
are co-extensive
- (4) (It has been shown that) that time neither changes, moves, is subject to
succession, and so on
- (5) Time must either be (a) identical with eternity or (b) wholly non-existent.

The conclusion 5 (a+b) is absurd: If time is either eternity or non-existent it no longer exist *as itself*. What if we deny (2) and state that being a creature is not necessarily co-extensive with change and motion, i.e. that it might be immutable, immobile, and so on? But this modification seems to lead to the conclusion, a conclusion which is totally unacceptable according to Augustinian principles, that it is not a creature at all, i.e. that it is uncreated. This last conclusion can be subdivided into two conclusions: (i) that this 'creature' is unformed matter, materially distinct from God, not the subject of his creation; (ii) that this 'creature' is the whole universe as such (with the exception of human minds),⁵ both materially and formally distinct from God—eternal and not of his creation. Augustine, however, is able to steer clear of these absurdities by maintaining (3) while maintaining a modified version of (2):

Arg. VIII

- (1) God is simple, i.e. Divine nature and agency are perfectly identical
- (2) God's nature is eternal, i.e. timeless
- (3) God's agency is eternal, i.e. timeless

⁵ The reason why I exclude human minds from the argument is twofold: 1) That we are engaging in an extra-mental exploration of time; 2) That Augustine (*infra*) supplies a general argument of creation (which is designed also to include human minds).

What this implies is that God's creative act cannot be conceived in temporal, mutable or successive terms, but must be eternal, timeless and simultaneous (11.11.13; 11.13.15; 11.31.41). Creation is not a question of horizontal causation (the priority of cause to effect in time), but of vertical causation (the priority of Cause to effect in timeless eternity and all creatures dependence upon this First Cause (11.13.16):⁶

Arg. IX

- (1) God is eternal, immutable, self-identical, i.e. He exists and acts always in the same state, without beginning or end
- (2) God created everything that is not God *ex nihilo*, i.e. by His goodness, power and wisdom alone, not from His very own nature or from some eternally pre-existing material not of His previous making. Everything that is not God has a beginning therefore
- (3) That which is not God can neither be eternal, immutable nor self-identical, i.e. they cannot exist or act always in the same state (11.30.40. Cf. *Conf.* 12.15.20-22 & 13.33.48; *De Diu. Quaest.* 19).⁷

What these two preceding arguments have established is that the whole of creation (including time) can and does have objective, individualized existence without having to be eternal, immutable or self-identical—without being uncreated. Consequently, even if some creatures (angels) or some aspect of creation (matter qua unformed) *might* transcend time (cf. *Conf.* 12.9.9.), they are not for that reason co-eternal with God (*ibid.*).⁸

⁶ There are 4 kinds of priory: (i) in time (blossom to fruit), (ii) in preference (fruit to the blossom), (iii) in origin (sound to song), and (iv) in eternity (God's priority to everything (*Conf.* 12.29.40).

⁷ For his theory of creation, see Strand (1998), chs. 1.2, 1.4, 3.3, and 4.2.2.

⁸ Unformed matter, according to Augustine (e.g. *Conf.* 13.33.48), was "created by you together with its form—that is simultaneously (*de concreata, id est, simul a te creata materia*). For you gave form to its formlessness with no interval of time between (*sine ulla temporis interpositione*)," transl. by H. Chadwick, Oxford World Classics (1992). As for the angels: In the *Confessiones* and *De Genesi ad Litteram* he seems to think that, although they are not co-eternal with God, they wholly transcend time. In *De Ciu. Dei* 72.76 however he seems to contend that while the immortality of the angels does not pass away or perish in time, their movements (*eorum motus*), which condition the passage of

Further, since creatures were not created out of the very nature of God, but out of nothing; since they are not self-identical as God is, creatures are *mutable* (*Conf.* 12.17.25; *De Ciu. Dei* 12.1). This implies that even if they do not actually change (substantially or accidentally), a *possibility* for change (*posse mutari*) is found in them (*De Gen. ad Litt.* 2.14.28; *De Trin.* 5.2.3).

But even if we have been able to defend the notion of the objectified existence of creatures through the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, we are still left with the task of explaining how they actually change. (And how can they move if they do not actually change in some sense?) But how can corporeal bodies, for instance, actually move and change on the basis of Augustine's contradictory contention about the present, claiming that it is both void of extension, length and limits, and that it moves and changes? On the other hand, is it not a fact of common sense derived from observation that things do in fact move and change?

This way of arguing brings us, however, from a purely objective approach to time to the mental realm, that is, to the sentient, measuring, cognitive agent itself: The human mind or consciousness (*mens; animus*).

2. PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TIME

Although it seems self-evident on the basis of observation that corporeal bodies actually do change and move, one can't even from an observational point of view make time co-extensive with the motions of these bodies:

- Time is not co-extensive with celestial bodies; for if these stood still and, say, the wheel of a potter turned, we would still have motion and time (11.23.29).⁹

time (*quibus tempora pereguntur*), pass from the future into the past. He persists from the *Confessiones* onwards claiming that the angels cannot be co-eternal with God because since they have been created out of nothing.

⁹ In 11.23.30, he also offers a religious argument based on the Scriptures (Jos. 10:12ff).

- Time is not co-extensive with the motion of one single body as such, or for that matter *all* corporeal bodies; for (a) if we have been able to note two points in space a body in continuous motion travels (the point from the time we began to observe and the point at which time we left off observing), we are able to measure how long a time elapses from point A to B; and (b) we are able not only to measure how long a body moves, but also how long it stands still, that is, is not in (perceptible) motion (11.24.31).

Time, therefore, on Augustine's account cannot be co-extensive with bodily motion, either in the individual or the collective sense. In fact, time is not bodily motion at all; it is rather that in or by which (*quo*) I measure bodily motion or rest (11.23-29+11.26.33). But while it is true to say that we measure spaces of time (*tempora*), and bodily motion within these spaces, one cannot say that we measure the past, the present and the future as such: We cannot measure that which is not anymore, that which is but has no extension, or that which is not yet (11.21.27+22.28+26.33). And neither can it be said that it is passing (*praeteriens*) times (*tempora*) or things (*res*) that we measure (11.27.34-36):

Arg. X

- (1) If time(s) is to have being, i.e. be neither eternity nor non-existent; if temporal measurement is to be possible, the notions or conditions of succession, relativity and length must be assumed (cf. Arg. III & IV)
- (2) Things that now are in the process of passing away cannot in themselves (i.e. qua passing) form the basis of these notions. Only when they have passed can these conditions be met. (I can't, for instance, declare that motion of 'X' is twice the temporal length of 'Y' if they aren't both already in the past).¹⁰
- (3) But what is past no longer exists, and so cannot form the basis of these notions or meet these conditions either
- (4) Time(s) has no being; temporal measurement is impossible.

¹⁰ This is the case also with continuous motion. Unless the body has already passed beyond the terminus point, I cannot declare how long, temporarily speaking, it takes (i.e. took).

According to Augustine, time(s) as well as temporal measurement, cannot be accounted for on purely objective grounds. The only possible way to solve the Gordian knot, Augustine contends, is to take into account the role of the measuring agent: Only in the mind can the notions or conditions above be countenanced. It is true that things that are in the process of passing away form a necessary objective basis for their temporal measurement. But as our argumentation has shown, they cannot constitute the sufficient ground.

So it is not passing thing themselves that are measured, or that are co-extensive with time(s). Rather, they generate mental motions or impressions (*affectiones*) that endure in that they are stored in the memory of the mind (11.27.35+36). The things themselves pass away into non-existence but their affections continue to exist in the mind, forming the basis of the kind of succession that are necessary for temporal measurement. And it is these mental impressions (of now things past) that can be equated with times (*ibid.*).¹¹

These impressions exist in the memory of the human mind, though not as future or past but as *present*. Memory, however, is not sufficient for temporal measurement. If I did not pay attention to these passing phenomena and continued to do so, their passage would not be recorded (in the form of mental impressions) and they could not be the subject of measurement by retrieving them from memory (in their right order).¹² An act of continuous attention or vision (*attentio*; *intentio*; *contitus*) in the present is also required. For although passing things qua passing (=present) lack extension, lack length, the present attention endures (11.28.36+37). Only then can a temporal measuring of extra-mental, moving things be possible; for only now can the condition of continuity or duration be met (*ibid.*).

This account is very able, but we are still left with the problem concerning the objective, extra-mental basis of measuring corporeal motion. Even if we have been able to defend the notion of objectified existence of creatures beyond the mind of God and man, we are still left with the problem of rendering

¹¹ This implies that even natural science is based on a reconstruction of past things.

¹² Part of this line of argument is borrowed from *De Trin.* (book 11).

an account of *how* it is that these can serve as the necessary, objective ground for mental times (=*affectiones*). Can we say perhaps that the temporal length of any moving body coincides with the number of mental impressions it generates in the mind while it passes? Do these relative quantities form the basis for the measurement and subsequent declaration that motion 'X' is, say, twice as long (temporally) as 'Y'?

But how can this be when our previous argumentation, based on his view of the present as extensionless and limitless, effectively destroys the objective basis for actual movement, succession and change? Or if we interiorize the present, contending that motion, succession and change do take place beyond time, beyond the present, it becomes impossible to *conceive* how these corporeal bodies might in actuality beyond the measuring mind display extension, length, successive continuity. For does not their existence, movement, and change involve 'before' and 'after,' 'then' and 'now,' 'has been,' 'is' and 'will be'?¹³

So it seems that if we want to safeguard the intelligibility of time (and motion, change, succession, and so on), the only option left is contending that even if extra-mental reality can serve as a necessary, objective ground for time, this ground transcends intelligibility and understanding simply because times, on Augustine's own insistence, coincide with mental impressions and the activities related to these in the human mind.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. e.g. *De Ciu.Dei* 11.6; *De Uer. Rel.* 49.97; *En. in Ps.* 9.11; *In Joann. Ev. Tract.* 38.10-11.

¹⁴ Time (motion, succession, and so on) cannot really be imagined or thought beyond the mind itself. But that does not mean, as we have shown above (*Arg. IX*), that we have disproved its possibility. As to the problem of correspondence between *res* and *affectio*: How can we know, given that there is not a necessary or intelligible relation between them, whether the former exists at all beyond the mind, whether the latter is an adequate representation of the former (granting its existence), or whether we judge correctly of the latter? Augustine, who is very much alive to the problematic relation between thing, mental impression, and judgment was neither an idealist nor a skeptic. Firstly, a defense of the existence of corporeal bodies beyond the mind can be given as has been seen. Second, the mind, on the whole, is able to produce an adequate impression of the extra-mental thing (cf. *Contra Ac.* 3.11.24ff.; *De Uer. Rel.* 39.73; *De Trin.* 11.1ff). Thirdly, in light of the preceding, even if we are fooled some of the time (by e.g. an oar bent in water) that does

To get clear about whether this conclusion is inevitable, however, we must delve deeper into Augustine's account of the relation between the present and mental times.

3. INTROSPECTIVE EXPLORATION OF TIME

Seeing that time cannot sufficiently and intelligibly be accounted for on extra-mental grounds, it also becomes problematic to speak of three times in the objective, separate sense:

Arg. XI

- (1) If we are to speak objectively and separately of three times (the past, the present and the future), they must display objective, separate existence
- (2) The past and the future have no objective, separate existence
- (3) One cannot speak objectively and separately of three times

Since only the present has been found to exist objectively and separately, one cannot say that there *is* or *exists* three separate times (the past, the present and the future). This leads Augustine to claim that the only way one can speak of three times, and indeed do so distinctly—properly—, is by making them inseparable from the mind, linking them to three distinct mental-presential acts in the following way: A present of things past (*praesens de praeteritis*): Memory (*memoria*); a present of things present (*praesens de praesentibus*): Vision (*contitus*); and a present of things future (*praesens de futuris*): Expectation (*expectatio*) (11.20.26).

True, future things are not yet, but in the mind there exists already an expectation of things future; past things are no longer, but, nonetheless, in the mind endures the memory of things past; present things lack length, passing as they do in a flash of a moment (*in puncto*), but the attention endures (11.28.37).

not entail that it is cogent or likely that we make wrong judgments all the time (cf. *Contra Ac.* 3.71.24 & Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. II: Medieval Philosophy (1993), ch. 4). The whole is problematic, and Augustine's reflections on it, is much more complex than portrayed here and is therefore a subject for a separate article.

Moreover, length can also be applied mentally to the past and the future. Granted, neither the past nor the future is long. A long future, however, may be conceived as a long expectation of that which is future (*longa expectatio futuri*); a long past a long memory of that which is past (*longa memoria praeteriti*) (*ibid.*).

So while times (*tempora*)—time in its quantitative aspect—is equated with mental impressions, the length or continuity required for time, for temporal measurement and the three tenses, is related to the enduring nature of the three distinct mental acts: Memory, attention (/vision) and expectation (cf. 11.28.37). In the deepest sense, time is a certain distension (*distentionem*) of the mind itself (*ipsius animi*) (11.23.30; 11. 26.22)¹⁵ into these three presential acts.

To exemplify:

Let's say we are bout to sing a song we know: Before we begin, our expectation is stretched out to the whole; when we have begun, as much is distended in our memory as we carry to the past. Our mental act is distended to memory (to what has been sung) and to expectation (to what we are about to sing), with our attention being present, through which future things pass to become past. The more the attention executes, the expectation is shortened, the memory lengthened (11.28.33).

This—painful—distension,¹⁶ Augustine tells us, underlies each and every act of each and every life of each and every human being (11.28.38).¹⁷

Let us take one step back and take stock:

¹⁵ 'Distentio' means literally a spreading, or stretching out, as one does with a tent (*tentium*).

¹⁶ This distension—and restlessness—is partly a product of sin, something to be redeemed from, in order that the mind will regain unity and rest in the One beyond time after history (cf. e.g. *Conf.* 1.1.1; 11.29.38; 11.31.41; 13.25.50-13.28.53).

¹⁷ Doesn't this way of arguing render time relative to the individual mind? For if it is related to the distensile mental acts of each and every individual mind, how can there be historical time which encompasses all human minds in a linear movement? For while it is true to say that Divine and created-rational agency establish linearity through creation, fall, redemption, judgment and beyond (the story of the two cities, the subject of his magnum opus, *De Ciu. Dei*), it is hard to see how individual acts are to be fitted within it. Must we say that while they are enacted within the big framework, they do not form the basis of its linearity?

- Times are co-extensive with mental impressions. Although length, motion, succession, and so on may be related to these impressions, they cannot form the sufficient ground of these concepts (cf. 11.26.33; 11.27.34-36 and *supra*). Consequently, time, or the temporal space (*interuallum*) in which we measure times, cannot be reduced to these *affectiones*.
- Even if it is the mental impressions that we measure (11.27.36), length and continuity in the sufficient sense are related to the mental distension into three presential acts. Apparently, motion and succession are accounted for by the wandering, so to speak, of the affections from expectation, through vision, to memory. Only then can past, present and future be accounted for; only then can we, presumably through being aware of the mental impressions *and* the mental acts themselves, measure temporal spaces and compare them with each other.

4. INTERLUDE

Before we proceed to conclude, I will briefly consider a few important issues following in the wake of our treatment of time as related to the present:

A) Measurement and transcendence:

If it is the case that that by and in which we measure things cannot itself be measured, but rather must transcend measurement, how can the (threefold) present be conceived as an atom in time, a part of a whole (a line)? If it is the case that that by and in which we measure cannot measure itself (the measuring rod (1 metre) kept in Paris, for instance, cannot measure itself only other things), how can it be possible for the presential acts to measure *themselves*?

There is, however, one possible solution to this problem, related to Augustine conceiving the present both as transcendent (extensionless, limitless) and immanent (an atom, a part). For although, it might be argued, the present acts qua present cannot be measured, they can be when they have become past, have become mental impressions, i.e. have been transferred to memory. So the (threefold) present is transcendent qua measuring, and immanent qua measured (as impressions measured by *other* presential

acts). Even if presential acts cannot measure themselves, they can when they are no longer presential.

B) Personal identity and the unity consciousness:

If it is the case that time and measurement imply a multitude of changing, succeeding mental acts, how is one to account for personal identity and the unity of consciousness? Surely, these notions require an unchanging unity beyond changing, multiform mental acts?

It seems to me that the permanence of personal identity can be defended on Augustinian grounds by looking to his account in the *De Trinitate* (9.4.4; et *passim*) of the trinity of the mind (*mens*), its immediate love (*amor*) and knowledge (*notitia*) of itself.¹⁸ The latter are in the mind not as in a subject, but substantially (*substantialiter*). There was never a time when the mind was not present to itself or did not know or love itself. The mind is never ignorant of itself, even if it does not always think of itself, similar to knowing letters even though one is thinking of other things. Through the continuous and simultaneous 'act' of self-awareness the *permanence* of personal identity can be secured.

But what about the *unity* of personal identity and consciousness? Even if 'I' cannot be reduced either to affections or to acts dealing with these, am 'I' still an aggregate of distended, presential acts? Does not personal identity require an unity of consciousness beyond the level of concrete, multiform-distensile activity?

I see two possible—and related—ways of defending this unity. The first is to make unity coincide with the mind qua substance (*substantia*),¹⁹ the subject underlying all properties and accidents of whatever kind.²⁰ The second may be to make unity coincide on the plane of presential activity i.e. unity in the present in its extensionless and limitless 'aspect.' Only here, it may

¹⁸ For a fuller account of this unity, see Strand (1998), ch. 4.3.1 ('Vestiges & Images').

¹⁹ On the mind as substance, see *De Trin.* 9.5.8; 11.11.18.

²⁰ Cf. *De Trin.* 5.4.5+5.5.6. Here acts (*opera*), passions (*passiones*), qualities (*qualitates*) and times (*tempora*) are considered to be accidents. What does he mean by *tempora* here? That the mind (as substance) transcends impressions? That it transcends time? What is certain is that even if the substance transcends time, it cannot be eternal or immutable (cf. *Arg. IX* + footnote 8 on the angels).

be argued can unity truly be found. (The present in this aspect can also be made co-extensive with substance.) It would even be possible to include a treatment of the aforementioned trinity of mind, love and knowledge and relate these to substance (and to the present): For if they are distinct inter-relatively speaking, making possible a distinction of subject-object (mind knowing and loving itself), they are—in analogy to the Trinity—identical substantially considered.²¹

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Does Augustine operate throughout the whole of the eleventh book of the *Confessions* with a present which exhibits two aspects, i.e. the present qua extensionless and limitless, and the present qua changing and moving?

If he doesn't, making the present only immanent and inextricably bound up with mental-distensile activity which is mutable, limited and manifold, it becomes difficult to grasp how the motion of mental times *between* memory, attention and expectation, and so their measurement, is at all possible. For mustn't motion and change be based on immobility and immutability somehow? Mustn't measurement be based on a transcendent standard of measurement? And what about the issue of personal identity and the unity of consciousness? Don't they require an aspect of transcendence as well?

If he really does operate with two aspects of the present, this would, as already shown above (*Arg. II & Vb* + comments on pp. 42-43 + 46), be a very difficult stance to defend argumentatively, the crux of the matter being: How can that which is void of extension and limitation move and change?²²

²¹ Cf. *De Trin.* 9.5.8. The salient point is how strict a unity is demanded. Only God qua Essence (which is truly self-identical and simple) can show forth absolute unity. If absolute unity is required, the human mind will, given Augustine's notion of creation out of nothing, always fall short. But the Augustinian God is also three persons (*personae*); and the mind is an image of this Trinity. I think the only possible and fruitful approach to defending unity on Augustinian premises, is this last Trinitarian one.

²² In 11.28-37 he says that while the present time has no space or length (*praesens tempus carere spatio*), perishing as it does in a the flash of a moment (*in puncto*), the attention endures. Does this mean that he distinguishes between the present and presential acts? This would contradict his notion of time as mental distension. Moreover, we would not only be stuck with the problems related in the last paragraph, but also have to tackle the problem how to harmonize a present in two aspects *and* the problem of presential acts.

Notwithstanding the solutions which he is able to come up with using such a bifurcate notion of the present, a paradox would underlie the whole enterprise itself. This will, once taken seriously, topple his proposed solution to the enigma of time (as well as the solutions to the issues considered in the interlude). For if we force Augustine to choose between a present which is extensionless and limitless, and a present which moves and changes, contending that the paradox is unacceptable on dialectical grounds, the whole edifice will start to crumble. If we choose movement and change, we end up with the insoluble problems of the former paragraph; if we choose extensionlessness and limitlessness, we end up with the insoluble problem of how the presential acts can actual change—come into being or cease to be—, contradicting the immediate data of common sense experience.

In conclusion, in one form or another, paradox and aporia are unavoidable once we start delving into Augustine's account of the enigma of time. It seems that as insoluble problems following in the wake of the dual aspect of the present, they won't go away if we exclude one aspect. Consequently, we cannot say that Augustine has solved the enigma of time. And even if the question of the present ultimately turns out to be insoluble *in se*, it seems safe to conclude that Augustine's insufficient attention given to the paradox of the present seriously undermines his chances of coming up with good, workable solutions.

Adding, as it does, unnecessary complications to the problem, this would seem to be the least promising path to pursue if we want to solve the enigma of time. Seeing that Augustine later in the book comes up with a more structurally simple solution, basically incommensurable with the one just mentioned, I opt to view the present/presential dichotomy as either a digression or a slip of the tongue.