

Augustine and Boethius, Memory and Eternity

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Introduction

In the crypt of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia, the same church in which Augustine's remains are interred, lies the tomb of Boethius. The influence of Augustine on this great synthesizer of Hellenic and Christian thought, despite claims to the contrary, should be clear to anyone reading the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The similarity between both thinkers' attempts to conceive divine eternity is a case in point. Throughout the *Confessions*, we observe Augustine espousing the limits of the human's ability to know God *qua* God and appealing to analogy and image, which his theology of the Trinity and philosophy of the soul require. So too does Boethius claim that all things are known according to the capacity of the knower, a claim now referred to as the "Modes of Cognition Principle." For both Augustine and Boethius, there is an appropriate, though always limited way for the human to understand the divine. While, any human conception of divine eternity will always be limited, imperfect, and incomplete, both in Boethius' *Consolation* and in Augustine's *Confessions* one finds that divine eternity is best conceived from our limited human point of view in terms of an all-encompassing present.

In the following, I will discuss Augustine's description of time and relate this to Boethius' explanation of the distinction between time and eternity. I will then connect this distinction to Augustine's understanding of memory as an image of eternity, showing that the analogy between God and the human with reference to time involves a comparison not between eternity and time, but rather, between eternity and a limited experience of eternity within the mind and its distension: time is not the image of eternity, the human mind is, particularly its power of memory (*memoria*). The accounts of time and eternity of both thinkers provide, I believe, evidence for Augustine's influence on and importance for the thought of Boethius. Both figures describe the past and future as united in the present under the divine purview of God.

Distensio Animae

Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions* contains Augustine's well-known and studied attempt to describe and explore the nature of time. The argument in Book 11, however, is less an attempt to define time than it is an explanation of our distance and distinction from the eternal God and of our ability through the power of memory to come to know something of His eternity. Augustine thereby provides a marvelous phenomenology of time.¹ Wondering where and how the past and future exist, since the former has passed away and the latter is yet to come, the Doctor of Grace concludes that there really is in fact only one tense: the present. He writes, "What is by now evident and clear is that neither future nor past exists, and it is inexact language to speak of three times – past, present, and future."² Because neither the past nor the future exists, and the present is continually fleeing towards non-being, time, Augustine argues, is a kind of measuring or grasping activity whereby the rational being unites these tenses in the mind: the past is present in remembering (*meminit*), the present is present in attending (*adtendit*), and the future is present in expecting (*expectat*).³ Augustine writes, "Perhaps it would be exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come"; that is, to the extent that past and future exist, they exist in the present.⁴ For the human subject, when neither remembering nor expecting, these times, past and future, seem not to exist at all. As Teske explains, "Past and future, then, are somewhere, but wherever they are, they exist only as present. The things themselves have passed away."⁵ Augustine argues that past and future, therefore, only exist within the human soul:

In the soul there are these three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation. If we are allowed to use such language, I see three times, and I admit they are three.⁶

¹ On Augustine's phenomenology of time, see Simo Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Elenore Meconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81-97, at 93 ff.

² Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.20. Hereafter, *Conf.* Citations give the book and then the chapter. For the text in English I use Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). For the text in Latin I use Augustine, *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 1995).

³ See Augustine, *ibid.*, 11.28: "For the mind expects and attends and remembers."

⁴ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.20.

⁵ Roland J. Teske, *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1996), 25. Teske continues: "[Augustine] insists that it is now plain and clear that neither the past nor the future exist and that it is not correct to say that there are three times: past, present, and future." *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.20.

When one is conscious of time as, for example, in the attempt to measure time or to compare lengths of time, the past or future that is measured is made present to the soul. As Einstein compares sitting on a hot stove with sitting with a pretty girl, these past images are called forth from the wellspring of memory, and attention is directed towards them as the objects for measuring judgment in the present.⁷ Teske notes that “Augustine has, then, located the three times in the mind in present memory, intuition, and expectation.”⁸ As Angus Johnston explains, the contradiction surrounding the existence of times that no longer are, “can be most properly held together in the soul.”⁹ That is, the past and future have no existence outside of the power of the rational being to conjure them out of oblivion and futurity and summon them before the inspection of the mind. Whether consciously in the light of present attention, or in potency, waiting to be called forth, the past and future exist in memory in the human soul.

Augustine calls this activity of making present to the mind the past and future a ‘*disentio animae*.’¹⁰ In measuring time, the mind is distended, or extended (*distentio*) across temporal moments, which no longer have any independent existence. Robert Jordan summarizes that for Augustine “Time is a relation, with a foundation in successive states of finite or limited being, whose measurement is a cognitive act, terminating in the ‘distentio’ of the mind.”¹¹ According to Charlotte Gross: “Augustine argues that time is to be found in the measuring mind. As he concludes, time is a distension or extension of mind (*distensio animi*), a sort of temporal ‘stretching’ of the rational soul produced by the mental operations of remembering, attending, and anticipating.”¹² Already we see for Augustine that these operations of remembering, attending, and anticipating, are all activities of the soul’s power of ‘memory’ - *memoria*. Thus the memory is not limited to recollecting or re-presenting the past only, as we now presently use the term. Memory, for Augustine, is the particular power of the mind or soul that can summon these tenses into the present.¹³ In potency, or subconsciously, all time is presently united in the soul.

Many have noted the negative connotations of this *distensio animae*, arguing that the need for such a distention betrays the difference and distinction between God and creatures. Teske notes that “The Latin *distensio* is a medical term that refers to a condition of the body and bears a decidedly negative

⁷ Einstein is supposed to have once said, “Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. That’s relativity.”

⁸ Teske, *Paradoxes of Time*, 26.

⁹ Angus Johnston, “Time as a Psalm in Augustine,” *Animus* 1 (December, 1996). <http://www.mun.ca/animus/1996vol1/johnston.html> (October, 2012).

¹⁰ At the time of this publication, I have not been able to consult the recent monograph, David van Dusen, *The Space of Time: A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions X to XII* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹¹ Robert Jordan, “Time and Contingency in Augustine,” in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R.A. Markus (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 272.

¹² Charlotte Gross, “Augustine’s Ambivalence About Temporality: His Two Accounts of Time,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 129-148, at 130.

¹³ See Chadwick’s footnote 12 in Chadwick, *Confessions*, 185.

connotation.”¹⁴ The argument is that in the distention, the human mind is stretched out over temporal moments; it is a laborious protraction for the finite and temporal human mind, a stretch which is unnecessary for God. God does not require such an act of the mind to attend to the past and future since everything, as we shall see, is eternally present to Him. We, however, are distracted from eternal things, and in the focus on passing temporal succession, we require a unification of the fleeting moments to think beyond the content of our immediate sensation. Thus, in the distension of the mind, we struggle to transcend or unify the division of our finitude, to reach beyond, both backwards and forwards, the mere fleeting present in which we live out our lives.

Although the distention of the mind is indicative of human finitude and our difference from God, I argue that it is not altogether negative. Rather, it is that act that allows one to perceive at all by unifying temporal moments into one conception. Gross writes, “The expression *distensio animi* thus refers to the time of mind itself – for the soul’s extendedness makes possible the existence of past and future together in the present – and also, considered as a spiritual activity, quite literally describes the condition of the soul in perceiving and measuring time.”¹⁵ This is true, but the distention occurs not only when we consciously try to measure time, but also subconsciously when we perceive anything at all. When reading this page, one attends to the letters and words in temporal succession. However, as one’s eyes move along the page, only ever attending to two or three words in any present moment, one retains the previous words in one’s memory and anticipates those to come. If we did not do the former, a sentence’s meaning would not be comprehended; if we failed to do the latter, we would not continue reading. Reading itself requires that the mind hold together and unify past, present, and future in order to comprehend the meaning of a text.

Augustine uses the example of singing a psalm to illustrate this point. Discussing Augustine’s *De vera religione*, Teske writes, “In the same work he compares the passing beauty of the whole temporal order to that of a song, arguing that it is just as unreasonable to want temporal things not to pass away as to want the individual notes of a song not to pass away, but to sound forever. He admits, nonetheless, that no human mind can see the whole temporal order as we can hear the whole of a song.”¹⁶ Here, it is the nature of the notes of the song to pass. Our experience of the song, however, as a unity, requires that we hold these bygone notes together in the present in a different way: they do not all resound at once in one’s mind in some cacophonous mishmash, but there is a presence of the past and future together with the present.¹⁷ The same is true of any experienced

¹⁴ Teske, *Paradoxes of Time*, 29. Teske continues: “The prefix *dis-* in *distentio*, and in many other compounds, has a negative connotation. While ‘attention’ or ‘intention’ are good or neutral, ‘distention’ is clearly negative.” Ibid, 26.

¹⁵ Gross, *Augustine’s Ambivalence*, 142.

¹⁶ Teske, *Paradoxes of Time*, 31.

¹⁷ See *ibid*, 36: “In order to grasp any meaning in the sounds of the verse we have to hold on to what has just sounded while we hear the present sound and look forward to the coming sound, and we have to synthesize the sequence of these sounds which we hold before our mind’s attention.

temporal object: its unity is brought together by the mind. This is what makes the experience possible.

Without a unification of the fleeting moments of sense experience, we should be surprised by the appearance of new things every instant. A dinner companion sitting across the table would appear to be a continually different and new person as he changes throughout each present moment. As Cratylus observed, we cannot step into a river even once, since there never is ‘a river’: there is just a constant flow of change, never coalescing into a particular, unified object. However, we are not confused by the movement evident in sense experience. That is, we naturally unify the past with the present when we turn our attention to any object of perception; this unification does not occur in sensation itself, which only presents us with infinitely divisible moments, but rather, it occurs in the mind. Further included in this unification is the expectation that these objects continue into the future. We should be surprised should our dinner companion vanish into thin air mid-way through the antipasto. Even when unconscious of this expectation, we presently expect him to endure into the future. Nor do we think our colleague a different person once the dessert arrives: we retain the past within our present perception. Our attention to any thing in the present already carries with it, even if subconsciously, a present awareness of its past and a present expectation of its future; perception would be impossible without such a unification. Thus, the *distensio animae* is at work, even before we are conscious of it and try to measure lengths of time.

Now imagine that we could draw together the whole past of all things that could possibly be experienced, and that we could also intend to them all at once. Now add to that the pulling into our present attention all future moments as well, not just as vague expectation, but as infallibly accurate presentness. By such an image, one begins to attain, as far as the limited human is able, to an experience of divine eternity—to have a complete distention from which no moment is missing and which is perfectly accurate and complete, to be perfectly, completely, accurately, and truly, present at every moment. This is Augustine’s human image of divine eternity.

Memoria: an Image of Eternity in the Mind

It is important to note here that Augustine does not understand time itself as an image of eternity. As Gross points out, in the *Confessions*, “Augustine’s ontology of time is noteworthy for its departure from Plotinus. If in earlier writings he sees time as an ‘image’ or ‘vestige’ of eternity (cf. *Tim.* 37d; *Enn.* 3.7.11), from the *Confessions* forward, he will stress the radical contrast between the two.”¹⁸

That attention endures, and by its enduring it produces the extendedness or distension of the mind which is time and is a necessary condition for our perceiving any temporal object, such as the verse of Ambrose’s hymn.” See also Gross, *Augustine’s Ambivalence*, 141: “In the recitation of a psalm, for example, *intentio* (*attentio*) or present attention is directed simultaneously towards the (non-existent) future in expectation and the (non-existent) past in memory.”

¹⁸ Gross, *Augustine’s Ambivalence*, 134.

According to Teske, “In an earlier work Augustine had followed Plotinus and Plato in calling time the sign or vestige of eternity, though that designation is not found in *Confessions*. In the *Confessions*, the emphasis is entirely on the contrast between eternity and time.”¹⁹ However, whereas scholars often point to the distinction between time and eternity in Augustine to show the vast difference between God and the human, I will argue that in the comparison between Augustine’s discussion of divine eternity and the image of this eternity through the power of human *memoria*, we see not only our separation from God, but also our connection and relation to Him. Augustine holds that there are limited ways according to which the human can understand or have access to the divine. In his discussion of time and eternity, he shows how *memoria*, not time, is an image of eternity.

Some scholars argue that there is no comparison possible between human temporality and divine eternity, and thus, no conception of eternity can be achieved. Herman Hausheer states that “There is no comparison between an ever fixed eternity ... and a time that is never fixed.”²⁰ Our experience of time is ours and has no divine counterpart. James Wetzel is right to emphasize that “there is no God-like experience of time for humans to covet. It is not that God has an experience of timelessness instead, but more that time is not a matter of what God experiences.... Apart from finitude the experience of time is not intelligible.”²¹ Just as we can say that our experience of weakness is not related or analogous to God’s weakness, since God experiences no weakness, we can also say that our experience of time has no relation to God’s experience of time since God does not experience time. Augustine emphasizes this point:

Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity, so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendour of a constant eternity? Then it may compare eternity with temporal successiveness which never has any constancy, and will see there is no comparison possible. It will see that a long time is long only because constituted of many successive movements which cannot be simultaneously extended. In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present.²²

However, it is our limited experience of eternity, not our experience of time, that is analogous to divine eternity. Certainly there are human limits to understanding eternity, but this is not to say that there can be no comparison.

¹⁹ Teske, *Paradoxes of Time*, 33-34.

²⁰ Herman Hausheer, “St. Augustine’s Conception of Time,” *The Philosophical Review* 46, no. 5 (Sept. 1937): 503-512, 509-10. James Wetzel too adds that “there is no analogy between divine and human manners of knowing time. The content of the knowledge may be comparable (as imperfection is comparable to perfection), but the manner of having is not.” James Wetzel, “Time After Augustine,” *Religious Studies* 31, no. 3 (Sept., 1995): 341-357, at 351.

²¹ Wetzel, “Time,” 351.

²² Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.11.

Donald Ross points to Augustine's description of the heaven of heavens as being extended throughout time, but not experiencing sequentiality; "Time may be extended without being sequential."²³ He claims that the heaven of heavens is "the only genuine representative of a kind of being which must be described in terms of time as it really is."²⁴ I do not disagree with his arguments, but I would add, however, that the memory *qua* memory, prior to its activity, is also representative of a kind of being that transcends time and sequentiality.²⁵ How else could Augustine, and the Augustinian tradition, claim that the memory is an image of the divine eternity of the first person of the Trinity? In fact, to say there is no analogy between the human and the divine is to render Augustine's philosophy of the soul and theology of the Trinity unintelligible. Augustine instructs his readers that the best way for them to understand the Trinity is to "reflect upon the triad within their own selves."²⁶ One finds that one possesses three powers united and inseparable within oneself: "one life, one mind, and one essence."²⁷ In the *Confessions*, these three aspects are being, knowing, and willing.²⁸ Augustine says that "this fact is certain to anyone by introspection."²⁹ In the later *De Trinitate*, Augustine refers to these three powers as memory, understanding, and will.³⁰ As Bonaventure writes, adopting the Augustinian image of the triune God in the soul, "Consider, therefore, the activities of these three powers and their relationships, and you will be able to see God through yourself as through an image; and this indeed is to *see through a mirror in an obscure manner*."³¹ In the discussion of time in the *Confessions*, of these three the focus is on memory.

As noted above, although our contemporary usage of the word 'memory' is reserved for recalling past things only, *memoria*, for Augustine and the medievals, is the power of the mind that attends and also presents past memories and expectations of the future to its attention.³² Augustine writes, "I combine

²³ Donald Ross, "Time, the Heaven of Heavens, and Memory in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 22 (1991): 191-205, at 196.

²⁴ Ross, "Time," 199.

²⁵ Ross adds at the end of his paper that the memory as well as the heaven of heavens experiences time without sequence, but does not elaborate on this point and insofar as he does, he connects this character of memory to the doctrine of divine illumination, not to the first person of the Trinity, God the Father. See Ross, "Time," 201-202.

²⁶ Augustine, *Conf.*, 13.11.

²⁷ Augustine, *Conf.*, 13.11.

²⁸ That is, "esse, nosse, velle."

²⁹ Augustine, *Conf.*, 13.11.

³⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate.*, 10.18: "Haec igitur tria, memoria, intelligentia, voluntas." For the text in Latin I use Augustine, *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 1995).

³¹ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium.*, 3.1. I use the text in Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

³² Other examples include Bonaventure, who adopts this Augustinian image of the Trinity, and in particular in the *Itinerarium* develops Augustine's thoughts on the power of memory. There, he writes: "The function of the memory is to retain and represent not only present, corporeal, and temporal, but also successive, simple, and everlasting things. It retains the past by remembrance,

with past events images of various things, whether experienced directly or believed on the basis of what I have experienced; and on this basis I reason about future actions and events and hopes, and again think of all these things in the present.”³³ Remembrance of the past, attention to the present, and anticipation of the future are all activities of memory. The memory has a power to transcend all time; past, present, and future are all present to the soul in memory, and prior to its activity, which brings any of these moments to attention, all of these tenses are present in the memory as in a vast reservoir.

We have seen that it is not entirely true to say that past and future are entirely non-existent, for they exist as present memory and present expectation by the power of the mind. However, Augustine argues that even before memories and expectations are called to attention, they exist subconsciously within the wellspring of memory, ready to be called forth for inspection. Somehow, the past and future are present to the human mind subconsciously, or in potency—otherwise these times could never be recalled or anticipated and brought to the attention of the human being in the present. Augustine refers to “the abyss of human consciousness” (*Conf.*, 10.2) and the “fields and vast places of memory” (*Conf.*, 11.8), as a kind of “storehouse” and “receptacle” from which an image “emerges from its hiding places” (*Conf.*, 11.8). “Memory’s huge cavern, with its mysterious secret, and indescribable nooks and crannies” (*Conf.*, 11.8), is an “independent storehouse” (*Conf.*, 11.8), a “vast hall” and “treasure-house” (*Conf.*, 11.8) containing images and principles within its “broad plains and caves and caverns” (*Conf.*, 11.17). He writes that “the vast capacity of memory” (*Conf.*, 11.9), contains “wonderful storerooms” (*Conf.*, 11.9) and “secret caverns” (*Conf.*, 11.10); it is the “stomach of the mind” (*Conf.*, 11.13). The memory is a “vast and infinite profundity. Who has plumbed its bottom?” (*Conf.*, 11.8). Augustine here uses many spatial images to convey the vast capacity of memory to contain, though in some dark and mysterious way, things that remain hidden to our consciousness.

Thus, Augustine argues that the memory is a kind of wellspring from which the past, present, and future can be drawn. Prior to calling forth memories to attention, they somehow exist within the memory, existing in potency in the present despite their temporally past character. This power of the memory is a limited human mode of approximating God’s being outside of time—His eternity. This approximation between divine eternity and the human soul is possible because in the soul’s powers we have something akin to eternity: the memory, which prior to its activity contains all time in potential. This is one of

the present by receiving things into itself, and the future by foresight” (Bonaventure, *Itin.* 3.2). He continues: “In its first activity, the actual retention of all things in time—past, present, and future—the memory is an image of eternity, whose indivisible present extends itself to all times.” Bonaventure, *Itin.*, 3.2. See also Bonaventure, *Q.D. de trin.*, q. 5, a. 1: “These exist in the soul simultaneously in such a way that those things which occur in succession in distinct moments of time are united and bound together in the soul, which is a spiritual substance.” I use the text in St. Bonaventure, *Works of Saint Bonaventure 3: Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachery Hayes, O.F.M., D. Th. (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2000).

³³ Augustine, *Conf.*, 10.8.

many senses in which the human is created in the image of God.³⁴ Augustine refers to the memory as a receptacle in which all time is united together, just as all time is present to God all at once. The memory is potentially all times and any time. In this way, this power of memory in the soul images the first person of the Trinity and partakes in divine eternity.³⁵

The Limits of the Mental Image of Eternity

There are four differences between the human power of memory and divine eternity that I will describe briefly in the following. First, the discursive activity of the power of memory is carried out and actualized in a successive manner. Whereas the human's use of memory is sequential, God's "knowledge admits no transient element."³⁶ Augustine claims that the very act of attention undergoes change as various things are brought to it successively.³⁷ When you think of your tenth birthday party, remember what you had for breakfast this morning, and look forward to Thanksgiving dinner etc., you transcend the limitations of the present moment. The memory contains these images within its vast storehouse, but they proceed sequentially.³⁸ Discussing how he knows the meanings of words Augustine writes, "I entrusted them to my mind as if storing them up to be produced when required ... they were already in the memory, but so remote and pushed into the background, as if in most secret caverns, that unless they were dug out by someone drawing attention to them, perhaps I could not have thought of them."³⁹ The activity of digging out memories happens in succession in time.⁴⁰

³⁴ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.8: "I will therefore rise above that natural capacity in a step by step ascent to him who made me. I come to the fields and the vast palaces of my memory."

³⁵ See Bonaventure, *Itin.* 3.2: "And thus it is clear from the activities of the memory that the soul itself is an image of God and a similitude so present to itself and having Him so present to it that it actually grasps Him and potentially 'is capable of possessing Him and of becoming a partaker in Him.'"

³⁶ Augustine, *Conf.*, 12.15.

³⁷ See Augustine, *Conf.*, 12.15: "Again, surely you would not deny what he speaks to me in my inner ear, that the expectation of future events becomes direct apprehension when they are happening, and this same apprehension becomes memory when they have passed. But every act of attention which undergoes change in this way is mutable, and anything mutable cannot be eternal."

³⁸ Again, Augustine also describes this difference in comparison to how one experiences a song. In any given moment the listener retains the previous notes and expects what is to come. Even one who knows the song well does not contain it all together at once. He writes, "You know them in a much more wonderful and much more mysterious way. A person singing or listening to a song he knows well suffers a distension or stretching in feeling and in sense-perception from the expectation of future sounds and the memory of past sounds. With you it is otherwise." *Conf.* 11.31.

³⁹ Augustine, *Conf.*, 10.10.

⁴⁰ Gilson also notes this limit: "Our inability to perceive things simultaneously and in the unity of an indivisible act is primarily the inability of things to exist simultaneously in a permanent and stable unity. Only things which cannot coexist follow one another. Hence, in order to form an idea of eternity it is not enough to think of the universe as a familiar song and to imagine a boundless consciousness which always knows exactly how much of that song has been sung; it is far beyond any such mind as this that God subsists, for He is the Creator of every mind. For him there is

Our conscious drawing the past and future out from the depths of the memory into the present is still a discursive activity, and is therefore only an approximation of divine eternity, but it is an image nonetheless because these images are contained within the memory prior to their being summoned forth, and the power is able, in a way, to transcend temporality insofar as the images can be of the past, present, or future. Even though the human possesses a power that images divine eternity in the power of the memory, this power is still actualised in time, and what is summoned to it from the past and what is called to its attention as expectation of the future still proceeds in a discursive manner.⁴¹

Second, the attention of the memory on a past moment precludes its ability also to consider a different past or future event at the same time, and thus not all times can be brought to consciousness or actualized at once. God's knowledge, on the other hand, is "not of one thing at one moment and of another thing at another moment, but is concurrent without any temporal successiveness."⁴² Even though the memory is capable of running easily between past, present, and future, there is still a "tension" between these sequential moments.⁴³ They cannot be held together in unity in consciousness or actuality; as Bonaventure says, the conscious memory lacks the perfect simultaneity of the divine eternity.⁴⁴ The memory always contains more than what we can successively and discursively draw out from within it in any conscious act.

Third, even though the memory can transcend the succession of time in its ability to think future, then past, then future again, this course that the memory decides to run and the order and veracity of the memory's activities need not correspond to an objective truth or to the objective temporal sequence; while this gives us creative power (another image of the divine), whatever sequence the mind chooses, this order still occurs in a temporal series, a kind of meta-succession, or over-arching temporal progression in which the memory is actualized. While the memory itself, as a reservoir and power images eternity, to

neither past nor future; His knowledge of things is one and undivided, like the act itself by which He created them. Hence, we may reasonably expect that the study of this creative act has great difficulties in store for anyone who would attempt to describe it." Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 195-96.

⁴¹ Bonaventure, in fact, explicitly quotes Augustine in his own explanation of this limitation: "As long as we are in the flesh, this will not be a perfect understanding; since, while we live here 'we have no knowledge without succession and time'; and therefore it is very different from eternity unless by chance it is elevated to a higher level by a special gift; as Augustine says, 'when we comprehend something eternal in our mind, we are not in this world.' Therefore, it is clear that the divine being is indeed eternal." Bonaventure, *Q.D. de trin.*, q. 5, a. 1. See also Augustine, *Trin.*, 12.10: "Now the more [the human mind] reaches out toward what is eternal, the more it is formed thereby to the image of God." For the text in English, I use the text in Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 1991).

⁴² Augustine, *Conf.*, 12.13.

⁴³ See Augustine, *Conf.*, 12.31.

⁴⁴ Bonaventure, *Q.D. de trin.*, q. 5, a. 1: "Yet because the soul is limited and receives from some being outside itself, it lacks that perfect simultaneity. But God receives nothing and is in no way limited; and therefore it is necessary to understand all things as present to Him without beginning or end. And this is to understand eternity."

plumb its depths, however, is to engage in discursive activity independent of an objective order.

Fourth, in addition to the questionable accuracy and order of the images that the human memory calls forth, there are things that we do not know. We do not remember, attend, or expect with perfect accuracy. Augustine writes,

Certainly if there were a mind endowed with such great knowledge and prescience that all things past and future could be known in the way I know a very familiar psalm, this mind would be utterly miraculous and amazing to the point of inducing awe. From such a mind nothing of the past would be hidden, nor anything of what remaining ages have in store, just as I have full knowledge of the psalm I sing.⁴⁵

Here, we see an image of what a perfection of the memory would be like, to Augustine's mind, from a human perspective. It would be like knowing eternity in the way we know a well-known psalm.⁴⁶

We see, therefore, how we are not severed completely from touching on God's eternity. The distension of the mind, while highlighting the vast difference between God and the human, also shows how an image of divine eternity is present in the human soul in the power of memory, despite its limitations and differences.

Boethius' Modes of Cognition Principle

We will now turn to Boethius, to show how he understands divine eternity and temporality and how he draws upon Augustinian conceptions explained above. We will first explain a crucial principle upon which his understanding of eternity hinges. As Aristotle tells us in the *De Anima*, Plato held that "like ... is known by like."⁴⁷ For the Platonists generally, knowledge is an assimilation of the thinker to the object of thought; the quality of thought depends upon the quality of its object. According to this doctrine, one attempting to know the first principle is confronted with an impossibility unless he can transcend the limitations of the

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.31.

⁴⁶ Even still, however, this is an image. God's understanding is beyond this: "far be it from you to know all future and past events in this kind of sense. You know them in a much more wonderful and much more mysterious way." Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.31.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 404b 16-20. I use *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Ransom House, 1941). Porphyry writes that "we do not understand similarly in all things, but in a manner adapted to the essence of each. For intellectual objects we understand intellectually; but those that pertain to soul rationally. We apprehend plants spermatocally; but bodies idologically (i.e., as images); and that which is above all these, super-intellectually and super-essentially." *Sent.* x. Porphyry also claims that "the similar is known by the similar; because *all knowledge is an assimilation to the object of knowledge*" Porphyry, *Sent.*, x. I use the text in Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: University Microfilms International, 1978). For the text in Greek I use Porphyrius, *Sententiae Ad Intelligibilia Ducentes*, ed. E. Lamberz, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: Bsb B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1975).

human mind. Either human limitation condemns to failure all attempts to understand God *qua* God (the object of thought transcends our ability to comprehend), or the human must be drawn up into the object of her thought, transcending her limited nature to the point where her thinking is assimilated to its object.⁴⁸ Because God has no limits, the assimilation of knower to known must involve a loss of the distinction between the two, a loss of self described in Plotinian *henosis*.⁴⁹

However, Chadwick notes that “With Iamblichus and Proclus, [Boethius] affirms that the knowledge possessed by God operates on a different plane from human knowledge.”⁵⁰ Boethius, following Ammonius, who probably received the doctrine from Iamblichus, asserts that this Platonic position is wrong, and thus proposes something rather different: knowledge is not an assimilation of the knower to the object of thought, but rather, the quality of knowledge is dependant on the quality of the knower. This has been called the ‘Modes of Cognition Principle,’ whereby things are known not according to the nature of the objects of knowledge, but rather, they are known according to the mode of the knower.⁵¹ John Marenbon adds, “Statements not unlike the Modes of Cognition Principle are found in Proclus and Ammonius, although there is no parallel to the way Philosophy works it out in V.4 [of the *Consolation of Philosophy*].”⁵² In the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy says:

You believe thinking things to be other than as they are to be alien to the integrity of knowledge. The cause of this mistake is that each thinks that all that he knows is known simply by the power and nature of those things that are known [(the typical Platonic position)]. Which is altogether otherwise: for everything which is known is grasped not

⁴⁸ Either (1) the human has a greater power than we might think, or is always united to the first principle (Plotinus), or (2) divine aid is required in some form of mediation or grace.

⁴⁹ See Plotinus, *Ennead*, IV, 8, 1, 5-15: “Then after that rest in the divine, when I have come down from Intellect to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body.” I use the text in Plotinus, *Enneads*, vols. I-VII, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classics Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988). See also Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 27. Cf. *Ennead*, VI, 7, 36, where Plotinus says that the soul “touches” (*epaphe*) the Good. On this type of language, see also John O’Meara, *Studies in Augustine and Eriugena* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1992), 212-13, and Wayne Hankey, “Bultmann Redivivus Radicalized: Augustine and Jesus as Heideggerian Existentialists” [A Response to James A.K. Smith “Confessions Of An Existentialist: Reading Augustine After Heidegger”], in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig J. N. de Paulo (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 246.

⁵¹ See Wayne Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*: Knower and Known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Proslogion* of Anselm,” in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002), 126-150.

⁵² John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134.

according to its own power but rather according to the capability of those who know it.⁵³

This position prepares the way for the solution to the perceived conflict between divine omniscience and human freedom, whereby God's foreknowledge of all human actions seems to preclude the human's ability to do anything other than what God foreknows. This problem forms the context in which the principle is introduced. As Thomas McTighe points out, "The key to its solution is the nature of divine knowledge, which like all modes of knowing is a function of the nature of the knower, not the known."⁵⁴ Boethius suggests that while the human cannot comprehend God's eternity in the same way that God understands, nevertheless, there is a proper human mode of knowing that can be true, or at least truer than some other human attempts to conceive it. Even though the human conception is somewhat alien to God's knowing, this does not affect the status of our knowledge *as knowledge*.

We cannot assimilate our minds to the object of knowledge as they are in themselves, particularly in this case concerning eternity. That is, according to the modes of cognition principle, we cannot know things as they are known by God any more than a dog can know things as they are known by a human being. Each thinker knows according to its own capacities. Michael Wiitala writes,

Our capacity or way of knowing differs from God's and cannot comprehend his. Consequently a complete solution to the foreknowledge and freedom dilemma in which 'no further doubt would remain' is impossible. A partial solution, however, is possible insofar as we can understand Divine simplicity in some way, and Lady Philosophy promises to offer such a solution.⁵⁵

Thus, we cannot comprehend eternity as God understands it, but there are truer ways in which the human can know according to her own mode of knowing. Thinking God's eternity differently from how it really is need not affect the integrity of that thinking, though there are better and worse ways to think it.

We should also point out here that the higher modes of thinking include the lower. As McTighe highlights, "The principle that the higher includes the

⁵³ Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 5.4. Hereafter *De Cons.* I use the text in Boethius, *Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1918). See also Wayne Hankey, "Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem: Knower and Known in the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius and the Proslogion of Anselm," in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002), 126-150.

⁵⁴ Thomas P. McTighe, "Eternity and Time In Boethius," in *History of Philosophy in the Making*, ed. Linus J. Thro (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 35-62, at 48.

⁵⁵ Michael Wiitala, "It Depends on What One Means by 'Eternal': Why Boethius Is Not an Eternalist," *American Catholic Philosophical Association, Proceedings of the ACPA* 84 (2011): 253-61, at 225.

lower, which is central to the theory of knowledge, is also operative in the theory of eternity and time.”⁵⁶ Thus God, in knowing in a higher mode, does not exclude the lower human mode; higher modes include the lower, but the lower do not include the higher.

Temporality, Sempiternity, and Eternity

So how does this principle apply to the human conception of eternity for Boethius? Boethius applies the Modes of Cognition Principle in his solution to the apparent conflict between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. The tension arises when the human being tries to understand eternity either according to the divine mode, which is impossible, or according to the wrong human analogy. Wiitala writes, “The dilemma arises because the human mind cannot comprehend God in his simplicity and as a result must break this simplicity into parts which then appear to be inconsistent with one another.”⁵⁷ Boethius’s solution is of course well-known. The wrong way to think about God’s eternity, that is, the way that leads to the perceived conflict between divine omniscience and human freedom, is to think God’s eternity as an infinite succession or perpetuity—as a sempiternity. Boethius says that a sempiternal being “does not simultaneously comprehend and embrace the whole space of its life, though it be infinite, but it possesses the future not yet, the past no longer.”⁵⁸ We can imagine a being coming into existence, being involved in the motion and change in the world, which, however, unlike all other things, would never come to an end; its life would continue on forever, like the *Highlander*, Tolkien’s elves, or Dorian Gray if he could have just kept that picture under lock and key. In fact, Augustine believes that there are such beings. Angels are not eternal in the divine sense; they couldn’t be, given that they are creatures that have beginnings. So too is the human soul such a creature. While it is a matter of scholarly debate whether or not Augustine believed that the human soul exists before it is born into a body, or whether the creation of the soul occurs at the moment of the body’s generation, either way, the human soul has a beginning; being immortal, it persists like the angel or demon in sempiternal succession.⁵⁹ However, as Marenbon explains, “The way God exists, Philosophy goes on to explain, is to exist eternally. Divine eternity, she then makes clear, is not a matter of existing during an infinite length of time, as the universe does if it lacks beginning and end. Rather, God’s eternity

⁵⁶ McTighe, “Eternity,” 37. Wiitala also emphasizes that the higher modes of thought include the lower: “If one grants these two claims, then although we are limited in our ability to comprehend God, God is not limited in comprehending us and our modes of knowing. Thus, although God knows time from an eternal perspective in a way that is beyond our comprehension, he also knows it from our temporal perspective, since his higher way of knowing time includes within itself all the lower ways of knowing time.” Wiitala, “Boethius,” 256.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵⁸ Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6.

⁵⁹ On this, see Roland J. Teske, S.J., “St. Augustine’s View of the Original Human Condition in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*,” *Augustinian Studies* vol. 22 (1991): 141-155.

is ‘the whole, simultaneous perfect possession of unbounded life.’⁶⁰ Or as McTighe notes, “It is one thing to be lead through an endless succession of temporal moments. It is quite another to *envelop* all moments all at once in a total presence. The former is perpetuity, the latter eternity.”⁶¹

It is clear enough that God’s eternity is not sempiternity, for then there would be moments apart from Him: God would be in time rather than time being in God. Boethius writes:

For whatever lives in time proceeds in the present from the past into the future, and *there is nothing established in time* which can embrace the whole space of its life equally, but tomorrow surely it does not yet grasp, while yesterday it has already lost. And in this day to day life you live no more than in that moving and transitory moment.⁶²

To think of God in this way would have God existing in the present, having existed in the past, and who, like us, is waiting around for the future to occur. Because, however, he, unlike the human, has divine omniscience, he knows all things that will come to pass, even though they are not yet present. This creates the problem for human freedom. God knew that I would write this paper, and until now, he was just waiting around for what he knew would occur to transpire. We seem to want, however, in order to feel free in the here and now, to be able to prove such a God wrong, that is, not to write the article and have God say, “Wow, I thought for sure he would write that paper!” If we cannot do this, we do not seem to have real freedom.

The conflict arises, however, because we are not thinking of eternity in the correct (yet still limited) way according to the human mode of thinking that we have available to us. Boethius telegraphs his philosophical answer to the problem, as he often does, in the poetry that precedes the discussion: “What is, what has been, and what is to come / in one swift mental stab he sees / Him, since he only all things sees / The true sun could you call.”⁶³ God sees what is past, present, and future in the created temporal order in “one swift mental stab.” Just as Fate is the successive unraveling in time of what Providence contains all together, so too are all of the moments of time encompassed by the eternal standpoint in which they are not successive, but unified. Boethius says that “Eternity, then, is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life, which becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things.”⁶⁴

Yet, as we have seen, there is a human counterpart to eternity imagined in this way. As Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzmann explain:

The existence of a typical existent temporal entity, such as a human

⁶⁰ Marenbon, *Boethius*, 135-36.

⁶¹ McTighe, “Eternity,” 49.

⁶² Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6 (my emphasis).

⁶³ Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.2.

⁶⁴ Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6.

being, is spread over years of the past, through the present, and into years of the future; but the past is not, the future is not, and the present must be understood as no time at all, a durationless instant, a mere point at which the past is continuous with the future.⁶⁵

This description of Boethius's understanding of eternity, taken out of context, could easily be mistaken for an accurate description of Augustine's account of human temporality in *Confessions*. Boethius provides the limited human analogy, according to the modes of cognition principle, by which we are better able to touch upon eternity; it involves thinking not about sempiternal succession, but about all temporal moments in the past, present, and future in terms of the present. He suggests, "But if the comparison of the divine and the human present is a proper one, just as you see certain things in this your temporal present, so [God] perceives all things in his eternal one."⁶⁶

In C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape writes to Wormwood:

The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to the point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity. Of the present moment, and of it only, humans have an experience analogous to the experience which our Enemy has of reality as a whole; in it alone freedom and actuality are offered them.⁶⁷

Lewis is here emphasizing that it is the human experience of the present that likens us to the divine and is the tense in which human freedom can be found. By conceiving divine knowledge as an all-encompassing present, Boethius attempts to solve the apparent contradiction between divine omniscience and human freedom. He argues, in the last book of the *Consolation*, just as one's seeing a man walking and the sun rising in the present causes neither to occur, so too does God's seeing what is future to us but present to Him fail to cause these events. The sun rises by necessity, a man walks by choice, but our seeing causes neither, yet neither escapes our notice. Boethius writes:

Whatever therefore comprehends and possesses at once the whole fullness of boundless life, and is such that neither is anything future lacking from it, nor has anything past flowed away, that is rightly held to

⁶⁵ Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981): 429-458, at 444-45.

⁶⁶ Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6.

⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 75. He continues, "In a word, the Future, is, of all things, the thing *least like* eternity. It is the most completely temporal part of time – for the Past is frozen and no longer flows, and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays." Ibid, 76.

be eternal, and that must necessarily both always be present to itself, possessing itself in the present, and hold as present the infinity of moving time.⁶⁸

Understanding God as being present to all events, which from our perspective unfold in time as past, present, and future, avoids the problem of God's perfect foreknowledge restricting us from doing other than what he foreknows. As Chadwick explains:

For us events fall into past, present, and future time. God is outside time. For him the knowledge of temporal events is an eternal present. Therefore to affirm God is omniscient does not entail that he holds beliefs about acts *in advance* of their being done; the temporality involved in the phrase 'in advance of' must be abstracted from the discussion.⁶⁹

We, however, are like Oedipus, bound by space and time, and we must learn through suffering and temporal succession, whereas Tiresias comprehends the whole span of time in one divine Apollonian vision.⁷⁰ The experience of time is the result of human limitation, which again, is a natural and necessary property of any created thing.⁷¹ Explaining Augustine's position, Katherin Rogers writes: "It is the temporal creature's weakness that it exists in time and sees things from its own finite point of view. It is God's strength that He sees all and all 'at once.'"⁷² As Stump explains, "From the eternal viewpoint every temporal event is actually happening."⁷³ We err when we try to conceive God's eternity according to the wrong analogy, that is according to eternal succession rather than the present.⁷⁴

The better human way to understand divine eternity is to conceive of God as experiencing all temporal events as we experience the present. There are, of course, limitations to this view. Wiitala raises the following problem:

⁶⁸ Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6.

⁶⁹ Chadwick, *Boethius*, 246.

⁷⁰ Even Tiresias, however, is still in time and must 'wait' for providence to unfold as fate and to realize his prophecies in time.

⁷¹ See Boethius, *De Cons.*, 5.6.

⁷² Katherin Rogers, "St. Augustine on Time and Eternity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (1996): 207-223, at 212. See also Marenbon, *Boethius*, 137: "So far as her main argument is concerned, the important point Philosophy develops from her description of divine eternity is that God lives and knows in an eternal *present*. Indeed, this eternal present is the model of the ordinary present, with which we are familiar. We experience the presentness 'of this tiny, fleeting instant' (CVI.6.12 [50-51] – that is to say, of the moment that it is *now*."

⁷³ Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 457.

⁷⁴ See Rogers, "Rogers," 213: "We are limited beings and can only understand things from the temporal perspective. For us the past *is* gone and the future *is not yet*. We make a mistake only if we insist that all beings, including God, must be bound by our temporal limitations and see things as we see them."

The only difficulty with Boethius's characterization of God's knowledge of time is that we cannot imagine what it would be like to simultaneously know the same event as eternally present, temporally present, past, and future. But why should we think that we can imagine God's 'mental states'? The reason that we cannot imagine what it would be like to simultaneously know the same event as eternally present, temporally present, past, and future is that, since we are limited by time, we can only imagine things from one perspective at a time.⁷⁵

One sees Wiitala's point, but the analogy between divine eternity as a present and the human experience of the temporal present is richer than it might seem in light of Augustine's account of memory. As we have seen in Augustine, so too does the human, through the power of memory, stretch beyond the limitations of the present moment to reach out towards the past and future, encompassing and unifying them within her present attention. While still a limited, human image, in light of the power of memory, which Augustine makes evident, the human soul and its divine creator are brought closer together within the analogy.

Conclusion

Some scholars have denied Augustine's influence on Boethius' conception of time and eternity. For example, McTighe asserts:

Boethius' reflections on time show no trace of the psychological approach to time of Plotinus and St. Augustine. Countless commentators claim without the slightest evidence to see in Boethius the influence of Augustine not only in respect to time and eternity but also many other issues. The truth is that Boethius' account owes nothing to Augustine.⁷⁶

It is hard not to notice the textual and philosophical similarities, however, between Augustine's and Boethius' conceptions of time and eternity. In addition to the texts cited throughout this paper, Katherin Rogers has also cited many other passages in Augustine's works that make the connection hard to deny.⁷⁷ Further, Teske argues:

Boethius (480-525/6), who lived roughly a century after Augustine, is rightly credited with having passed on to the later Middle Ages this concept of divine eternity as life all at once. He expressed the idea in his well-known definition: 'the perfect possession all at once of unending life.' All the elements of that definition are clearly found in Augustine, but before the time of Augustine that concept of eternity is found in no

⁷⁵ Wiitala, *Boethius*, 260.

⁷⁶ McTighe, "Eternity," 53.

⁷⁷ See Rogers, "Augustine."

Christian thinker, except perhaps Gregory of Nyssa, who is more Augustine's contemporary than his source Augustine, it seems, was the first Christian thinker, at least in the West, to have articulated the philosophical concept of eternity as a life that is complete all at once in the present without any past or future.⁷⁸

Though raised within a different context as a solution to a different problem, Boethius' discussion of divine eternity as an eternal present is an elaboration of the view of Augustine. In Book 11 of the *Confessions*, Augustine contrasts the human life, which is lived out in temporal succession, with divine eternity. Augustine too suggests that the proper image of eternity is not an everlasting sequential sempiternity, but rather, that it is a kind of everlasting present. He writes, "Yet, if the present were always present, it would not pass into the past: it would not be time but eternity."⁷⁹ Like Descartes, who says that we are aware of our own imperfection only in relation to some prior notion of perfection, which we cannot define but yet can touch with our thought, Augustine says that we are aware of the eternal in our own recognition of the limits of the temporal.⁸⁰ When discussing God's words spoken in time in the Gospel, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", Augustine writes, "That voice is past and done with; it began and is ended. . . . But the mind would compare these words, sounding in time, with your eternal word in silence."⁸¹ Augustine makes the distinction explicit:

It is not in time that you precede times. Otherwise you would not precede all times. In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future, because they are still to come, and when they have come they are past. 'But you are the same and your years do not fail.' Your 'years' neither go nor come. Ours come and go so that all may come in succession. All your

⁷⁸ Teske, *Paradoxes of Time*, 18, 22. On the relation between Augustine and Boethius, see also Chadwick, *Boethius*, 247-253.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.14. Cf. Bonaventure, *Q.D. de trin.*, q. 5, a. 1: "In time, which is the vestige of eternity, present, past, and future truly exist in such a way that what was future later becomes present and then past, because it is rooted in mutable and fluid being, or in movement itself. Therefore, if the present is understood to be rooted in immutable and stable being which has neither beginning nor end, that would be understood to be eternal."

⁸⁰ See René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999): "By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me, that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp, but can somehow reach in my thought, who is subject to no defects whatsoever." Descartes, *Meditations*, 3, 52.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.6. The biblical reference is to Matthew 3:17. Cf. Bonaventure, *Q.D. de trin.*, q. 5, a. 1: "Now, in creatures—even though a complete likeness cannot be found because of their deficiency—yet a certain limited likeness can be found which can lead us to understand the eternity of the divine being if we abstract from the defect by means of our intellect. In a certain way, this likeness can be noticed both in the image and in the vestige."

‘years’ subsist in simultaneity, because they do not change.⁸²

This analogy, however, is by no means perfect, since the entirety of things past and yet to come cannot be present to us in the way that Boethius or Augustine suggests that they are present to God.⁸³ In fact, it is not quite right to call God’s present a ‘present’ at all; the notion of the ‘present’ only is comprehensible in the context of a past and future, none of which are experienced by God without placing Him back into the time which He transcends. Such is the nature of analogy. Nevertheless, an all encompassing present is a better image than sempiternal succession, since it more perfectly images divine eternity, and avoids the conflict that opposes God’s foreknowledge to human freedom.⁸⁴

Central to Augustine’s confession is not only the distinction and distance between the human and God, but also, and more importantly, the relation and connection between Creator and created. As much as our experience of time distinguishes us from the Creator, so too does the power of *memoria* in the human soul, the pre-condition of our experience of time, liken us to the eternal God. C.S. Lewis once wrote in a letter to Sheldon Vanauken, “Notice how we are perpetually *surprised* at Time.... In heaven’s name, why? Unless, indeed, there is something in us which is *not* temporal.”⁸⁵

⁸² Augustine, *Conf.*, 11.13.

⁸³ See Rogers, “Augustine,” 211: “Perhaps ‘present’ does not begin to do justice to God’s eternity since ordinarily it does suggest a dimensionless point in time, but no word could really do the job. It seems clear that Augustine chooses to use ‘present’ to emphasize that there is no extension in God because extension or duration would limit the perfect divine simplicity.”

⁸⁴ In fact, God does not have foreknowledge at all, since there is no ‘fore’ for God.

⁸⁵ *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3, Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950-1963, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2007), 76.