

it played a similar role in rescuing the self from fragmentation. In Descartes's *Meditations*, God became part of the mechanism of knowledge, assuring certainty; and the mind's reflection on its dependence on God becomes the source of another version of the idea of the 'stretching out' of the soul.

DESCARTES AND AUGUSTINE

Central themes from Augustine's writings recur in Descartes's famous discussions of self and self-consciousness. Turning away as he did from Aristotelian models of knowledge and of the relations between mind and body, it is not surprising that his philosophy should echo some Platonic ways of thinking, startingly novel though his transformation of them was. As Etienne Gilson says, Descartes, having rejected Aristotle, could not but follow the other great way of metaphysical speculation. Surrounded as he was by contemporary Augustinians, he was bound to meet Augustine on that Platonic way.¹ Augustine's efforts to establish certainty against the sceptics, and the spirituality of the soul against the Manichees, were being re-enacted in Descartes's intellectual milieu. Augustine's shift of focus from world to self is paralleled in Descartes's emphasis on the inwardness of knowledge, and in his dramatic view of 'ideas' as the proper objects of knowledge. The self, rather than being just a preferred object of contemplation, becomes the immediate object of knowledge, mediating even the knowledge of material things, in so far as that can be certain.

Rejecting the Aristotelian orientation of scholastic theories of knowledge, Descartes reversed the prevailing conception of the order of knowledge, giving precedence to the mind's awareness of its own thought rather than to its confrontation with the world through the senses. Whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive through pure intellect as belonging to a thing, he thought, can be taken as a real property of it – a principle through which he establishes both the limits of certainty and the utter separation of spiritual soul from material body.

Something of Augustine's yearning for stabilized self-knowledge can be discerned in Descartes's concern with the transparency of thought to itself. Moreover his most famous insight into self-consciousness – that from the indubitability of the act of thinking follows the certainty of the thinker's existence

Genevieve Lloyd Being in Time (Routledge, 1993)

as a thing that thinks – had, as some of his contemporary readers pointed out, already been formulated by Augustine. Augustine's delight in finding in his own self the stability and security which had eluded him in his dealings in his search for knowledge and love in the world outside him, finds more systematic philosophical expression in Descartes's *Cogito*. But Descartes himself was sure that his own version went well beyond anything to be found in Augustine. When his contemporaries drew his attention to similarities to passages in Augustine, Descartes was not interested in the resemblance. Augustine, he thought, had put the point to very different use, lacking his own concern with articulating the radical separation of mind and body. In response to the Jansenist Arnauld, who was rather more preoccupied with the echoes of Augustine in Descartes's works, Descartes said, with a note of irony, that he would not waste time thanking Arnauld for bringing in the authority of Augustine to support him.²

Pascal endorsed Descartes's claim to be the real inventor of the *Cogito*, stressing the distinctive reflectiveness of Descartes's version. Descartes, he pointed out, drew out the consequences of the argument to distinguish spiritual from material natures and build an entire physics on it. In Descartes's writings, he suggested, the *Cogito* becomes as different from its occurrence in the works of others, who have said it in passing, as a man full of life and force from a dead man.³ Gilson has argued against this that Augustine in fact put the principle to similar uses – to refute sceptical doubt and to shift the mind's attention from objects of sense to the intelligible order; and that Augustine too emphasised the soul's grasp of its own existence through an act of pure thought, immediately accessible to consciousness, in contrast to its mediated awareness of body.⁴ Descartes's treatment of the self can be seen as retracing in a systematic way the Augustinian turning away from world to find God in the soul. For Gilson, Augustine is more Cartesian, and Descartes more Augustinian, than Pascal or Descartes himself would allow. But to recognize the Augustinian influence is, as Gilson acknowledges, in no way to deny the originality of Descartes's transformation of the master theses of Augustinian metaphysics, or the extraordinary depth with which he developed them. This is evident in Descartes's transformation of another theme we have already seen in Augustine – the dependence of the human mind on God.

Augustine and the 'problem' of time

The connections between the idea of narrative and philosophical reflection on time and consciousness go back as far as Augustine's *Confessions* – that remarkable venture into autobiography, written by the Bishop of Hippo around AD 396. What philosophers most often quote from Augustine's discussion of time in Book XI of the *Confessions*¹ is his famous remark that he knows well enough what time is, as long as no-one asks him, but is reduced to bewilderment if asked to define it. His positive account of time is usually regarded as something of an oddity – a curiously implausible reduction of the reality of time to the workings of the human psyche. Time, he argues, rather than being an 'objective' feature of the world, is a 'distension' of the soul. The mind stretches itself out, as it were, embracing past and future in a mental act of attention and regulating the flow of future into past. Taken in isolation from the autobiographical reflections which frame it in the *Confessions*, such claims about time do seem implausible. As a theory of the nature of time, such a radical psychologizing of its reality must seem counter-intuitive.

Although Augustine presents his view as a theory of time's nature, his interest in that question is framed by reflection on the experiential and emotional dimensions of being in time. Such concerns are, perhaps all too readily, now commonly regarded as extraneous to philosophical enquiry; but they are integral to Augustine's treatment of time. In the *Confessions* he attempts to take account of time as it bears on human existence – to engage with the ways in which time makes him 'a problem to himself'. The work tells the story of his gradual coming to understand what it is to be a consciousness in time. If we are to understand

fully what he has to say about time, we must take seriously the fact that it occurs in the context of an autobiography. The philosophical content of the work is interwoven with its narrative form.

The relations between God's eternity and the temporality of the individual soul, for example, can seem extraneous to Augustine's treatment of the nature of time – a theological excursion which is irrelevant to philosophical content. But to ignore the theological context is also to set aside the literary structure of the work. The central significance of his religious belief is enacted in the narrative form of the work as a whole. Augustine, in the role of the narrator, is able to see each event in relation to a recounted past. Everything finds its place in relation to the crucial event – his conversion to Christianity. The narrator's complete vision here represents the human approximation to the complete knowledge of a changing reality which Augustine attributes to God. In the position of the protagonist in the narrative, Augustine sees his life only in a confused way. His past is continually re-shaped by the addition of new experience and by expectations of the future which are continually revised in the light of that experience. In the position of the narrator, in contrast, he presents himself as seeing each event in a fixed relation to a past which has achieved its final form. From this god-like perspective, the self has a completeness and stability which the protagonist cannot attain. Through the act of retrospective narration, Augustine is able to achieve a view of himself as object which eludes him in the midst of the life he now narrates. His narrated life takes on a unity, a wholeness.

The narrator has knowledge denied to the protagonist of how the story goes on. He is able to bestow unity and meaning on the events of a life directly experienced as fragmentation. The autobiographical form of the work can in this way be seen as the vehicle of an attempt to achieve an elusive goal which being in time puts out of reach. God is envisaged as having a completeness of self-knowledge in which no aspect or element of his being remains absent or opaque. The human mind, in contrast, cannot have it all at once. But the distension of the soul – epitomized for Augustine in memory and enacted in narrative – functions as a semblance in the midst of time of the standing present of eternity. Past, present and future, in Augustine's theory of time, are held together in a unifying act of attention; and this extended

present of the act of attention – modelled on God's eternal self-presence – finds expression in the autobiographical form of the work as a whole.

To properly understand what Augustine has to say about time then it is crucial to see the interconnections between philosophical content and literary form. But the content of earlier sections of the work is also important to understanding what he is about in internalizing time to the mind. The philosophical discussion in Book XI is not an answer to a timeless philosophical question in to the nature of time. It is rather an attempt to resolve a problem posed to consciousness by the human experience of time. What exactly is Augustine's 'problem', and how does it relate to the nature of time? To answer these questions we must examine both his account in earlier sections of the *Confessions* of the ways in which he has become a 'problem to himself', and the philosophical picture to which he responds with his daring assertion that time is nothing more than the distension of the soul.

LIVING WITH 'HALF A SOUL': AUGUSTINE ON GRIEF

Augustine describes two major episodes of grief in the *Confessions*. First, in Book IV, he recounts his youthful response to the death of a friend. The description of grief is here interwoven with reflections on friendship which echo themes from the concluding books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially the idea of the friend as 'another self'. Because he lives outside himself, pouring out his soul 'like water upon sand' (IV, 8; 79), the young Augustine experiences grief as a disorienting loss of self. He becomes a puzzle to himself – a stranger, tormented in his own country and finding even his own home 'a grotesque abode of misery'. Familiar places become unbearable in the experience of this new, strange absence for they no longer whisper 'Here he comes!' as they would have, had he only been absent a while (IV, 4; 76).

In the immediate experience of grief, Augustine cannot understand what is happening in his own soul. Reflecting on it now in memory, he comes to an understanding of what was lacking in his apparent possession of selfhood before his friend's death. His misery, it now seems to him, came from his soul's being directed outside himself – from its being 'tethered by the love of things that cannot last', so that it is then agonized to lose them (IV, 6; 77).

Reflection on this past loss makes visible flaws in his early loves. He had loved something mortal as though it could never die, as something more than human. This defect of love has rendered his soul 'a burden, bruised and bleeding', which he cannot set down. The loss of a friend loved as another self makes the soul a burden to itself. But this loss only makes visible a wretched state of separation from himself which was already there, fuelled by the attachment to something external. 'Neither the charm of the countryside nor the sweet scents of a garden could soothe it. . . . Everything that was not what he had been was dull and distasteful. Where could I go, yet leave myself behind? Was there any place where I should not be a prey to myself?' (IV, 7; 78).

With self bound up with what is external, grief becomes intermingled with the fear of death. Augustine is obsessed by a 'strange feeling', quite the opposite of the altruistic desire of friends ready to die for each other's sake. Sick and tired of living, he is yet afraid to die. Death, which has snatched away his friend, seems the most terrible of enemies, likely to seize all others too without warning. He wonders that other men should live when his friend is dead, having loved him as though he would never die. And still more he wonders that he himself, having been his 'second self', the 'half of his soul' should remain alive. 'I felt that our two souls had been as one, living in two bodies, and life to me was fearful because I did not want to live with only half a soul. Perhaps this, too, is why I shrank from death, for fear that one whom I had loved so well might then be wholly dead' (IV, 6; 78).

Augustine is delivered from this early grief by the passage of time and the possibilities it brings of new friendship. Time, which never stands still nor passes idly without effects upon the feelings, works its wonders on the mind. As it passes, it fills him with fresh hope and new thoughts to remember. Little by little it pieces him together again by means of the old pleasures he had once enjoyed. But time, by bringing new attachments, brings also new vulnerability – new captivations of the heart by the 'huge fable' of friendship – 'the long-drawn lie which does not die with the death of any one friend' (IV, 8; 79).

Augustine's powerful evocation of the pleasures of friendship in Book IV, section 8, is double-edged. The mutual learning and teaching, the laughter and kindness, the shared pleasures of books, the regrets at absence, the glad welcomes of return are tokens of affection between friends. Signs read on the face and in

the eyes, spoken by the tongue and displayed in countless acts of kindness, all 'kindle a blaze to melt our hearts and weld them into one'. But they hold the 'germ of sorrow still to come'. The delights of friendship, especially those centring on the spoken word, are woven into a fable – a long-drawn lie which our minds are 'always itching to hear, only to be defiled by its adulterous caress' (IV, 8; 79). He loved this fable instead of God. The passage of time, though it may heal a specific grief, is itself now seen as a source of anguish – of separation and internal fragmentation of the self.

What the passage of time cannot deliver, however, Augustine finds in his own activity of narration. Reflection on memory – foreshadowing the later, more extended philosophical discussion of time – yields the kind of self-knowledge in which he sees his deliverance from the anguish of temporal experience. Memory, a 'sort of stomach for the mind' in which grief can be reflected on without grief, allows him to recover himself (X, 14; 220). Through self-reflection he turns away from the love of changeable things – from friends conceived as other selves – to his own self. His reflections on past grief, and on the memory through which he is able to reflect thus, here prepare the way for the discovery of the distension of the soul, through which he will both understand and escape from the distress of the temporal. Time's destructive flight into non-existence is countered by the act of memory. Having found in his own soul the act of attention which approximates in its all-encompassing presence the 'standing present' of eternity, he will now be free to love changeable and mortal things in God, who is never lost. No longer clinging to the external and thus clasping sorrow to itself, his soul is freed to a new joy.

The second major episode of grief recounted in Augustine's narrative concerns the death of Monica, his mother. It is separated from the earlier grief by the crucial event which forms the pivotal point in the *Confessions* – his conversion to Christianity. He now knows of the 'eternal wisdom' which creates 'all things that ever have been and all that are yet to be', while yet it itself 'simply is', subject to neither pastness nor futurity. Monica's death is preceded by a conversation in which she speaks with Augustine of this eternal wisdom. They felt their minds touch it, he tells us, for one fleeting instant, before returning to the sound

of their own speech, in which each word has a beginning and an end (IX, 10; 197–8).

Enlightened by this moment of contact with eternity, Augustine, as we might expect, presents his second grief as in marked contrast with the earlier one, although his immediate emotional response to it is, to his chagrin, not fully in accord with what he now knows of time and eternity. The 'great wave of sorrow' which surges in his heart is, he thinks, at odds with his religious beliefs; and his misery at finding himself so weak a victim of these human emotions becomes an added source of sorrow. Grieved by his own feelings, he is tormented by a 'two-fold agony'. He is plunged again into the restlessness and oppressiveness of grief. But little by little memory returns, bringing back to him his old feelings about his mother accompanied by the comfort of tears.

In his earlier discussion of grief, Augustine reflected on why it should be that tears are sweet to those grieving and found no clear answer. Weeping now becomes the expression of a hope which eluded him at the death of his friend. 'I had no hope that he would come to life again, nor was this what I begged for through my tears. I simply grieved and wept, for I was heart-broken and had lost my joy' (IV, 5; 77). In that context tears are sweet only because in his heart's desire they take the place of his friend (IV, 4; 76). His new grief, in contrast, is integrated into his own confession and transformed into prayer for his mother's soul. Memory is gathered up in a move forward in the hope of eternal life.

Augustine's new-found religious faith makes of this grief a different experience from his earlier hopelessness in the face of loss, even if his emotions lag behind his intellect. The two griefs express different responses to time. In the second episode, the destructive passage of time is framed by the soul's journey towards eternity. Memory of what he has lost is no longer a source of misery, but a delight in the life which held the seeds of transformation into contact with the eternal. Eternity is here not an empty abstract contrast with the reality of time, but a fullness of presence to be attained after death – a fullness towards which the soul strains during life and of which it gets occasional glimpses. This shift in the emotional resonances of grief foreshadows the later discussion of time. The soul's stretching out in memory, though itself a source of distress at the lack of self-

presence, becomes – through the narrative act, centred on the significance of his conversion – the basis for a reaching-out of a different kind, from time into eternity. The reflections on grief foreshadow Augustine's discovering in the distension of the soul an image of eternity. The 'problem' of time is resolved through finding unity amidst fragmentation. This unifying of the fragments of experience is epitomized in memory, articulated through metaphors drawn from the unity of speech, and acted out in autobiographical narration.

Memory represents for Augustine the soul's inward turning, away from the delights of the world grasped through the senses, to search for the good and the eternal within itself. The search echoes the famous passages in Plato's *Symposium* describing the soul's ascent from things of sense towards the intelligible forms known through the higher faculties of the soul. In Augustine's version of this journey, memory represents a higher stage than sense, marking the crucial inward turning which will yield the desired contact with the eternal. To reach God, he thinks, he must carry self-reflection from sense, which he shares with the animals, on to the extraordinary human power of memory. He compares memory to a 'great field or a spacious palace', a 'storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses' (X, 8; 214). In its 'vast cloisters' are the sky, the earth, the sun, ready at his summons. But memory, as well as bringing the world into the self, also contains the self. He finds himself, along with other things, within this 'vast, immeasurable sanctuary'; and yet it is a faculty of his soul (X, 8; 215–16).

Reflection on memory makes the self an object of wonder – an astonishment previously reserved for the contemplation of the world with its 'high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses' (X, 8; 216). Although the soul's search takes it beyond memory to intellect, it is in some ways memory that best represents the crucial shift to the self, encompassing in its cloisters even the supposedly higher faculty of intellect. For Augustine, memory retains a certain primacy in understanding the nature of the mind. Mind and memory, he says, are one and the same (X, 14; 220). To understand memory is to understand the self: 'I am working hard in this field, and the field of my labours is my own self' (X, 16; 222–3). He has become a problem to himself – a problem which is to be resolved through the investigation of

his self, his memory, his mind. Awe-inspiring though the profound power of memory is, it is identified with his mind, with himself.

What, then, am I, my God? What is my nature? A life that is ever varying, full of change, and of immense power. The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond compute of countless things of all kinds. . . . My mind has the freedom of them all. I can glide from one to the other. I can probe deep into them and never find the end of them. This is the power of memory! This is the great force of life in living man, mortal though he is.

(X, 17; 224)

Intellect may transcend that form of memory which retains sensory images, grasping rather 'the facts themselves' (X, 10; 217). But even this achievement of intellect is framed by memory. The power of intellect resides just in its capacity to gather things which, although they are muddled and confused, are already contained in memory: ' . . . once they have been dispersed, I have to collect them again, and this is the derivation of the word *cogitare* which means to *think* or to *collect one's thoughts*' (X, 11; 218). It is memory, with its capacity to make all things present, that yields the clue to the idea of eternity. It is like a mental replica of the world, but it contains more – intellect, and even God himself. It thus offers possibilities of understanding and dealing with time of a kind which eludes the soul in its thought about the physical world as object. Even the immutable God has deigned to be present in memory, and forms there a 'safe haven' for the mind. Memory provides the material for reflection which allows Augustine to find in God the 'gathering-place' for his 'scattered parts'; and as a 'sort of stomach for the mind' (X, 40; 249), retaining experience without its original 'taste', it allows the reflection which is impeded by the immediacy of emotion. Memory and self-knowledge thus belong together. The turning away from world to self which it epitomizes yields a self-knowledge in which Augustine will find the divine. The self becomes visible through a kind of detachment – it draws back from the mindless world to turn its gaze on consciousness. It is the incapacity of that mindless world of physical motion to reveal what is involved in being a mind, capable of understanding time and eternity, that Augustine stresses in his discussion in Book XI

of the nature of time. Let us now look at his own account of what it is to be in time in relation to what he sees as the inadequacies of the Aristotelian treatment of the relations between time and consciousness.

THE 'MEASURE OF MOTION': AUGUSTINE AND ARISTOTLE

Augustine's psychologizing of time aims both to secure the reality of time and to resolve puzzles about its measurement. On either side of the present, he reasons, lies an abyss of non-existence. And even the present, in abstraction from the mind's attention, collapses internally into a non-existent future and an equally non-existent past, on either side of a durationless instant in which nothing can happen. His arguments for internalizing the reality of time to the mind centre on puzzles about measurement. What, he asks, do we measure when we measure time? Not the future; for it does not yet exist. Nor do we measure the past, for it no longer exists. Do we then measure time 'as it is passing? But, if so, while we are measuring it, where is it coming from, what is it passing through, and where is it going? It can, it seems, only be coming from the future, passing through the present, and going into the past. In other words, it is coming out of what does not yet exist, passing through what has no duration, and moving into what no longer exists' (XI, 21; 269).

We are left then with a paradoxical passage from non-existence, through a fleeting, existence-bestowing 'present' into non-existence again. The fragile hold of the present on reality, moreover, is itself encroached upon by the surrounding, voracious non-existence of future and past. The measurement of time in the fleeting present, as it passes, cannot be insulated from the puzzles that beset the measurement of non-existent past and future. The only time that can be called present is an instant – if we can conceive of such a thing – that cannot be divided even into the most minute fractions. However a point of time as small as this passes so rapidly from the future to the past that its duration is without length; for, if its duration were prolonged, it could be divided into past and future. When it is present, then, it has no duration. But such a present can hardly be thought of as bestowing reality on that strange being or non-being which comes out of, and vanishes into, nowhere. There is for Augustine

another dimension too to the implication of the present in the non-existence of past and future. The present itself participates in non-being; for if it were always present and never moved on to become past, Augustine reasons, it would be not time but eternity. If, therefore, the present is time only by reason of the fact that it moves on to become the past, how can we say that even the present 'is', when the reason why it is, is that it is not to be? In other words, we cannot rightly say that time is, except by reason of its impending state of non-being.

From all this we might expect Augustine to adopt a sceptical attitude towards the reality of time. These puzzles do indeed echo the temporal paradoxes which Aristotle discussed in the *Physics*. But Augustine's conclusion is that it must be in his own mind that he measures time. Everything that happens leaves an impression which remains after the thing itself has ceased to be. It is the impression that he measures, since it is still present when the thing itself, which makes the impression as it passes, has moved into the past. From this he moves – in a step which may well seem, from our own perspective, all too swift – to the conclusion that time itself must be something mental. 'Either, then, this is what time is, or else I do not measure time at all' (XI, 27; 276).

From the consideration of time's measurement then Augustine derives a shift in the understanding of its nature. From seeing past and future as non-existent times, he moves to the claim that what we call past, present and future are not really three different 'times'. Rather, there are three kinds of present: a present of past things – memory; a present of present things – direct perception; and a present of future things – expectation. But this distinction between three 'presents' gives way to a transformed sense of the present, which accommodates the present of memory and expectation in an all-embracing act of attention. The mind's attention persists, and through it that which is to be passes towards the state in which it is to be no more.

Taken as an analysis of the nature of time, all this may well seem counter-intuitive. Augustine presents his problem as understanding the fundamental nature of time and what power it has. But his description of the passage from expectation through perception into memory seems to demand an objective temporal sequence, in which the states can be said to precede or succeed one another. However, there is more going on here than a

misguided attempt to totally absorb the reality of time into his own mind. The force of Augustine's remark, 'Either, then, this is what time is, or else I do not measure time at all', is that if time is not integral to consciousness, then it is as nothing to him. What may seem a non sequitur deriving the nature of time from consideration of its measurement takes on a different aspect when seen in the context of the view of the relationship between time and measurement which Augustine is rejecting – the Aristotelian definition of time as the measure of motion. From that, Augustine is suggesting, it is impossible to derive an adequate understanding of what it is for consciousness to be in time. A brief look at the discussion of time in Aristotle's *Physics*² will clarify what kind of 'problem' it is to which Augustine's talk of time as a distension of the mind is meant to offer a 'solution', and why that problem cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of the Aristotelian definition.

In Book IV of the *Physics* Aristotle presents some considerations about time which could, he suggests, make one suspect that time does not exist at all, or 'barely and in an obscure way'. His formulation of the dilemma is similar to Augustine's. One part of time 'has been and is not', while the other 'is going to be and is not yet'. Yet time is made up of these apparently non-existent parts; and one would naturally suppose that 'what is made up of things which do not exist could have no share in reality'. Further, if a divisible thing is to exist, it is necessary that all or some of its parts exist. 'But of time, some parts have been, while others have to be, and no part of it is, though it is divisible' (IV. 10. 218a).

From Aristotle's presentation of the paradoxes, it is clear that he does not intend them to be accepted as showing the unreality of time, although he does not offer any explicit solutions to them. His own treatment of time ties its reality securely to that of motion. Time is not movement, but nor is it independent of movement. Aristotle defines it somewhat cryptically as 'number of motion in respect of "before" and "after"' (IV. 11. 219b2). Time is 'movement in so far as it admits of enumeration' – what is countable in movement. Time then is a kind of number, provided we understand this, he insists, not in the sense of that with which we count, but rather in the sense of what is counted. The 'nows' involved in this enumeration are to be understood not as parts of time, but rather as boundaries of temporal intervals. Time is both made continuous by the 'now' and divided at it, just

as a point both connects and terminates length – the beginning of one and the end of another.

Any idea of time as made up of a succession of 'nows' is foreign to Aristotle's way of thinking of time. The 'now' can be thought of either as a boundary of intervals of time, similar to the point's role as spatial border, or as the number which measures motion. But the identification with number is only partial. Being a boundary, it cannot be detached from what it numbers in the way that the number ten can be detached from the horses it numbers when we refer to ten horses. Since the instants picked out as 'now' are for Aristotle not parts of time, he is able to sidestep the sceptical paradoxes about time's existence: '... what is bounded by the "now" is thought to be time – we may assume this' (IV. 11. 219a29).

Having defined time in terms of movement and measurement, Aristotle goes on to offer a definition of being in time. To be in time means that movement – both it and its essence – is measured by time; and he thinks it is clear that 'to be in time' has the same meaning for other things also: namely, that their being should be measured by time. To 'be in time' means either 'to exist when time exists' or to be 'contained by time as things in place are contained by place' (IV. 12. 221a10–20). That which is in time necessarily implies that there is time when it is; and it is necessary that all things in time should be 'contained by time'. Augustine's treatment of time can be read as expressing dissatisfaction with the implications of Aristotle's picture of time for the understanding of time's relations with mind or consciousness. He sees the Aristotelian definition of 'being in time' as inadequate for understanding what it is to be a self in time.

Aristotle himself touches on the issue of time's relations with consciousness when he raises the possibility that if there were no consciousness there would be no time: '... if nothing but soul, or in soul reason, is qualified to count, there would not be time unless there were soul, but only that of which time is an attribute...' (IV. 14. 223a25). On Aristotle's model, mind is outside change, located as an external observer – a measurer of motion. Minds can, it is true, be said to change and hence to be in time; but there is no privileged position for soul in the definition of time, other than that of the observer and measurer of change. With this model, to say that there would be no time without mind is just to say that without the possibility of measurement there

would be not time, but only the substratum of time – only whatever it is about motion which makes it measurable.

For Augustine there are dimensions of the relations between mind and time which cannot be captured in this Aristotelian picture. We will never understand the problem of time, he thinks, until we learn to examine our own consciousness, rather than treating it as the transparent performer of measurement of external change. What is problematic about our being in time is not resolvable through consideration of change in the physical world. But Augustine wants to go further – to account for the reality of time itself in terms of the capacity of consciousness to stretch itself out. It may seem, on the face of it, an extraordinary non sequitur. But it reflects a way of thinking of the relations between time and consciousness very different from that of Aristotle – a way which has some things in common with the neo-Platonism of Plotinus.

PLOTINUS: THE 'STRETCHING OUT OF THE SOUL'

In the *Enneads*,³ the third-century Greek Platonist Plotinus is strongly critical of the Aristotelian definition of time in terms of the measurement of motion. Such approaches, he says, do not really get us to the nature of time. It comes to this: we ask "What is time?" and we are answered "Time is the extension of Movement in Time" (III. 7. 8; 231). There are great difficulties, he thinks, even in making the identification of time with any kind of measure. Does such a measure itself have magnitude, like a foot-rule? Time would then be understood as a line traversing the path of movement. But, if it thus shares in movement, how can it be the measure of movement? Why should the traversing line be the measure rather than the movement itself? And why should the mere presence of a number give us time if it is not given by the fact of movement? Time must be something more than the mere number of movement.

Some of Plotinus's criticisms seem to depend on the interpretation of the idea of time as measure which Aristotle himself explicitly set aside – the identification of time with number in the sense of 'what we measure with', rather than what is measurable in motion, the measurable aspect of change. Plotinus's insistence that to understand time we must think of 'a combined thing', a 'measured movement', seems to come close to Aristotle's own observation that time, unlike number, is not detachable from

what it measures. But the more substantive aspect of Plotinus's rejection of the identification of time with measurement concerns the relationship between time and the soul. For him, it is not as measurer that soul is essential to the reality of time. It is we that must create Time out of the concept and nature of progressive derivation, which remained latent in the Divine Beings' (III. 7. 11; 233-4). But the 'we' here does not refer to calculating, measuring intellects. Time for Plotinus depends on soul in a deeper, more metaphysical way, which makes movement itself imbued with soul. Soul is manifested in movement, not just present to it as external measurer of a soulless substratum of time.

Plotinus's way of thinking of soul has its background in cosmological ideas developed in Plato's *Timaeus* and rejected by Aristotle in the *De Anima*. But Plotinus develops the Platonic 'world soul' in ways that Plato did not, giving it explicit connections with the nature of time and change. In the *Timaeus* time, though subject to change, is created to a pattern of the changeless. Soul interfuses and envelops the world; and this presence of soul is prior to the creation of time. The creator, the story goes, rejoicing in the moving, living world creature he has made in the image of the eternal gods, determines to make the copy still more like the original – the eternal, living being. So he seeks to make the universe eternal, so far as this is possible. The everlasting nature of the ideal being cannot be bestowed in its fullness on something created. So he resolves to make a 'moving image of eternity'. When he sets the heavens in order, he makes an eternal image, but one 'moving according to number', while eternity itself rests in unity. And this image we call time.

The philosophical implications of the *Timaeus* story of time as the moving image of eternity are not entirely clear. It suggests that there is some movement and change in the world independently of time – that what time adds is ordered movement. Time and the heavens begin together – framed after the pattern of the eternal nature. The creation of time is the creation of orderly motion – predictable, law-governed, and hence fit to convey something of the nature of the eternal. In this picture, the presence of soul in the world is not particularly tied to the nature of time. The idea of time as the moving image of eternity is not specifically connected with that of the movement of the world soul which diffuses the whole of creation.

In Plotinus's version, time and soul are much more closely connected. In the first *Ennead*, he describes as 'apt' the reference to time as a 'mimic' of eternity (I. 5. 7; 54). But his version of time as a representation of eternity suggests an active *mimesis*, rather than a passive image made by an external creator. And what makes the idea 'apt' for Plotinus is in some respects the opposite of its Platonic role. For Plato the associations of time as image of eternity are with order, predictability, permanence. Time, as the image of eternity, bestows something of its permanence on the disorderly change of a world lacking true temporal order. For Plotinus, there is a darker side to the idea of mimicry. The emphasis is on the introduction of transience where before there was permanence. Time is aptly described as the mimic of eternity in that it 'seeks to break up in its fragmentary flight the permanence of its exemplar'. Whatever time 'seizes and steals to itself' of the permanent in eternity is annihilated – 'saved only in so far as in some degree it still belong to eternity, but wholly destroyed if it be unreservedly absorbed into time'. Time as mimic is time the destroyer. This twist to the Platonic idea becomes clearer in Plotinus's fuller discussion of time in the third *Ennead*. Time as the 'representation in image' of eternity, he says there, can be clearly apprehended through understanding its exemplar, though we could also proceed in the other direction – from an understanding of time 'upwards' to the awareness of eternity, the 'Kind' which time images (III. 7. 1; 222-3). Our awareness of eternity is crucial in Plotinus's account of time. Time, rather than being the measure of change, or even a feature of change as measurable, is a product of soul. It is a *mimesis* performed by soul in response, not to the perception of change but rather to the eternal.

Soul, in the form in which it figures here, is not 'we', who might – in the Aristotelian account – be said to measure change, but something closer to Plato's 'world soul'. But the participation of individual minds in that soul is manifested by our awareness of eternity. We participate in the Soul whose mimicry of eternity produces time. Eternity is for Plotinus thus not 'alien' to time. 'What understanding can there be failing some point of contact? And what contact could there be with the utterly alien?' (III. 7. 7; 228). But if we do have some understanding of eternity, we must, he reasons, then have some part or share in it. And how is this possible to us who exist in time? The whole question, he thinks,

turns on the distinction between 'being in time' and 'being in eternity'; and this is best understood by probing the nature of time. To explore the nature of time Plotinus proceeds to devise a fiction, to tell a story of the origin of time. Something thus, he says, the story must run: time lay, though not yet as time, in the 'All-Soul', the active principle which aimed at something more than its present. It stirred from its rest and the cosmos stirred with it.

'And we (the active principle and the Cosmos), stirring to a ceaseless succession, to a next, to the discrimination of identity and the establishment of ever new difference, traversed a portion of the outgoing path and produced an image of Eternity, produced Time.'

For the Soul contained an unquiet faculty, always desirous of translating elsewhere what it saw in the Authentic Realm, and it could not bear to retain within itself all the dense fullness of its possession.

(III. 7. 11; 234)

Time is seen as originating in the unfolding of Soul – the unwinding of 'unity self-gathered'. Soul in 'going forth from itself' fritters its unity away, advancing into a 'weaker greatness'. Soul lays aside its eternity and clothes itself with time.

For the Cosmos moves only in Soul – the only Space within the range of the All open to it to move in – and therefore its movement has always been in the Time which inheres in Soul. . . .

Time, then, is contained in differentiation of Life; the ceaseless forward movement of Life brings with it unending Time; and Life as it achieves its stages constitutes past Time.

(III. 7. 11; 234)

Time, Plotinus concludes, can be defined as 'the life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of act or experience to another'. Eternity is Life in repose, unchanging and self-identical, always endlessly complete. And time is the image of this Eternity. On this version of the Platonic idea of time as the image of eternity, the 'mimicry' is something acted out by Soul – an unfolding, a stretching out. Time is not conceived as outside of Soul; nor is it a 'sequence or succession' to Soul. It is 'a thing seen upon Soul, inherent, co-eval to it.' But, although time is

not independent of Soul, this does not mean that Plotinus regards it as merely subjective. It is a 'certain expanse', a quantitative, 'outgoing phase' of the life of the Soul. If Life could conceivably revert, he says, to the 'perfect unity', time and the Heavens would end at once. If Soul were to cease its outgoing, if it became once more turned to the 'tranquilly stable', nothing would then exist but Eternity. If the Soul withdrew, sinking into itself again – into its primal unity – time would disappear (III. 7. 12; 235–6).

Movement as a feature of Soul here takes precedence over physical motion in understanding the nature of time. It cannot be reasonable, Plotinus argues, to recognize succession in the case of soulless movement, and so to associate time with that, while ignoring succession and the reality of time in 'the Movement from which the other takes its imitative existence' (III. 7. 13; 238). It is the 'self-actuated movement' of Soul which provides the basis for the reality of time, creating a sequence by which each instant no sooner comes into existence than it passes into the next. Whereas for Aristotle soul entered into the definition of time only through the implicit reference to mind carried by the idea of measurement, for Plotinus the time of the cosmos imitates the movement of Soul, just as the latter in turn imitates the eternal.

For Plotinus, then, time, as the life of the soul, is prior to the time of the cosmos, the time of physical motion. There is a 'soul movement' which constitutes time and hence cannot strictly be said to be contained by it. Contrary to Aristotle, for Plotinus not all being-in-time involves being contained by time. We treat the cosmic movement as overarched by that of the soul and bring it under time, he says. Yet we do not set under time that soul-movement itself with all its endless progression. The explanation of this paradox is simply that the soul-movement responds not to time but to eternity, and the 'descent towards Time' begins with this soul-movement which 'made Time and harbours Time as a concomitant to its Act' (III. 7. 13; 238).

It comes easily to us to think of movement in the soul as merely metaphorical – an analogue of the literal movement of bodies. But for Plotinus the movement of souls – as well as that of the 'All-Soul' in which they participate – is prior to the movement of bodies. He makes it clear that this applies to movements in the individual soul no less than to the 'All-Soul' in an interesting

'supplementary observation' at the end of his discussion of time in the seventh section of the third *Ennead*. Take a man walking, he says, and observe the advance he has made. That gives us the 'quantity of movement he is employing' and when we know this, represented by the ground traversed by his feet, we know also the movement that exists in the man himself before the feet move. We must relate the body, carried forward during a given period of time, to a certain quantity of movement causing the progress and to the Time it takes, and that again to the movement, equal in extension, within the man's soul. He then goes on to consider the 'movement within the Soul', asking to what we are to refer it. Let your choice fall where it may, he says. From this point there is nothing but the unextended primarily existent, 'the container to all else, having no container, brooking none'. And as it is with the human soul, so it is with 'the Soul of All'. 'Is Time, then, within ourselves as well?', he asks, and responds: 'Time is in every Soul of the order of the All-Soul, present in like form in all; for all the Souls are the one Soul.'

Plotinus's shift from physical motion to the movement of the soul as the paradigm for the understanding of time is an extension of the Platonic idea of physical motion as imbued with soul. But he gives a special status to meaningful bodily movements, and especially speech, as illustrative of the idea of unity and the overcoming of fragmentation. His most famous example of bodily movement as a metaphor of the unity of the universe is the image of the dancer. Every soul, he says, has its hour – 'all is set stirring and advancing as by a magician's power or by some mighty traction'. 'Like is destined unfailingly to like, and each moves hither or thither at its fixed moment' (IV. 3. 13; 272). The configurations, by their varied rhythmic movements, make up 'one total dance-play', in which the limbs of the dancers are adapted to the overall plan. The whole universe is to be understood in terms of this image of unified action. It 'puts its entire life into act, moving its major members with its own action and unceasingly setting them in new positions', and brings the minor members under the system as in the movements of some one living being (IV. 4. 33; 317).

Plotinus elaborates the theme of soul's presence in the world through other analogies drawn from the spoken word which illustrate the unity and indivisibility of soul itself. He stresses, as Augustine will do later, the difference that form and meaning

make to mere sounds. Speech is subject to measurement, but only in so far as it is sound. Its essential nature resides not in what makes it quantifiable like other sounds, but in its significance. As significant sound it involves both activity and passivity – both action and experience. In addition to the motion involved in the act of speech, there is also a counter-motion. We can think of speech as both action upon air as substratum and as experience within that substratum (VI. 1. 5; 447). These shifts between activity and passivity, action and experience make speech for Plotinus a fitting illustration of the unity in variety which characterizes the presence of soul. Whatever in the world is 'apt for soul' will possess itself of it, just as an ear within range will catch and comprehend a spoken word. From the one identical presence, meaning will be derived by more than one hearer. The spoken word is entire at every point in the appropriate space, every listener catching the whole alike. Its sound is evidently not 'strung along the air section to section'. Why then, he asks, should we not think of soul as omni-present, indwelling at every point in the totality of the All, rather than 'extended in broken contact, part for part?' Having entered into such bodies as are apt for it, soul is like the spoken word. Present in the air, before that entering, it is like the speaker about to speak. Even when embodied, it remains at once 'the speaker and the silent' (VI. 4. 12; 528-9).

These illustrations drawn from speech, imperfect though they are, carry, Plotinus thinks, a 'serviceable similitude' to soul. It is equally a 'self-enclosed unity' – the speaker silent – and a 'principle manifested in diversity' – the speaker speaking. The analogy of the reception of the spoken word shows how Soul can become present in some parts of the world and not in others, including the ambivalent presence of soul in individual human beings, just as, from a significant sound, some forms of being take sound and significance together, others only the sound, the 'blank impact'. The 'participant newcomer', the 'intruder', the 'thing of beginnings in time', has made human beings become a duality, winding himself about 'the Man that each of us was at first'.

Then it was as if one voice sounded, one word was uttered, and from every side an ear attended and received and there was an effective hearing, possessed through and through of what was present and active upon it: Now we have lost that

first simplicity; we are become the dual thing, sometimes indeed no more than that later foisting, with the primal nature dormant and in a sense no longer present.

(IV. 4. 14; 530)

Plotinus's picture of mind, turning back to contemplate the eternal out of which it comes, and in the process understanding its own role in the constitution of time, answers – as the Aristotelian account cannot do – to the experience of time and consciousness as intimately connected. It is this which attracts Augustine to images drawn from Plotinus. If time were what Aristotle takes it to be, he thinks, time would be as nothing to me. If the substratum of time were thus outside himself, he could not understand what is involved in his consciousness being in time. The challenge Augustine sets himself is to give an account of time's nature which will answer to his own experience of the stretching out of consciousness. Just as Plotinus re-tells Plato's story of time as mimic of eternity, Augustine now re-tells Plotinus's story. As a bald statement of the nature of time, identifying it with the distension of the soul may seem preposterous. But as a variation on a literary story, it emerges as a profound insight into what it is to be in time. The twists in Augustine's version of the tale of time allow him to extract from it a legend of recovering unity of consciousness in a journey out of time back into eternity. Having in mind that Augustine is not merely engaged in timeless reflection on time, but is re-telling an inherited story of its nature, origins and power, let us now see what use he makes of the metaphors and analogies of the spoken word he took over from Plotinus.

AUGUSTINE'S ANALOGIES OF THE SPOKEN WORD

The consideration of the spoken word preoccupies Augustine throughout the *Confessions*. In the early sections of the work he pictures the phases of life as stages in acquiring the power of speech. It is through his growing awareness of this power that he knows his infancy has receded into the past. The power of speech is here a model of autonomy. Learning to speak involves acquiring a capacity for spontaneity – a self-directedness which contrasts with following a set system of instruction, as he does in learning to read. Through the spoken word he expresses his own observations and wishes. But this new autonomy brings with it

new responsibilities. Speech takes him more deeply into the realm of the social – 'a further step into the stormy life of human society' (I, 8; 29).

The freedom associated with the self-directedness of the spoken word has as its correlate a certain necessity. In Book III, that things have from an inner necessity their own proper time. When he composed verses, he reflects, each verse was differently scanned. Although the act of poetry does not vary from one line to another, the location of each phrase is governed by rules. Through reflection on speech, Augustine is better able to understand how self-directedness and necessity can come together in the relations between individual life and the unfolding of time. Recalling his early griefs, he reflects that things have their appointed times, rising and setting like the sun, growing until they reach perfection, then growing old and dying.

Not all reach old age, but all alike must die. When they rise therefore, they are set upon the course of their existence, and the faster they climb towards its zenith, the more they hasten towards the point where they exist no more. This is the law they obey.

(IV, 10; 80)

The analogy of the spoken word provides the model of necessity and a unity which encompasses past, present and future. Just as a sentence is not complete unless each word, once its syllables have been pronounced, gives way to make room for the next, so changeable, mortal things continue on their course. And if the soul loves them and wishes to be with them and 'find its rest in them', it is torn by destructive desires. In these things there is no place to rest, for they do not last, passing away beyond the reach of our senses. 'Indeed, none of us can lay firm hold on them even when they are with us' (IV, 10; 80).

The most striking of Augustine's analogies between being in time and the spoken word comes towards the end of the discussion of time in Book XI. Here we see the full significance of his reflections on the measurement of time. Suppose, he says, I am going to recite a familiar psalm. Before I begin, my faculty of expectation is engaged by the whole of it. But once I have begun, relegated to the past' now engages my memory. The scope of the

action I am performing is divided between memory and expectation – the one looking back, the other forward to what I have still to recite. But my faculty of attention is present all the while; and what was future passes through it in the process of becoming past. The 'province of memory' is extended in proportion as that of expectation is reduced until it is all absorbed into memory. Augustine goes on to extrapolate from this illustration of a mind consciously active in time to the understanding of temporal reality generally:

What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part.

(XI, 28; 278)

The illustration is preceded by another in which the reader is asked to imagine three sounds (XI, 27; 275). In the first case, a noise is emitted by a material body. The sound begins and we continue to hear it until it finally ceases. When is it measurable? asks Augustine. Not now that it has ceased, for it is no longer there to be measured. While it was present, then – while it was gaining some extent in time? But not in present time, for the present has no extent. This leads to the consideration of the second case, where the sound has begun, but not yet ceased. It still cannot be measured; for we now lack a final point which could give us a measurable interval between beginning and end: '... we measure neither the future nor the past nor the present nor time that is passing. Yet we do measure time' (XI, 27; 275).

The beginnings of a resolution of the problem come when we move to consideration of not just any sound but sounds with meaning – speech. Consider, he says, the line 'Deus creator omnium'. He can measure the syllables as short or long, despite the fact that they are past. So what he measures is something that remains in memory. Reflection on the familiar experience of hearing significant speech shows him that the measurement of time goes on, not in the physical world, but in the mind. We are blinded to this by preoccupation with the idea of time as something objective – a feature of the physical world. The crucial shift which we have to perform is from the cosmological to the mental.

What we measure are 'impressions' that remain present despite the transition, whatever it may turn out to be, into the past. We measure the sound mentally, as though we could actually hear it. Even without opening our mouths, he points out, we can go over speech in our minds, and reflecting on this is supposed to bring about a turning away from the physical world to the mind, where we can hope to understand the true nature of time. Consideration of the spoken word helps shift attention away from the thought of physical motion in a changing world to our own being in time. Some of the points Augustine extracts from his psalm example are independent of the fact that it is a meaningful utterance rather than, say, a wordless melody. But the spoken word is for him the ultimate model of a unified temporal structure.

We will not resolve the problem of time, Augustine thinks, until we learn to examine our own consciousness, rather than treating it as the transparent performer of measurement of external change. What is problematic about our being in time is not resolvable through consideration of change in the physical world. But Augustine of course wants to go further than this. Understanding the relations between the spoken word and time is supposed to reveal also the true nature of time itself. All motion – not just the self-movement involved in speech – is to be seen as measurable only in the mind; and for Augustine this means that time itself is to be understood in terms of the distension of the soul. Here his attempt to turn the mind around to its own contemplation may well be seen to have over-reached itself. But it is important to see just what the shift achieves for understanding the soul's being in time. In moving from the Aristotelian external viewpoint on change to the consideration of what it is to be in the midst of understanding an act of speech, we move from a passive model to an active one; and this shift gives the mind some redress against the sense of time's onslaught. Its distressing passivity in the face of time's bewildering passage – out of a non-existent future through an extensionless present into an equally non-existent past – is transformed into an active relegating of the future to the past. 'All the while the man's attentive mind, which is present, is relegating the future to the past. The past increases in proportion as the future diminishes, until the future is entirely absorbed and the whole becomes past' (XI, 27; 277).

By shifting attention away from the world of bodies that move independently of him to the world of consciousness, Augustine

gains a new perspective on time. Consciousness is no longer present as a mere observer of external change but located, as it were, within movement. Change is now located in its inner life. The upshot of this shift is, in a way, to eliminate change. Future, present and past are now accommodated into an encompassing presentness of the attending mind – a mental act which holds together a temporal reality which had previously been seen as having only the most tenuous of existences. Consciousness, rather than being located at a precarious vanishing point between the non-existence of past and future, is now seen as encompassing the passage of future into past.

The shift which Augustine has made is from seeing consciousness as in time to seeing time as in consciousness. It is a shift we will see undone and re-made throughout the subsequent philosophical tradition. In Augustine's version of this reversal of the relations between consciousness and time, a crucial structural role is assigned to God. If you would understand your self in relation to time, he is saying, you will do so not by looking to the external world, but rather by looking inward – to the inner world of consciousness where you can understand yourself in relation to God. If you would understand your own being in time, look not to the physical world of motion, but to your own self in relation to eternity. It is through the contrast between the stretching out of consciousness and God's eternal present that you will come to understand your own being in time. For Augustine, as for Plotinus, consciousness understands itself by looking back to what it has come from – to its unfolding out from a unitary presence. The spoken word is the metaphor through which this crucial relation between time as the stretching out of consciousness and God's eternal now is to be grasped.

TIME AND ETERNITY

Augustine presents the process by which he gradually learns to turn away from the physical world to the world of consciousness as the story of his religious conversion. His turning away from the physical world to contemplate himself begins the process of turning towards God. But this is more than a tale of spiritual journeying into the ineffable. Let us look more closely at what Augustine has achieved. His way of thinking of the present is contrasted, on the one hand, with Aristotle's bounding instants –

the instantaneous presents which are mere limits of motion. On the other hand, it is contrasted with an 'eternal present' which escapes in a different way the dilemmas of the non-existent past and future. Aristotle's view of time, joining as it does the idea of what is measurable in motion with the idea of durationless instants by which it is measured, leaves no space for the Augustinian idea of the distension of the soul. Mind, as we have seen, enters the Aristotelian account only as the external observer and measurer of change – as the implicit presence of consciousness which is necessary to measurement. The kind of present associated with the distended soul brings time and soul together in a different way, and also makes possible a point of connection with the idea of eternity which was not possible on the Aristotelian view.

The fact that our present, ever moving on to become the past, cannot be always present, as Augustine points out, prevents it from being identified with eternity. He elaborates the contrasts between time and eternity – between the distension of the soul and the 'eternal now' of God's knowledge – through an extension of the recitation analogy. Let us suppose, he says, a mind engaged with such great power of knowing and foreknowing that all the past and all the future were known to it as clearly as we might know a familiar psalm. Such a mind would be 'awesome beyond belief' in its grasp of all that is to happen in ages yet to come. 'It would know all this as surely as, when I sing the psalm, I know what I have already sung and what I have still to sing, how far I am from the beginning and how far from the end' (XI, 31; 279). But such a mind would still be in time – spread, as it were, between past, present and future. When we recite or listen to a recitation, our feelings vary and our senses are divided because we are partly anticipating words still to come and partly remembering words already sung. It is far otherwise with God who is 'eternally without change', knowing changing things without any change in his knowledge. Such a knower is not in time and the eternal presence of his knowledge is quite different from the 'present of attention', through which the future passes into the past.

The content of Augustine's eternal present is elusive. But it is clear that this lack of past and future is a very different kind of lack from that involved in the Aristotelian bounding instant, which can allow for no past or future because there can be in it no mind

or soul. Here, as Ricoeur points out in his commentary on Augustine in *Time and Narrative*, there is a conceptually unbridgeable gap separating Aristotle's instants from Augustine's present.⁴ The Aristotelian instant requires only that a break be made in the continuity of movement – a break which can be made anywhere. Mind functions here as an external observer of motion which does not intrinsically involve itself. The lack of past and future which characterizes Augustine's eternal present, in contrast, arises from a fullness of presence which the human mind cannot achieve – not from absence of mind but from its presence in a superior form. Here again there are echoes of Plotinus. All progress of time, Plotinus says in the first *Ennead*, means the dissipation of a unity whose existence is in the present. Past and future are associated with this dissipation which is time's essence. To think of eternity is to think of a life not made up of periods but 'completely rounded, outside of all notion of time' (I, 5, 7; 54). And in the third *Ennead*, he associates eternity with the idea of a life ever varying, not becoming what it previously was not. Here there is no development but only actual presence – 'not this now and now that other, but always all; not existing now in one mode and now in another, but a consummation without part or interval' (III, 7, 3; 224). All its content is in immediate concentration 'as at one point'. The eternal remains identical within itself, what it is, it remains for ever. Nothing can make its way into this 'standing present' which excludes past and future. Any imagined entrant will prove to be not alien but already integral. No ground is left for its existence but that it be what it is. So eternity in contrast to time involves stable existence, neither in process of change nor having changed – 'pure being in eternal actuality'. Here there is no future, for every 'then' is a 'now'. Nor is there any past, for nothing here has ever ceased to be. Here 'everything has taken its stand for ever' – an 'identity well pleased, we might say, to be as it is'.

The idea of eternity plays not only a religious role in Augustine's thought on time but also a literary one. By projecting a construct of an alternative mode of presence, Augustine is able to sharpen his articulation of the temporal presence which characterizes human consciousness. Reflection on the idea of eternity serves to focus and intensify the experience of incompleteness and fragmentation that goes with being in time. The lack of eternity functions, as Ricoeur puts it, not simply as a limit that is

thought but as a lack that is felt at the heart of temporal experience – 'the sorrow proper to the negative'.⁵ The idea of the eternal present allows Augustine to integrate philosophical speculation on the nature of time with a more literary reflection on its power – on what is involved in the human experience of time. But it also serves to reconcile the mind by holding out an ideal of an alternative kind of consciousness with which the individual can identify. The distension of the soul which marks Augustine's separation from eternity also becomes through reflection the source of his deliverance from the distress of being in time. It becomes both the mark of the difference between human and divine consciousness and the reflection in him of the divine understanding. God's all-encompassing present becomes a model for the mind's act of attention, which overcomes the fragmentation of temporal experience. The extended present becomes the approximation in the soul of God's eternal now. It is through attempting to think of eternity that Augustine most strongly realizes the nature of time.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THE LITERARY

We have seen that Augustine's ideal for self-consciousness finds expression in the literary form of the *Confessions* as well as in its content – that its literary form is by no means incidental to its explicit treatment of time. The movement of time in the direction of eternity, as Ricoeur points out, is the very movement narrated by the first nine books of the work. The narrative activity accomplishes the itinerary whose conditions of possibility are reflected on in Books X and XI. And the narrative form, holding together disparate events in a meaningful unity, itself enacts Augustine's ideal of a consciousness which holds fragments together in a unity for which time is no longer a problem. The narrator, knowing what has been and what is to come, enacts his own life in the way the reciter goes through the psalm. The story goes on. But the narrator of course is not simply 'reciting' this life. He is also in some ways creating it – bestowing unity and meaning on fragmented events. The autobiographical form of the work can in this way be seen as the vehicle of an attempt to achieve the elusive goal of a consciousness fully present to itself – a goal which being in time puts out of reach. For Augustine, as for

Plotinus, the distension of the soul is a disruption of unity. In contrast to God's fullness of presence to himself, we cannot have it all at once. But the distension of the soul, epitomized in memory, also functions, as we have seen, as a semblance in the midst of time of the standing present of eternity. Past, present and future can be held together in a unifying act of attention which finds its clearest expression in the form of autobiography.

Augustine of course believed that his 'resolution' of the problem of time was more than a literary device to give clearer philosophical articulation to the problem. What we call the present, for him as for Derrida, is implicated in the non-existence of past and future. But Augustine tries to resolve the problem through appeal to the encompassing act of attention. The extended present offers a safe haven which solves the problem of the non-existence of past and future by bringing them into consciousness. Derrida would see this as a false solution to a problem which arises only from the conviction of the primacy of the present, fed by preoccupations with the spoken word. For him, what we call the present is constituted out of what in fact never really was present. The alleged primacy of the present is an illusion. His deconstruction of the primacy of the present is at the same time the deconstruction of the self-presence of consciousness. Augustine's yearning for an illusory fullness of presence expresses a nostalgia for a supposedly lost unity of consciousness. *Différance* is Derrida's version of 'taking account of time' without the false reassurance of the limiting idea of eternity. Whatever is distressing in being in time cannot be allayed by aspiring to the self-presence of the eternal word. The distension of the soul, the extended notion of the present, and the idea of eternity can provide no resolution of Augustine's dilemma. But that dilemma is of his own making, generated by the pivotal role he gives the supposed primacy of the present – in his suggestion that 'wherever the past and future are, they are there not as past or future but as present'; in the idea of the act of attending which makes past and future present to the mind; in the complementary idea of the distended soul; and, finally, in the crucial idea of the standing present of God's eternity.

Because the idea of God and his eternal present clearly carry the force of theological belief in the *Confessions*, it is easy to overlook their literary role in the work – their function as 'fictions' which allow a clearer articulation of the experiential and