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Ali John Madani 14 April 2010

From Time to Eternity:
Augustine, Milton, and the Problem of Reconciling the Eternal with the Temporal

By

Ali John Madani

Adviser: Dr. Ann Hartle

Department of Philosophy

Ann Hartle
Adviser

Richard Rambuss
Committee Member

Donald P. Verene
Committee Member

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Abstract

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Spoken in a prayer to his God, Augustine opens his philosophical discussion in the *Confessions* with a question into the nature of time and its role as a barrier to fully encountering the divine. Augustine, not alone in his question, echoes a perennial frustration with the relationship between things eternal and things temporal. This work attempts to address the seemingly irreconcilable separation through an analysis of Book XI of Augustine's major work in the context of early Christianity and with the backdrop of Ancient Greek and Neo-Platonist thought. Having bridged the gap between time and eternity through the use of the eternal Word, this project extends its scope to investigate Augustinian philosophy's influence on John Milton, specifically the poetry prior to *Paradise Lost*. The early work of *Sonnet 16*, *On Time*, and *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* provide a frame by which to understand the centrality of time's operations and its importance for the faithful seeking God. Finally, a focus on the static postures that pervade Milton's poetry demonstrates the debt he owes to Augustine and the vision he imagines for a future in which time and eternity are one.

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Augustine enables Milton, Milton completes Augustine, and they join in their difference. Outside the sequence of history, gathered in a circle that knows no before or after…they may enjoy each other and the one they serve.

Savoie, “Justifying the Ways of God and Man”

Introduction

Referring to the established bond between Saint Augustine and John Milton, John Savoie, in his article "Justifying the Ways of God and Man," contends that "[t]he relationship between these kindred souls across the centuries is not simply a legacy which Augustine handed down, or an authority to which Milton appealed, but rather a dialogue in testing and refining toward a clearer truth" (Savoie, 139). It is within this framework of mutuality that I seek to further understand the Augustinian dimension of Milton's poetry and its previously unexplored concern with the oppositional binary of time and eternity. Contemporarily, scholarship focusing on the influence of the philosopher on the poet most often, as it has since the publication of Milton's great epic *Paradise Lost*, centers itself on issues of theology, sin, and even divorce. Though certainly matters of intense significance, an exclusive concern with issues of religious importance elides over the complexity of these two figures who can only roughly be assigned to their respective titles of philosopher and poet. They are, instead, a mixture of both traditions, blurring the line between what it means to write metaphysical philosophy and verse. It is because of this intricate and intensely philosophical, theology-centered writing that the role of time and its position as a barrier to encountering divine eternity figures so prominently as an area of scholarship.

A better understanding of time, therefore, and its complex and theoretical construction, provides greater insight into the structure of the mind and, for Augustine, the soul's relationship with God. In the *Confessions*, the primary

impediment for explaining this separation of the individual from the eternal lies in the disconnection, indeed utter incompatibility, of things temporal and atemporal. This is the project of Book Eleven of Augustine's seminal work: to reconcile the created beings with their eternal creator. Out of the desire to reunite time and eternity, Augustine in Book Eleven produces a series of paradoxes that, once resolved, illuminate the subject and provide a clearer understanding of the nature of the created being.

As an attempt to unravel the paradoxical relationship between the eternal God and his temporal creatures, I will argue that, though separated by divergent temporal structures, the creator and the created have at least the Divine Word, Providence, that unites them in communicated. Uttered at the moment of creation, God's Word is spoken throughout time and to time. In this way the faithful can hear their God and respond to his will. Though not what could be called direct communication, God's Word, containing all action that God will put forth into time, and its inherent providential (and atemporal) quality provide a link between seemingly incompatible, binary opposites. What communication between God and creation does not overcome fully, however, is the insuperable barrier of time. Having scattered the human mind into what Augustine will term distended manyness, time distinguishes the ever-changing individual from the immutable creator. Only after an end to time, an end to change, can the created rejoin their maker in the eternal constant.

It is within this framework of time as the barrier to encountering eternity that John Milton writes his early poetry. Most notable in *Sonnet 16, On Time,*

and *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* is the persistent and antagonistic struggle between the faithful and temporality. In this project I intend to proffer a new reading of these poems, one that demonstrates the intensive Augustinian influence in matters concerning the nature of God, sin, and, ultimately, time. The relationship between Milton and Augustine is one that has been explored before; indeed whole books have been devoted to the subject. What I aim to accomplish, however, is to build upon the previous scholarship that pertains primarily to matters of theological import. Having explored this established connection, I will extend the mutuality to include a shared philosophy of time.

With this new understanding of Milton's Augustinian representations of time, a novel poetic subject emerges, one that expresses a desire for the end of time and the arrival of eternity in God. The principle locus of these temporal representations occurs, I will argue, in the repeated and distinctive Miltonic postures: sitting, standing, and lying. Surrounded by continuous action, the faithful in Milton's poetry – and Christ as well – assume static postures that reconfigure them in closer relation to God. Though certainly not an exhaustive account of time in Milton's oeuvre, this project will argue for a new understanding of the early poetry through the lens of temporality and, in the process, elucidate Augustine's own relationship with God.

I. Keeping Time: A History of the Relationship of Time to Eternity

> He thought of making a certain movable image of eternity, and, at once with ordering heaven, he made an eternal image going according to number, that which we have named time.
>
> Plato, *Timaeus*

Plato's discussion of time in the *Timaeus* suffers from many of the same complications and paradoxes that will plague Augustine nearly half a millennium later. These difficulties highlight the connection of philosophical ideas of time that stretch between the ancient, medieval, and, indeed, early modern period. In the *Statesman*, for example, Plato utilizes the myth of reversed time and the Age of Cronos to examine time's flow and operations. An image of time as circular, passing in an out of states of creations, emerges as humans are governed first by the gods and then themselves, consequently falling into chaos (*Statesman*, 268 dff). While Plato's dialogues never explicitly deal with time as a core theme, they nevertheless introduce the issues concerning the passage of time and the troubling inability of human language to properly describe its components. Similar to what Augustine will later theorize, Plato puzzles over the phases of time - 'is', 'was', and 'will be' - and the moment of temporal transition between them as one stage flows into the other (*Parmenides* 141, 151 e ff.). Finally, embedded within Plato's discussion on time is a similar examination of the relationship between things eternal and things temporal; however, the inclusion of the eternal within the world (by this I mean the forms) posits a distinct relationship between the two divergent temporal conceptions that renders them

separated from each other outside of the mind.

First it seems appropriate to analyze what Plato attributes to time and its constituent parts. Laying the groundwork of a philosophy of time that will endure even to Augustine, Plato figures time and its flow as something inherently psychological, lacking viability outside of the mind. Eva Brann, in her book *What, then, is Time?*, describes the philosopher's conception of temporality in this way: "Plato acknowledges in his cosmic story that temporality outside of a numerally disposed soul is practically unimaginable. It will be shown over and over to be in effect unthinkable - time needs to be imagined and thought as psychically contained" (Brann, 6). In this way, therefore, time is positioned within the mind as something constructed, at least in a detailed sense, by thought. The question arises, however, as to the natural emanation of temporality from observations of the movement of the heavenly bodies. As the planets and stars move in regular patterns, it would appear as though nature creates within itself a conception of time that is independent of the psyche. Nevertheless, this view of the origins of time elides over the mental process of naming and attributing the concept of temporality to those regularly moving celestial object. Time is not natural passage; rather, the rotating bodies are "mobiles and move, and their going gives rise to the epiphenomenon of time and its numerable parts. It is we who name this moving image Time" (Brann, 7). Said in another way, the moving bodies simply move - we attribute their movement to the tracking of time's passage.

Despite the misidentification of time with natural phenomena, the psyche's

attribution of time to the celestial bodies does, however, serve the important function of setting a predictable sequence of the phases of time: that is, from 'will be' to 'was'. This separation into two forms (*eide*) isolates the difference between where the heavenly body was and where it will be, based on the repetition of the pattern of movement (Brann, 6). With this seemingly natural sequencing of the movement of time present in the movement of the planets and stars, Brann argues that, for Plato, instead of stumbling upon or discovering the inherent time in the created world, the concept of time is named and formulated around this orbital motion. In other words, for Plato time is not a natural phenomenon but a psychological epiphenomenon in which time's constituent parts (the phases of time) are mapped onto the natural world.

Though Plato analyzes the passage of time and designates the temporal flow from 'will be' to 'is' and 'was' for the material world, the philosopher simultaneously posits the existence of the atemporal forms. What distinguishes Plato, and, indeed, most of the Socratic philosophers, from the Medieval and Early Modern philosophers' conceptions of time is the inclusion of the eternal within the temporal. By this I mean the presence of the forms within the world. In his book *God and the Nature of Time*, Garrett DeWeese introduces this complex relationship by relating Plato's ambiguous references to eternity in the *Timaeus* in which "he seems to regard the Forms as timeless, durationless, and existing always" (DeWeese, 131). Similarly, in the *Parmenides* Plato represents his title character as arguing that the One, the Eternal being, must not be in time since, if it were, the One would be subject to time and grow older. In turn, its

former self would be younger and the change would force it to no longer be fit within the definition of the eternal (DeWeese, 140). Though, for Plato, the One is not in time, it also not exist in a separate space altogether. Here the central question of this project - determining the relationship between the eternal and the temporal - is altered by the inclusion of one within the other, the eternal within the space of the temporal. Though situated within temporal, the durationless forms have a still uncertain relationship with the material existence of what the Forms represent. The temporal chair, for example, subject to the phases of time in the continuously aging world, is dependent upon the eternal Form of chair for being. Similarly, the human understanding of the chair as a member of the category of 'chair' can only exist through a 'reminiscence' of its eternal form. Remembering this form from a previous life, Plato contends, the individual has access to eternity in the mind. This relationship between the concept and the reality within time, therefore, like the relationship between God and creation, is established as necessary for material existence.

Having explored the connection between the temporal and the atemporal for Plato, the perennial problem of discussing the eternal and its perspective arises for the first time. Talking about the timeless forms, then, is complicated by language and the use of the tenses of the verb 'to be'. In recognition of this problem, Plato in the *Timaeus* argues that these forms of 'to be' do not apply to things eternal because they "belong only to Becoming and the things that are borne about in the world of sense" (Brann, 7). A traditional sequence of tenses in which the past is put in reference to the present and future, therefore, cannot be

attributed to eternal things. The temporal terms are simply a part of an inappropriate vocabulary. An alternative set of terms, however, is not established by Plato because of the utter foreignness of eternity to creatures in time. Similarly, the inability to speak correctly about the human present adds to this difficulty when theorizing the eternal. It, unlike the unchanging eternal things, is constantly "enmeshed" in Becoming, constantly arriving upon the present (Brann, 7). What comes to be is understood as it comes to be and then quickly moves to the past.

Aristotle and Augustine both will later deal extensively with the movement of moments in time and the process of experience but they will separately first redefine what it means to talk about time itself. Perhaps the most drastic alteration that Aristotle, like Plato before him, suggests for an understanding of time is his rejection of a connection of time with the heavenly bodies. Though Plato and the Pythagoreans linked time with the heavenly rotations, Aristotle describes any relegation of temporality to the movement of the heavens as naive (*Physics*, 218 b 8). The distinction Aristotle creates from his teacher is that, instead of measuring time in the mind by the movement of the heavens, he is only concerned with the soul. Operating with the assumptions of his predecessors, Aristotle would argue, transforms time into nothing more than a 'heavenly clock' (Brann, 37). This fixation on the natural world as marking time is particularly troubling for Aristotle because of his firm belief in the origin time as arising out of the human soul. Indeed he begins his analysis of time by taking-up the 'perplexity' of the nature of temporality by "looking both to time itself and to the 'outside arguments'" (*Physics,* 217, b). Attempting to understand its

qualities, Aristotle enumerates the components that describe time, specifically whether or not time is itself a part of the 'outside arguments' (outside of the things that change). In doing so Aristotle labels time as the number of motion, and subsequently motion as an ever-expanding magnitude. As magnitude, time will inherently include a before and after in the progression of numbering. The constant and consecutive numbering must, therefore, return the nature and origin of time to the soul through the process of counting (Brann, 36). In this transformation from time to number, Aristotle concludes that time does not have being; rather, time is simply the soul's tracking, 'counting' of successive moments.

Returning to his plan to understand time by looking to both it and 'outside arguments', Aristotle attempts to position change in relation to the nature of the movement of time and to the structure of time itself. Change, specifying a before and after, necessitates the progression of time through a succession of movements. Taken with this definition, change must only occur within the temporal framework as it can only take place in 'particular mobiles' (Brann, 38). Time itself, however, is in every place at once because it characterizes every thing that changes. Aristotle resolves this uncertainty by arguing that, because of its presence in all that move and its constant passing, time is an 'outside argument', that is, outside of change itself. Said in another way, as changes can take place faster and slower, time cannot itself move at a different pace and must not be subject to varying movements in the way that temporal object are. Time cannot change for only things in time are mutable.

The relationship between time and motion, therefore, is a complicated one that creates issues for comprehending the way in which the overall structure of time works. Though time cannot arise in the absence of movement and change, it cannot, for Aristotle, be equated solely with motion. For, though time is inherent in motion, when motion starts and ends we "take note of time" (Brann, 39). By this I mean to say that we mark the start and end of motion by means of what Aristotle calls 'Nows'. Furthermore, as markers of different present moments, these Nows have inherent sequencing to them as one designates the beginning and the other the end of movement. This progression from one Now to the next and the counting of the magnitude or number of Nows is what we call time (*Physics*, 219 a 20 ff). Similar to the way in which Augustine will characterize the moment of the present as the point at which the future slips into the past, Aristotle conceives of the Now as analogous to a point in a line: it connects the past to the future but does not have its own substance (*Physics*, 222 a 10). Aristotle more specifically defines the Now or the present as the point at which the "world is before the soul and they touch each other" (Brann, 45). This poetic rendering of the nature of the present is potentially problematic. The Nows, again analogous with points, must be identical in thought for they all reflect the moment the soul 'touches' the world. What distinguishes the different Nows, however, is their temporal location (*Physics*, 219 b 19). Eva Brann formulates the conclusion in this way: "… the Now is doubly double: it both divides and unifies, and it is both same and different" (Brann, 43).

Though not discussed in detail in his *Physics*, Aristotle's conception of eternity can be rendered from his analysis of time and movement. If, for

example, all changeable qualities of an object are removed, what is left, the 'self-same substance', "comes to a stand, and this stable being enters eternity" (Brann, 44). This notion of 'standing' and 'stability' is characteristic of the eternal and will be important in the coming chapters. Independent, the eternal being is sufficient in itself and unchanging. This stable quality eliminates the necessity of subsequent Nows as every possible Now is indeed identical in both the soul and time. With an absence of movement - both external and psychical - for the eternal and independently stable being, it becomes clear that the soul's ability and desire to mark changing moments creates what, for Aristotle, humans consider time: magnitude, motion, before-and-after, number, now, soul, and clocks.

While Aristotle focuses his attention primarily on understanding the nature of time and its psychological origins, Plotinus formulates his philosophy of time out of the eternal. For Plotinus, time is not an independent or human construction; instead, it is a product of something greater that grounds it (Brann, 96). I will first start, as Plotinus does, by detailing his conception of the eternal: "So it does not contain any this, that and the other. Nor therefore will you separate it out, or unroll it, or extend it, or stretch it. Nor then can you find any earlier or later in it. If then there is neither any earlier nor later about it, but 'is' is the truest thing about it, and indeed it is, and this in the sense that it is by its essence and life, then again we have got the very thing we are talking about, namely, eternity" (*Enneads* III.7.6). In defining eternity Plotinus presents key qualification that will greatly influence Augustine's philosophy, thus leaving an indelible mark on the philosophy of time. First, the eternal is not particular or

separable. Eternity has no parts by which to distinguish one portion from anther. Though simple, eternity's consistency is what isolates it from the changes that characterize time. Without parts there can be no alteration to the eternal. The second quality that defines eternity is perhaps the most influential for later philosophers, notably Augustine. Because of its inability to be 'extended' or 'stretched', eternity stands in direct contrast to Augustine's 'distention' of the mind. Distention, serving as the only method of understanding the flow of time for Augustine, creates a mind scattered into 'manyness' as it strives to understand its place in the world. Without extension, therefore, there is no need for either distention or a sequence of events. Containing all within itself unextended, there can be no time: only true being.

Unlike many of the thinkers who preceded him, Plotinus devoted a great deal of attention to the way in which the temporal individual is in relation to the eternal. In doing so he developed an ontology of the individual in which the soul stands at the midpoint between the intelligible world and the phenomenal world, with reality plotted on a continuum between the individual and the One. Because of this bridging function, the soul shares time with the body in its immanent phase (during the life of the body) and is timeless in its transcendent phase (after death) (DeWeese, 140). These different phases of temporal attachment provide insight into Plotinus' treatise on eternity and time because they express the ways in which temporality arises. His treatise is essentially this: "The intellect is identical with Eternity. The Soul is identical with Time. As Soul falls out of the Intellect, so Time falls out of Eternity" (Brann, 97-8). The creation of time,

therefore, is described as one that springs forth from a disconnection between Soul and Intellect, the individual and the One. Thus Soul is Intellect 'wretched away' from unity in the One to display its 'busybody nature' (*Enneads* 3.11,15).

This definition of the soul as having fallen away from the One parallels time's creation in that time is reliance upon the existence of a separated soul. The question arises, as it does for Aristotle before him and Augustine after, concerning the locus of time. Plotinus himself presents the question: 'Is Time in us?' (*Enneads*, 3.13,66). His answer, Plotinus tells us, is distinct from his predecessors'. He concludes that, unlike Aristotle's contention, time is not a psychological concern; rather, it is 'our *Being*'. Having been temporalized from the Intellect, the Soul is drawn out with time (Brann, 99). With time as a part of its being, the soul can be described as futural and defined as "the life (zoe) of the Soul in its transiting motion from life-phase (bios) to life-phase" (*Enneads*, 3.11,43). Because of this futural quality, the soul's relationship with time is one that is restless in that it was the "unquiet longing for something else and something more that made the Soul cast itself into Time" (Brann, 99).

As Plotinus had perhaps the greatest influence on Augustine's philosophy of time, Augustine, in turn, shaped the next millennium's understanding of temporality and God's relation to it. A more thorough analysis of Augustine's philosophy will occur in the subsequent chapters but it is important here to note that, because of Augustine, God was conceived of almost universally as external to time. This view is one that is fundamentally informed by Neo-Platonism and the influence of Plotinus and others is unmistakable. Garrett DeWeese theorizes the relationship in this way: "We should not ignore the strong influence that

Neo-Platonism had on Augustine. Since Augustine's arguments for God's atemporality depend heavily on the Neo-Platonic understanding of immutability and simplicity, his views of an atemporal God is as strong - or as dubious - as the Neoplatonic foundations" (DeWeese, 133). These Neoplatonic requirements that God be unchanging and simple become incorporated into the early Christian Church, creating a distinct philosophical metaphysics within Catholicism and many of the early Protestant denominations. I will detail his understanding of time, the more specific historical influences that shaped it, and the implications it has for the soul's relationship to God in the coming chapter.

II. Unwinding An Augustinian Paradox: Time and the Role of the Eternal

Herman Haushur, in his article “”St. Augustine’s Conception of Time,” isolates time as what appears to be the greatest separation between man and God: “Time thus reduces itself to the impermanent, being made of a succession of indivisible instants. It has therefore no relevance to the stable immobility of divine eternity” (Haushur, 504). In an attempt to attain a clearer conception of the nature of God, St. Augustine utilizes Book 11 of *The Confessions* in order to explore the role of Time, its origins, and its relation to the divine. In doing so, however, a series of potential paradoxes arises. What, for example, to borrow a question from the Manichaeans, was God doing before the creation of time? How can God interact in Time while simultaneously remaining changeless in the way that Neo-Platonism and early Christianity demand? These seemingly unanswered questions, in addition to others, produce roadblocks on the path to a fuller conception of the relationship of man to time and, by extension, eternity and God. Despite the apparent contradictions inherent in the idea of a changeless, atemporal and eternal God engaging in a created, changing and temporal world, the Eternal Word, through its sustaining Providence, provides the necessary bridge in Augustine’s philosophy of time.

To understand the permeating influence of Augustine’s philosophy of time in *The Confessions*, it is necessary to begin with a view of the structure and organization of the work as a whole. Augustine opens with a laudatory address that contains both a praise of God and an introduction of the role of time. He

writes, “O Thou, the greatest and the best … utterly hidden and utterly present, most beautiful and most strong, abiding yet mysterious, suffering no change and changing all things: never new, never old, making all things new, *bringing age upon the proud and they know it not*; ever in action, ever at rest, gathering all things to Thee and needing none…” (*Confessions*, 1.4, p 4-5). Thus, it is in the opening passages of *The Confessions* that Augustine begins his discussion of the implications of time and God’s position in relation to it. That relationship, however, is itself complicated by the conflicting expressions of God’s divine nature. Although he is “utterly present” and “abiding,” he is equally “utterly hidden” and “mysterious.” These combinations shed light on the divergent states of the atemporality present in God and the temporal condition of the created world. God, because he is ever-present and omniscient, is relegated to a space that appears both disconnected from and interrelated to the temporal world. Further complicating the argument, Augustine introduces the changeless quality of God, and thus its alien status in a temporality that is, by definition, always changing. God “suffers no change” because it would be counter to the very essence of God to experience a new action or volition, outside the omniscient comprehension of the mind of God.

It is because of this layered view of the different interactions with time that Augustine establishes a three-tiered understanding of reality. In this hierarchical structure, there is at the bottom a nature that changes in both time and place - the body. Because of its physicality, the body necessarily changes and adapts to the created world by means of movement, aging, growing, in addition

to other modes of alteration (*Letter* 18). The soul, existing on the second tier, has the ability to change in time while lacking the possibility to change in place. In contrast to the body, it is the lack of a physical, corporeal substance that permits the soul to avoid a mutability in place; because it is thought without extension (i.e. without material quality), the soul evolves solely through temporal change that exists for all created beings. The highest, and final, tier is reserved for "a nature that cannot change in either place or in time, and that," Augustine states, "is God" (*Letter* 18). It is through this structure that the distinction between creator and created is solidified - what is mutable is a creature, while what is changeless is God. Although God clearly has some relationship to the created world, that connection is obscured by the boundaries of time that constrain the different possible interactions.

Returning to the influential role of Book Eleven's discussion of time, however, reveals that this tiered explanation of the different experiences of temporality permits a fuller understanding of the *Confessions* as a whole. Separating the analysis of time from the autobiographical chapters, for example, misses the message of the text because of its intentional construction (Teske, 2). The first nine books, following this structure, appear to be primarily autobiographical; Book Ten focuses on the state of Augustine's own soul at the time of writing; and books eleven, twelve, and thirteen center around a reading of creation found in the Book of Genesis. It is in these final books that Augustine posits a more explicit philosophy that, upon its completion in Book Thirteen, becomes both allegorical concerning the path of man's fall from God and

prophetic of his eventual salvation (Teske, 8). Although separated into distinct discussions, the concern with time filters throughout each portion of the *Confessions*. Beginning with the opening praise to God previously discussed, Augustine utilizes time as a means of comprehending the focus of the given analysis and as a preface to the coming broader discussion of time itself.

The ostensibly autobiographical books themselves introduce the question of temporality into the narrative retelling of the saint's life. Augustine writes, "From infancy I came to boyhood, or rather it came to me, taking the place of infancy. Yet infancy did not go: for where was it to go? Simply it was no loner there" (*Confessions*, 1.8, p 10). In this progression narrative from infancy to boyhood, there exists a prefiguration of Augustine's understanding of the processes of temporality. The present, infancy, flows into boyhood through the passage of time. Instead of simply growing into this new state, however, the author figures the arrival of boyhood through an involuntary action of the subject: "or rather it came to me." This immediate rephrasing of the progression posits Augustine as the passive subject who is merely experiencing the transition between the two states. Through the autobiographical narration an understanding of the workings of time becomes evident. In much the same way that infancy is confronted by and replaced with boyhood, so too is the present continually encountered by and supplanted with the future. Similarly, the end result of infancy, following its replacement by boyhood, mirrors Augustine's description of the once present time. Like infancy, the previously present does "not go: for where [is] it to go? Simply it [is] no longer there." The growth of the

boy himself, therefore, plots the movement from future to present, present to past. The present, like infancy, does not depart to some other location; rather, it is simply past. This mapping of temporality onto physicality through the representation of Augustine's aging body proffers an explanation of time's functioning through the way in which individuals experience it. This presentation of the workings of time also introduces the important role that psychology plays in man's understanding of temporality. Arising from the mind itself, time becomes tied to experience and perception rather than existing independently of action and change.

By mentally grasping the different locations of the stages in time, Augustine suggests a new view of the three possibilities of temporal location. There is a present of things past located in the memory (memoria), a present of things present in intuition (contuitus), and a present of things future in expectation (expectatio) (Teske, 25). The mind remembers past events, experiences the present, and expects the future (*Confessions*, 11.20, p 242). Through the mental mapping of temporal locations, Augustine paradoxically is able redefine time as both wholly present and entirely disparate. Shifting the phases of time, therefore, to the present makes them intelligible through their simultaneous presentation. The all-present conception of time is only possible through the use of the mind as the sole location of actuality but, although all things are contemporaneous when viewed in the mind, events certainly occur sequentially in relation to each other. The actual physical expression of temporal events reveals a version of time that stands in opposition to an ever-present

understanding. The most striking difference can be found in the apparent lack of any period of time that can truly be called “present.” Because the present is simply the instant in which the future transitions into the past, the present lacks any measurable quantity of time (Teske, 26). In an attempt to further elucidate the unmeasurable nature of present time, Augustine introduces his analogy of the varying lengths of the different components of poetry. He explains, “Thus we measure the length of poems by the lengths of the lines, and the lengths of the lines by the lengths of the feet, and the lengths of the feet by the syllables, and the lengths of long syllables by the lengths of the short” (*Confessions,* 11.26, p 215). The process continues to narrow into smaller and smaller components, revealing the infinitesimally small nature of the fleeting present. Because it is the instant through which the future slips into the past, the concept of the present is best understood from the perspective of the mind.

Because of the inherently different experiences of time from the mental and physical perspectives, the ways in which God and man view time must also differ. God, pure and eternal, is thoroughly removed from temporality and instead persists in the equivalent of the ever-present in which all things are simultaneous and successionless: All things occur at once because of God’s eternal, unchanging nature. While man encounters a series of events that take place prior to, contemporaneous with, and following some general event, God stands outside of the relative sequences of time. His atemporality affords him the absence both of a beginning and end and a sense of succession of past or future (Teske, 13-4). This removal from the limits of temporal succession is necessary

for God's changelessness. To experience time - to be in time - is to be affected by that temporality. Augustine phrases this incongruity with a description of one of the defining characteristics of time: "So indeed we cannot truly say that time exists except in the sense that it tends towards nonexistence" (*Confessions*, 11.14.17).[1] The Divine, therefore, because he always exists, cannot be held within the temporal and the *tending-not-to-exist* world. Clearly, however, God as creator must have some interaction with the created world that is intrinsically connected with temporality and mutability. Here arises the central paradox of the way in which that necessary, divine presence influences and indeed enacts its Will on creation without being subject to some change itself. This paradox, while troubling for the production of a rational and coherent explanation, is not unique in its placement in the *Confessions*. Augustine frequently employs the technique of presenting paradoxes in order to actively engage the reader in the process of the philosophical argument. This mental exercise (*exercitatio animi*) is used here specifically to help the reader to grasp the eternal nature of God and his omnipresence in both time and space.

Before taking up the primary paradox of temporality in Book 11 of the *Confessions*, a fuller understanding of the philosophical and theological background of Augustine is helpful in comprehending the reason for the question of temporality and the paradox that arises with respect to it. Manichaeism, the religion to which Augustine turned prior to his conversion to Christianity, provided the possibility of a purely rational approach to theology: "Only this group, Augustine thought, could answer the questions that had begun

[1] The selection reads, '*nisi quia tendit non esse*'.

to ‘torment’ him as soon as his ‘conversion’ to philosophy had caused him to think seriously…” (Brown, 46). Prior to the Christian conversion, the initial turn to philosophy and rationality brought with it important questions concerning the nature of God, man, and human sin. What is the cause of sin? Why is there suffering? These questions, in addition to others, fueled the young Augustine in ways that led to a desire for a rational approach to explaining both human and divine action. For this reason, therefore, the Manichaeans presented an attractive alternative to his previous life. While the common person searches for a universal solution to the existential questions previously discussed, the Manichaeans depended upon a thoroughly literal idea of an internal battle of the soul waged in the visible, material world (Brown, 56). This mapping of the internal, spiritual world onto the physical provided a more readily comprehensible system for understanding the conflicting impulses in the soul that prompt sin.

Augustine embraced this mode of thought in order to tackle his most difficult questions. Though not addressing the central mystery of the unchanging eternal affecting the ever-changing temporal, the Manichaeans were able first to present Augustine with the troubling nature of time. The Manichaean question, “What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?” appears perplexing in its paradoxical assumptions of a God who is both acting and unchanging; it is a conception of a God who must be mutable and evolving because of his new will to establish creation. Arising from their lack of an understanding of God as having neither beginning nor end, the Manichaeans were unable to provide a

persuasive, indeed rational, answer to the question. To begin with an assumption that God was doing something in a time before he created time is itself incoherent. Simply put, without a temporal creation there can be no time, no "before." This basic principle exposed the flaw in the analytical system of the Manichaeans and, without the presence of an eternal God, exposed the shortcomings that the religion had for answering the very questions that Augustine had come to ask. In order to address the question of what God was doing before he made heaven and earth, Augustine turned to a Neo-Platonic conception of God as one who had neither beginning nor end and, more importantly, no "succession of either past or future so that there is only the abiding present" (Teske, 13-4). Having taken the step towards a Neo-Platonic version of God, Augustine is able to more easily answer the questions concerning temporality by positing time itself as a created thing that does not exist as co-eternal with God; rather, time is merely a creature like the world and man. Augustine states, "You made time itself, and times could not pass before you made times. But if there was not time before heaven and earth, why do they ask what you did then? There was no 'then' when there was no time" (*Confessions*, 11.14). The absurdity of the question, therefore, is apparent within the limitations of language and its faculties to describe things eternal. Created language as such is ill equipped to address things eternal.

Having established a conception of God that exists *totus simul* (all at once) or in the ever-present, Augustine is able to take up the question of how the eternal and atemporal God interacts with creation. Augustine begins with a

question at the start of Book 11 that introduces this potential paradox. He asks, "But, Lord, since You are in eternity, are You unaware of what I am saying to You? Or do you see in time what takes place in time? But if you do see, why am I giving You an account of all these things?" (*Confessions*, 11.1, p 233). Introducing the book with the topic of the relationship between God and man, Augustine immediately brings the question of the role of time to prominence, presenting two possible options. First, if God is relegated solely to the space of eternity, he is incapable of understanding what takes place within the temporal world.

This exclusive interpretation of how time functions presents an understanding of the interaction between eternity and temporality, the creator and the created, that is wholly divergent and separated; the two are so distinct that there is no communication. Because of this separation, furthermore, the potential for God to enter into or influence time is eliminated. The second possibility is equally troubling because it is descriptive of a version of the creator who views temporal events in the same way as created beings view it: "Or do you see in time what takes place in time?" By positing the divine as understanding temporal events sequentially or "in time," God ceases to be ever-present and becomes, instead, subject to the parameters of past, present, and future temporal actions. This constriction, however, is inconsistent with the nature of God in light of his atemporality. Some solution, therefore, is necessary in order to produce a theory of time that is both consistent with the divine nature and inclusive of a kind of interaction, or at least understanding, between the creator and the created.

In an attempt to avoid the confusion and paradox of repeated and new willful actions taken by God in creation, a focus on the Word and divine Providence provides a compelling solution to the problem of temporal engagement. The Word of God, present from the moment of creation in the Book of Genesis through the introduction of Christ in the Gospel of John, expresses the co-eternal will of God, its sustaining Providence, and its possibility for temporal interaction. God's first utterance in the Bible appropriately is one of creation: "And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the water. And God said: Be light made. And light was made" (Genesis 1: 2-3). In transforming the void and darkness into light and substance, God spoke light (*lux*) into existence. This command of "*fiat lux*" provides a key insight into the way in which God creates or, more specifically, the way in which divine creation is presented in the Bible; it is through speaking (*dixit*) that the divine Will is known and transformed into action, resulting in the created world. That Word, however, cannot be a vocalized sound into the abyss - a human-like voice would not be an appropriate attribute of God. Augustine addresses this question by asking, "But *how* did you speak?" (*Confessions*, 11.6, p 237). It is clear that he did not "make heaven and earth by speaking some words whose syllables sound one after the other, for words that sound in time presuppose the existence of creatures" (Teske, 18). This attempt to attribute audible language to the creator fails to erect a logical framework to describe the physicality associated with speech (a mouth, for example) and the acorporeal, Neo-platonic conception of God presented by Augustine. Instead, there must be a turn away from the anthropomorphizing of God and a re-

evaluation of what is meant by "Word."

Augustine continues, however, by considering what he himself means when he refers to speech. He remarks, "…it is clear beyond question that that voice was sounded by the movement of something created by You, a movement in time but serving Your eternal will" (*Confessions*, 11.6, p 237). Despite the prevalence of auditory references ("voice," "sounded," etc.), Augustine is discussing something more than what is contained in words; he argues that that voice of God more accurately *is* a movement and that this 'movement' can more appropriately be understood to be the divine Will. The abstract concept of a 'movement', a volition, reconstructs what the Gospel relates as words and speech into expressions of the desire or Will of God. While Augustine states that the movement acts to serve the divine Will, when analyzed more basically, that movement is the manifestation of Providence in action, in the act of creation. The Will, therefore, is both the driving and sustaining force of the process of creation and the created world. Said in a simpler way, the divine will as represented in the Word and speech is the process by which God creates.

Although God 'speaks' the world into creation, the eternal Word of divine Providence found in the book of Genesis is not synonymous with the Word of the New Testament. In the opening of the book of John, a new version of the Word is presented: "In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God" (Gospel of John 1:1). The creation speech-act in Genesis noted previously, therefore, does not speak (*dixit*) in a way that would produce the Word (Verbum) in the Gospel of John. Said in a different way, *Deus non dixit*

Verbo [my translation].[2] Despite the lack of interchangeability, the two terms help to more fully understand one another in that, in the New Testament, instead of speech the Word is Christ. Taken with this meaning, a theological pronouncement is made in which the second person of the Trinity exists from "the beginning" with God. Additionally, however, this version of the Word is also descriptive of a divine Will co-eternal with God.

Without a fundamental conception of the way in which the will of God exists in relation to time, however, it is unclear how the use of the Word avoids the fundamental problem of the dissociation of eternity and temporality. For example, if God were to make, at some point prior to time or after the creation of time, the decision to create, this desire would be a new volition, denying the eternal quality of God (Confessions, 11.10, p 240). Augustine provides an explanation of this relationship by proposing a version of the will that, when applied to God, allows for the word to be both co-eternal with God and temporally relevant. He argues: "But of Your Word nothing passes or comes into being, for it is truly immortal and eternal. Thus it is by a Word co-eternal with Yourself that in one eternal act You say all that You say, and all things are made that You say are to be made. You created solely by thus saying. Yet all things You create by saying are not brought into being in one act and from eternity" (*Confessions,* 11.7, p 238). Thus the co-eternal Word provides the necessary link between the eternal and the temporal by willing all things from eternity and

[2] My construction and translation: "God did not speak the Word." This formulation is clearer in the language of the Latin Vulgate. As such, I have included it an effort to help the reader with the distinctions in the different uses of 'word' for the Bible and Augustine.

permitting these movements or actions to occur or be created at the determined time within the temporal world. In this way, therefore, the divine successionless Will is enacted within temporal succession.

Having been established from time eternal, the intelligible word provides both the plans for the initial creation and the things to come in time. In this way, therefore, the divine wisdom is eternally with the Father and "creation was always present as described and formed" (Teske, 19). Though a minor change in the understanding of the Word, this conception allows for a divine will that is 'spoken' in eternity and all at one moment while not suggesting that the effect of that Will - creation - is similarly co-eternal. The Word of God sets in place the Will to unfold sequentially over the course of a predetermined future time. To borrow from Carl Vaught, "there is a correspondence between nontemporal ideas in the mind of God and their temporal instantiation in the world" (Vaught, 116).

While the mode of connection between creator and creature has been explored, the way in which time is measured and figured by Augustine remains at issue. The understanding of the mind's conception of time, however, will serve to elucidate the communication between God and man further insofar as it will express man's falleness. Roland Teske argues that "the temporal distention of the soul or mind is a necessary condition of our perceiving temporal wholes" (Teske, 7). Seen through this interpretation of time's processes, distention plays a pivotal role in the comprehension and ordering of temporal events in sequence. Here distended time refers to time as removed from the locus of the

mind and, instead, stretched to create the categories of past, present, and future. In this way, therefore, events are situated within distinct temporal locations that are created by the mind and are open to some form of measurement. Intended time, however, refers to time that has been retained by the mind. This conception of time does not separate the three locations of temporal occurrence as occurs in distention; rather, the mind simply encompasses the past, present, and future (Wetzel, 347). These two methods of referring to time, though describing slightly different concepts, are dependent upon one another for meaning. The different events in time need first to be recognized by the mind in order to be stretched by it to produce a coherent description of the sequence of events.

Because of this formulation concerning time's functioning, Augustine has been credited with making it possible to measure time based on stretches of memory produced by the mind's distention. Relating this measurement, however, still falls short of producing a definitive and quantitative account of the amount of temporal succession. Herman Haushur returns the problem to Augustine's invocation of poetry and music as metaphor for mentally processing the separations of moments in time. He writes of the difference between divine and created perceptions of time, "between God and the creature is the same difference as between a consciousness in which all the notes of a melody are simultaneously present, and a consciousness which perceives them only in succession" (Haushur, 504). Though the previous attempt at utilizing the lines, meters, feet, and syllables of poetry failed to produce a version of time that could

locate the moment of the present, the recitation of poetry provides the link between time and the mind's distention. In Book XI Augustine argues that the speaker, whose knowledge of the poem exists before he begins speaking, anticipates the poem, line, or word. Speaking, he experiences or sees the action of the poem in the present. The lines, upon completion of the poem, return to the memory and are no longer (*Confessions*, 11.33).

This spreading out of the soul (*distentio animi*) that is necessary for an understanding both of sequences of events and poetry, while serving the purpose of organizing moments in time, paradoxically makes time appear akin to eternity because of its containment wholly within the mind. Augustine's theological position, however, clarifies this potential confusion. Writing the *Confessions*, and especially Book XI, Augustine assumes the position not of an independent philosopher but of a mystic seeking to break free of temporal existence and enter into a union with God (Pranger, 380-1). The inextricable connection between time and being is one that Augustine desires to understand in order to seek an understanding of his own being and the nature of God (*De Civ*, 12.15). [3] Sin, fallenness, and redemption, therefore, come into focus with this philosophy of time as they are all tied, for Augustine, to the nature of creation. Teske argues the connection in this way: "here the state of distention is a state of being pulled apart into manyness away from God, the One, to whom we are being called and pulled back" (Teske, 31). Having flowed down from the creator, man becomes scattered in his separation from the One by means of time's displacement and

[3] Here Augustine engages in a longer discussion of the link between being and time that treats the topic in greater detail.

confusion; similarly, as the body spreads in three dimensions, time swells into a fourth dimension and emphasizes the parallel and link between time and the ontology of created beings (Teske, 31).

The presence of time, for Augustine one of the penalties for the Fall of man, therefore connects the distended condition to the redemption of Christ. Retrieving man from sin and the human condition of scatteredness, Christ's return corrects the 'manyness' resulting from having fallen from God and brings the temporal creation into changeless eternity. Redemption, therefore, is tied to the elimination of temporal attachments. In *De Vera Religione*, Augustine continues this idea by suggesting that "we have come down into temporal things, and by love of them we are kept from eternal things" (Teske, 34)· The elimination of temporality by its inclusion into eternity, like the providential influence of the Word discussed previously, reconnects the temporal creatures with the creator, rectifying the distention of fallenness.

III. Crossing Time: Bridging the Gap from Augustine to Milton

Augustine's interpretation of the Fall, as expressed by the creation of psychological time through the distention of the mind, coincides largely with John Milton's in his epic *Paradise Lost*. Neither simple chance nor the product of the Church's authority and doctrine, the similarities in the accounts of the Fall, the relationship of time to eternity, and the redeeming power - both temporally and spiritually - of Christ in the two writers' major works demonstrate the intimate relationship between the medieval philosopher and the early modern poet. This connection or, more specifically, this continuum is for John Savoie entirely appropriate given Augustine's standing as the most literary of the Church fathers and Milton's as the most theological of the English poets; the similarities, therefore, should be "deep, pervasive, and complex" (Savoie, 139). Because the topic of the philosopher's influential conception of time has not previously been applied to Milton's poetry, I will begin with an assessment of the established relationship.

Writing over a millennium apart, Milton and Augustine are nevertheless products of similar cultural, religious, and political turmoil. Savoie reminds the modern reader that "Theology in the fourth and fifth centuries [was] often as political as the politics of the seventeenth century were theological" (139). This commixing of politics and theology, polemical exigencies and skepticism provides the foundation for a shared intellectual history that demonstrates a thoroughly Augustinian early modern analytical lens. The broad, shared

understanding of Christianity and its philosophical representations of God have been explored previously; indeed its full analysis could itself fill entire volumes. What I seek to uncover, however, is the unexplored influence of St. Augustine's seemingly paradox-ridden philosophy of time with the Miltonic poetic representations of temporality and eternity.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Augustine's influence on matters of theological import was unsurpassed even, and perhaps especially, in Protestant England. Instead of rejecting the Catholic father for his seminal significance to the Roman Church, Augustine was highly regarded as the most Protestant of the great saints and indeed the most "judicious of all the Father" (Savoie, 140). This is not to say that Augustine was himself a proto-Protestant, a forerunner of an eventual and ineluctable Reformation; rather, his conversion from Manichaeism to Christianity and his less-entertained theological pronouncements lend themselves for use by the anti-papists. He does, in the eyes of Calvinists and other Protestant denominations, provide arguments in his tracts for a still-contested belief in predestination. Because of the pervading influence of Augustinian philosophical theology, Milton, having been educated at St. Paul's school in London and subsequently at Cambridge University, undoubtedly would have encountered and understood Augustine's writing. Studying at St. Paul's from the age of eleven to sixteen (1620 to 1625), Milton's education was shaped by the strict school curriculum established by St. Paul's founder, John Colet. Colet, in addition to being a devoted reader of Augustine, infused his school's curriculum with "Christian authors that wrote their wisdom

with clean and chaste Latin" (Savoie, 140). With this framework in place, Milton undoubtedly read and studied Augustine in Latin because he was, as John Savoie relates, "the foremost among these [Christian] fathers, and would remain so throughout Milton's life" (Savoie, 140).

This enduring Augustinian influence is apparent in its explicit and implicit appearances throughout Milton's writing career, in both prose and verse. *The City of God*, *Adulterous Marriages, Literal Commentary on Genesis, Harmony of the Gospels* - all of these products of Augustine and others appear in the theological and political tracts of Milton. Even Milton's posthumously published *De Doctrina Christiana,* perhaps his most influential prose piece, borrows its title and purpose from Augustine's own Christian doctrine. Though omitting any explicit reference to Augustine, the treatise pays homage to its predecessor's model in effecting the practice of allowing the Scripture to act as the final word in deciding matters of doctrine (Savoie, 141). All of this is not simply to present the similarities between these two major thinkers; however, by forming a clear conception of the classical literature and theology influencing Milton, a fuller portrait of his poetic production emerges for a more critical, more pertinent analysis.

Even in areas of critical disagreement, Milton and Augustine retain a *shared* discontent from others for their seemingly paradoxical or contradictory philosophical and theological principles. Howard Schultz presents the frustration:

> Augustine had transmitted to an unbroken line of medieval disciples, to Christian skeptics of the Renaissance, and to all Protestantism, a volume of precepts that hardly fitted his own practice; for it was he who originated or popularized most of the speculations that Renaissance critics like to saddle upon Scholasticism… he played with bizarre analogies in his defense of the Trinity, with theories of the soul's origin in his work on free will and foreknowledge, with natural science in his comment on the letter of Genesis… (Schwartz, 50).

Drawing from Augustine's lasting influence on Christian theology, albeit a dense and complex one, the intricate and paradoxical philosophical ideas shape and, for Schultz, corrupt the theology of Milton into a contrived version of philosophy, detracting from the simplicity of the Christian message. Though Milton, for example, would not follow Augustine with regard to his defense of the Trinity, he would begin his own treatise where the most literary of classic philosophers ended. This continuation is most clear when viewing the desired goal of the authors' major works. That aim or interest in Augustine's *Confessions* is, for Regina Schwartz, the very same as Milton's in *Paradise Lost*; rather than attempting to gain knowledge of the objects sought, the focus is instead on "the religious posture of the seeker" (50). Though not the most recognizable feature of Milton's poetic work, the insistence on the physical and, by extension, spiritual postures of the figures - sitting, standing, lying, simply being - is the focus of my project insofar as it reveals the internal, godly condition. With the expression of temporality (or its lack) at the core of these postures, there is a distinctly Augustinian influence that must be recognized. This emphasis will be addressed after a thorough analysis of the more generally explored relationship between the two thinkers.

Stanley Fish's *How Milton Works* details the poet's Augustine-influenced conception of God and how man can approach an understanding of him by means of orienting *Paradise Lost* (in addition to his other theology-driven poetry) in the scope of the Christian tradition. As both men's aim is to "justify the ways of God to Man,"[4] they must begin with an epistemology appropriate for the scope of the divine and the limits of the human intellect. On this account Fish argues that Milton believes that "rationality is a perfectly good tool for everyday purposes, but he knows, with Augustine, that rational entailments are only as good as the presuppositions on which they build and that whenever one thinks to subject those presuppositions (God is good, Christ redeemed our sins) to the test of rationality, one has inverted the hierarchy of first and second and made rationality into and idol" (57). Whether engaged in philosophical discussion or poetic expression, there are arguments, therefore, for a particular starting-point when embarking on discussions of God. In both of these cases, there are certain presuppositions that are not subject to question, notably interrogating God concerning qualities inherent in his being. What follows from an analysis without these principles is something doomed to inconsistencies, flaws, and misconceptions. With the presuppositions in mind, however, the product of discovery is grounded in truth and worthy of religious devotion. It is in Augustine's *De Doctrine Christiana* that he formulates this requirement; rather than being tied to the medium of expression or the objects explored in pursuit of God, it is better to enjoy or use a thing for the purpose of moving

[4] The echo here is clearly from Book Three of *Paradise Lost* but the shared goal is enumerated by John Savoie.

toward blessedness. Without this goal in mind at all times, the "journey toward blessedness will be retarded" and, for example, in Milton's *A Masque*, the individual will be "shackled by an inferior love" (Fish, 54). The fixation on the created thing instead of the creator is what creates stumbling blocks on the path to enlightenment of the divine, to correct knowledge.

An expression of the path to true knowledge, Adam and the angel Raphael's conversation concerning the celestial bodies presents an account of proper reasoning flowing first from the nature of God. In this pedagogical moment from *Paradise Lost*, Milton proclaims the way to avoid error. Though Adam asks for greater information and detail in astronomical matters, the angel's response provides a lesson in what questions are proper to ask: "for the Heav'n's wide Circuit, let it speak / The Maker's high magnificence" (VIII.100-101). In these two lines Raphael relates the epistemological structure of human understanding. It is improper in this system to seek to grasp God's will by viewing the world and its movements. What Raphael suggests instead is a view of the world as seen through the "lens of a godly intention (and character) already assumed" (Fish, 518). This sentiment is strikingly similar to the Augustinian instruction to come to know God and the world by way of 'faith seeking understanding'.[5] In this way the starting point is not a question of the goodness of God or his existence throughout eternity; rather, having read and studied the scriptures, the believer (and I use that term deliberately) seeks God with a faith already having been solidified. With regard to the questions of astronomy, therefore, the way to avoid

[5] This approach is at the heart of much of Medieval philosophy. See Anselm, Aquinas, Boethius, et. al.

error is to "read whatever phenomena are disclosed to you by your perspective as further evidence of God's glory and goodness. If you do that, you can't go wrong, not because you will come upon empirical truth, but because the truth is not empirical; rather, it is a reflection of the relation of any phenomenon (or person or action) to the deity" (Fish, 519). This sentiment has its root in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and its instruction to read the Scriptures with the intention that they will always reflect "the doubly love of God and of neighbor." Having begun with this interpretation in mind, "even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 30).

Though proceeding from the assumptions concerning God's intent is itself circular, it is the principle reasoning that Augustine and Milton employ when talking about God and his nature. In his shortest treatise, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy,* Milton establishes and proclaims this framework: "the way to get a sure undoubted knowledge of things, is to hold that for truth, which accords most with charity" (183). It must be assumed, therefore, that God will always act in line with charity and that it is necessary to read every word of Scripture and life with this realized disposition (Fish, 521). Simply put, the Scriptures, if read with this intent, will not lead the faithful astray. Though charity is clearly linked with the nature of God, it is Augustine who first explicitly enunciates this system of interpretation in his *Christian Doctrine*: "What is read should be subjected to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced (93). Returning to the astrological questions, Raphael meets Adam's questions with a direction not an answer. Instead of detailing the structure and

movement of the celestial bodies, Raphael refocuses the discussion in a way that emphasizes the centrality of God to any question of human experience. A complete understanding of the movement of the heavens is irrelevant so long as the desired goal is not further knowledge of the divine. Said in a different way, only when the objective of the question concerns the greater love (or charity) of God is it a valuable endeavor. Exploring time, memory, and biblical creation, Augustine's philosophical pursuits therefore fall within the enumerated parameters of intellectual inquiry. The account of time, while philosophical in its analysis and theorization, begins and ends with God, his relations to time, and its importance for created, dependent creatures.[6]

With this framework passed down from Augustine, Milton's poetry, especially *Paradise Lost* and the earlier poems that are contained within the 1645 volume, presents a world separated by a binary opposition: what is scriptural or tied to scripture is good, what is not is unproductive and consequently bad. In this Augustinian world of scriptural supremacy, Stanley Fish explains, "time is devalued as a medium of error and wandering; language is distrusted as an impious addition to the sufficiency of God's revealed world; and history… is stigmatized as a collection of corrupted texts or as a veil that obscures a reality easily seen by those of a cleared and regenerate vision" (Fish, 509). This 'will to understanding' for the sake of understanding[7] is at the heart of the Fall both for Augustine and Milton. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, it

[6] This framing of the philosophy of time is dealt with in the previous chapter.

[7] Or a 'will to knowledge' in a non-Foucauldian, non-Nietzchean sense. I mean this strictly in terms of a desire for knowledge for the sole purpose of acquiring knowledge.

is precisely Eve's desire to know as much as the divine that is the greatest temptation to disobey God's commandment. The serpent temps her thus:

> O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,
> Mother of science! Now I feel thy power
> Within me clear; not only to discern
> Things in their causes, but to trace the ways
> Of highest agents, deem'd however wise.
> Queen of the universe! Do not believe
> Those rigid threats of death: … (PL IX.678-84)

Here, the intellectual curiosity that is in opposition to both heavenly command (the order not to eat the apple) and correct reasoning (pursuing only that which is tied to a charity and a love of God) is the point of sin's entry into the world. The prominence given to this directed reasoning that Augustine prescribes in the fifth century inextricably connects it to sin and fallenness and, therefore, to Milton.

This shared love of directed rationality figures most prominently in Milton's version of the Fall which, for C.S. Lewis in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, is substantially that of St. Augustine (and by extension the Church as a whole). With an understanding, therefore, of the Augustinian account, Milton's version becomes less prone to misinterpretation and "false emphases to which modern readers are liable" (Lewis, 66). False emphases here likely means any deviation from an orthodox conception of theology for, despite the traditionalist appearance of *Paradise Lost*, Milton held fairly radical religious beliefs: rejection of the Trinity stands out as the clearest example. God's act of creation, being intimately linked with the foreseen Fall, provides the opportunity to examine the divine original intent for the created world and thus its drastic fall away from

God. Beginning at the same moment of creation as Genesis, Milton's interpretation of the *fiat lux* includes, to borrow a phrase from Regina Schwartz, a "drama of submission." Creation in this account carries with it an order of obedience that even the fallen chaos must obey. The imperative use of *fiat lux* ['let there be light'] ties 'speech'[8] and action into one process of submission to God (Schwartz, 23).

Though commanded into being from fallen chaos, the created world is, for both Milton and Augustine, inherently good, and "no Nature (i.e. positive reality) is bad…" (*De Civ. Dei*, XI, 21, 21). The created world and its fallen future, therefore, are not inevitable products of their formation, for creation is from God and consequently always good. The perennial question of evil and its origin is a real concern for a world created without the presence of anything outside of the process of divine formation. Milton addresses this concern in a way that is again following the tradition set by Augustine. By defining evil as a privation or perversion of good, Augustine and Milton reveal evil as a *quality* dependent on good for existence: evil needs good (or more precisely the absence of good from an inherently good thing) in order to emerge (*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, II). This absence of evil is apparent in Milton's Paradise and Heaven.[9] Having been created good, all created things lack evil until what is innate has been perverted. Though, for example, the allegorical character of Sin generates by an eruption from the head

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[8] I am using 'speech' loosely here since, as discussed in the previous chapter, God does not physically speak existence into being; rather, his will is represented by the great speech act of creation.

[9] Schwartz goes further to label the Anarch's kingdom as a kind of 'negative empire' that is filled with 'havoc, spoil, and ruin'. This 'negative' formation owes a great debt to Augustine's conception of privation. See page 19 in *Remembering and Repeating*.

of Satan,[10] the act of 'sin' for the first couple and for Satan himself is a product of a desire for self-interest and knowledge that exceeds the interest for God. The conscious creature, whether human or angel, having placed itself in higher esteem than God, wishes to exist independently - this is the sin of Pride (*De Civ. Dei, XIV*, II).

With pride as the first sin as expressed in the temptation noted previously - embodied first in the person of Satan and then in Eve - all of the vices Augustine and Milton link to curiosity arise from a desire for excessive knowledge. Regina Schwartz enumerates these sins: "lust, the appetite for information; avarice, the mastery over object of the world gained by such information; and pride, the elevation of the self as possessor of once hidden secrets" (Schwartz, 51). These vices appear not in themselves, as characteristics of created things; rather, a perversion or privation of good gives rise to their error. The production of evil outside of God, however, is necessarily foreseen by the atemporal mind of the creator. Not bound by the sequences of time and the limited perspective of created beings, God foreknows the corruption of man and angel. Prompting questions of God's goodness given the suffering resulting from the eventual fall, the presence of evil is an issue at the heart of *Paradise Lost,* the *City of God*, and the *Confessions,* with both writers attempting to resolve the problem with the conception of evil as privation. Simple privation, however, does not account for the divine foreknowledge of pain and suffering. Instead, their solutions to the

[10] See Book II.727-730. The asexual production of the character of Sin is itself a creation outside of God. This creation, however, is a complete privation of the good with which Satan was created

problems of suffering and sin are grounded by the human (and angelic) freedom to choose. John Savoie formulates the importance of choice for Milton and Augustine in this way: "… God created humans upright but they freely chose to disobey, as God knew - though did not determine - that they would, but God allowed this evil knowing that He could bring forth a greater good…" (Savoie, 144). Because Augustine argues that the "sole source of evil is the free choice of the will," Milton is able to assert both that man was created 'sufficient to have stood'[11] and that the Fall could indeed be understood as a fortunate one [*felix cupla*].

Perversion, however, cannot be the sole answer to the problem of evil for Milton: something else must provide a separation between the creator and the created. Having been ordered by God to avoid the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve's wandering appears out of place. The simple command (indeed the only command) from the creator is one that the first couple ought to have been able to follow: they were, of course, as Milton tells the reader, created "sufficient to have stood." The question, therefore, of why Adam, Eve, and Satan lapsed into sin remains troubling. Returning to Augustine and the structures of psychological time provides additional insight to the issue and a possible solution. Created to serve the divine, the angels and the first couple suffer by forgetting - forgetting the commands of their maker and their maker himself. Memory, as discussed in the previous chapter, is the present of things past and

[11] See here the main argument of *Paradise Lost,* justifying the ways of God to man and Augustine's *On Free Will* and *Retractions*, 32 (1.8). Milton's project in *Paradise Lost* is to account for sin and absolve God of blame for human sin.

serves as the only 'proof' of the existence of things previously experienced. Unable to re-experience one's own creation or the original edict prohibiting the consumption of the "fruit of that forbidden tree"[12] the temptation to forget is the most damning because of its simplicity. Regina Schwartz argues, "The Deuteronomic logic of memory informs *Paradise Lost*, where Satan offers the temptation to forget, and to forget the Creator, the Redeemer, is to fall. Satan's question haunts a poem persistently engaged in inquiring into origins" (Schwartz, 5). This fascination with origins - and, consequently, memory and origins - features prominently in Satan's quest for angelic/demonic support. Satan persuades his followers: "That we were formed then say'st thou? and the work / Of secondary hands, by task transferred / From Father to his son? strange point and new!" (PL, V.853-55). This series of questions puts the whole of creation in doubt. Satan, the constant tempter, inquires into the power of another to form new beings by relegating creation to the space of the imagination, of lies. Not by other hands but by their own did the angels arise and arguments to the contrary are merely constructions of God, used to assert dominance.

Satan interrogates these previously accepted origins further through his use of time and memory, specifically the lack of memory. He questions, "who saw / When this creation was? rememb'rest thou / Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?" (PL, V.856-58). Delving into the memory of one's own creation, Satan presents a problem inherent in human (and angelic) consciousness -

[12] See *Paradise Lost* I.1-2 and the first invocation of the heavenly muse.

creation is prior to or, more likely, contemporaneous with the start of being and, therefore, memory is insufficient as proof of creation. To answer Satan's question, no one saw his[13] own creation and, by extension, no one remembers it. The debt to God the creator and the duty to serve and obey him, therefore, vanishes with a lack of memory. Instead, Satan and the other fallen angels fashion themselves as their own creators: "We know no time when we were not as now; / Know none before us, self-begot, self raised / By our own quickening power…" (V.859-61). Ignorant of time-past because of an absence of memory, the fallen angels deem themselves creator and created. Satan, therefore, exploiting a lack of temporal consciousness, succeeds in extracting God from the process of creation because, as it appears with all other beings, God is as he was. It is this insistence on immutability that will play heavily in the Augustinian application of time to *Paradise Lost*. Convinced of a changeless nature, created things think themselves permanent, everlasting, and eternal. This is the logic of Satan's rebellion and this is the justification for the creation of his own, oppositional kingdom. Truly, for Satan, to forget is to fall.

Indeed Satan's memory is selective in its recollections. Mindful of his defeat during the war in heaven against the forces of God, the fallen angel forgets both his creation and continued dependence upon the creator. His existence ultimately depends on God for original and sustained being: "forgetful what from him [he] still receiv'd" (IV.54). Here Schwartz reinserts Augustine into this conversation as he too speaks "of selective memory, but one that opts for the

[13] I use the masculine pronoun intentionally as all of the angels are male.

opposite choice; to forget pain and remember happiness (Schwartz, 109). The reader experiences the two oppositional possibilities of memory in time and, consequently, the power it has to influence the created individual. While the one ignores his creator and erects his own empire in reaction to him, the other embraces him, selecting to reject the memories of things hurtful and instead embrace the creator with love. It is clear, therefore, that time's operations reveal a great deal about, and are indeed essential to, the structure and logic of both Milton and Augustine.

Eve's fall is similar to Satan's in that a forgetfulness of the creator features prominently in the characterization of her sin. Having lapsed into sin, the first woman addresses the serpent as her maker, forgetting God and his command. The scene certainly mirrors her original act of transgression. In forgetting the order from God not to touch the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and instead elevating her own pride above it, Eve succumbs to her tempter. Her fall, therefore, is not simply a fall into sin but a fall in memory. Here, her post-lapsarian forgetfulness is not simply a revision of her first sin but a constant reminder of her fallenness (Schwartz, 15). Through sin she is separated in memory - in time - from her maker and left to address a new author: Satan. Fallen nature, therefore, is marked by forgetting, both during the act of sin and after through a sustained loss of memory. This exchange between sin and memory (sin and a lack of correct temporal consciousness) presents most explicitly the relationship between the act of creation and the process of the fall: "the denial of the former issues in the latter. The punishment suits the crime. To

deny the maker is to be unmade" (Schwartz, 22). The devout, yet fallen, angel Abdiel expresses this reaction between sin, creation, and memory: "Then who created thee lamenting learn, / When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know" (V.894-95). The fallen, it appears, will remember their creator once having been confronted with the possibility of unmaking. Through unmaking, the created recall their author and creator.

This recognition of the relation, therefore, between the prospect of unmaking and act of recalling asserts a redemptive quality of remembering. By forgetting, the created beings fall. By remembering, they resist that fall (Schwartz, 22). Through both an admission and a remembering of the "pastness of the past," to borrow a phrase from Regina Schwartz, the subject can recall the creator and strive to rejoin the divine through an emersion in the memory of God and his command. What this entails, however, is not concrete but I will argue that Milton's poetic depictions of simple being - sitting, standing, lying - represent communion with the creator through an experience of divine atemporality. By refusing the mutability of the world and sitting with God, the created being has the possibility to approach eternity, to be with God. In this way, therefore, Raphael's edict to Adam during the discussion of astronomy to limit his vision to the most immediate concerns carries with it a new meaning, one shaped by Augustine.

IV [In]stances: 'Sitting,' 'Standing,' and 'Lying' with God

Time heals all, but what if time itself is the disease?
- *Wings of Desire*[14]

For reasons of literary decorum governed by an overwhelming recognition of the source material, Milton refrains from explicitly acknowledging Augustine in his poetry; his presence, nevertheless, is clear in nearly all of the major poems, from the *Nativity Ode* to *Paradise Regained*. The Neoplatonic influence, the defense of continence, and the exaltation of chastity characterize the poetry as "exud[ing] a general Augustinian air" (Savoie, 141). The relationship to time, however, has not garnered nearly as much attention. Despite this lack of established scholarship, I will argue that the expressions of temporality and atemporality display perhaps the most directly Augustinian influence. Milton's *Sonnet 16*[15] presents this temporal framework through a re-telling of the parable of the talents. As a part of the 1673 collection, the poem reflects on the literary career of its author: "When I consider how my light is spent, / Ere half my day, in this dark world and wide" (1-2). Recently having become blind, Milton questions his usefulness to God and to others on account of his newly acquired disability. The importance of blindness reveals the multiple interpretations of the poet's "light." First, the literal darkness of lacking sight expresses itself in the poet's perception of the world. Unable to see his work, Milton lacks a conventional or utilitarian purpose. Poetic inspiration provides an alternative

[14] Directed by Wim Wenders (1987) and spoken by the fallen angel Marion.
[15] See appendix for the complete poem.

reading. Though blind, the poet can still write or, more precisely, dictate his poetry;[16] his inspiration, however, remains in doubt. It is the ability to receive the 'light' of poetry that worries the poet, fearing God has already or will soon revoke his inspired vocation.

Milton continues to explore and feed his frustrations with a fixation on the parable of talents. He recounts the biblical story: "And that one talent which is death to hide, / Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent / To serve therewith my maker, and present / My true account, lest he returning chide, / Doth God exact day-labour, light denied, / I fondly ask;" (3-8). The poem calls to mind the allegory of a wasted talent, a wasted investment. Having given the three men coins with which to invest as they choose, the giver (God) expects a return for his effort. Though two of the men decide to pursue risky methods of making more money with their talent, they nevertheless produce a return and are rewarded because of it. Contrasted with this possibly unwise investing, the third man buries his talent. When asked to display what he has made of his coin, the man returns the single talent. Rather than praise the man for his prudent and cautious financial practices, the allegorical figure of God rebukes him, arguing that a burial is a waste of the gift. The 'chide' of the investor is subsequently followed by a retraction of the solitary talent. Fearing that his blindness will leave his talent - his poetic inspiration - unused and therefore wasted, Milton voices the question of divine expectation. Confusing here the light of poetic vision and the light of sight, Milton blends the multiple meanings

[16] Indeed Milton dictates the whole of *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained,* and *Samson Agonistes* in addition to others while blind.

as a means of justifying his frustration: with light having been denied, what should God expect in return?

What separates the poet from his biblical counterpart, however, is the production of the poem itself. For, as he enumerates his fears and doubts the durability of his talent, Milton simultaneously makes returns on the poetic investment through his lament: that is, *Sonnet 16*. This paradoxical representation of used and potential talent serves to complicate his understanding of his own utility for God. Though producing his art and approving of divine investment, Milton similarly argues for the value in the buried talent: "… but patience to prevent / That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need / Either man's work or his own gifts…" (8-10). The character of Patience provides the response to the poet's rhetorical question. In an attempt to forestall the question's utterance and the self-pity of the poet, patience 'prevents' his musing with an insistence on how superfluous created gifts are to the creator. God is complete and whole, needing no others to add to his glory. An argument to the contrary, that God *needs* the products or praise of man, would be little less than heresy. With this theological pronouncement related by the poem's speaker, Patience continues its directives: "…who best / Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state / Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed" (10-12). The sentence turns on the action of the follower to 'bear'; rather than an order issuing some injunction or task, the believer here must simply follow and be with God. The prescription from Patience, however, does not describe the lowest level of religious devotion; instead, it designates those who mildly bear his yoke as the

'best'. The repetition of the superlative title emphasizes the apparently contradictory message of the poem: Not those who perform lofty deeds or enact great works in the name of God, but those who mildly obey are *best*.

The Sonnet's concluding couplet, in the fashion typical of its Spenserian form, provides the message of the poetic encounter. Milton argues, "And post o'er land and ocean without rest: / They also serve who only stand and wait" (13-14). With the concern of his usefulness as a result of his 'spent' 'light' (1) having fallen away from the poem, Milton proffers a revision of the parable of the talents. Those who 'stand' and 'wait' serve their creator, and better. The myriad angels attend to God at all moments in heaven and on earth, therefore providing man with the opportunity to 'stand' with the divine. It is this lack of action, I argue, that brings the created, temporal beings closer to eternity in God. By defining action as actionless, as standing, the poem advocates an ontology separated from the sequence of time and history, devoted to God through the bearing of a 'mild' yoke. The order to stand, furthermore, is paired with one to 'wait'. Through this appropriately patient command, the injunction to stand is prolonged for a sustained encounter with God. The removal of the self from action, therefore, produces a more divine, eternal experience that privileges being - sitting, standing, waiting - above traditional modes of glorification.

A look back to Milton's 1645 volume of poetry, specifically *On Time*[17], provides the foundation for this Augustinian distrust of temporality through its elevation of the Miltonic postures. The poem, addressed to the figure of Time

[17] See appendix for complete poem.

itself, begins, “Fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race, / Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours, / Whose speed is but the heavy plummet’s pace;” (1-3). The opening clause establishes the binary - even antagonistic - relationship of time and eternity, not surprisingly designating eternity as the superior of the two. ‘Envious Time’, the poem labels it, takes on the trappings of the temporal and fleeting world, the impermanent and indeed petty. Not complete in itself, scattered Time (and the poet) seeks its ending in the everlasting eternity. In this highly Christian framework, with the race having ‘run out’ the created world has an assurance of incorporation into divine atemporality. The desire for the end of Time’s race, more specifically the end of Time, creates a contradictory description of the nature of temporality. Milton, like Augustine before him, proffers a highly psychological understanding of time that creates a relationship between the individual and the temporal flow. The poet’s call to speed the ‘lazy’ and ‘leaden’ hours ascribes variability to time’s movements; though one might experience a ‘quick’ hour, another (here Milton) experiences it slowly and drudgingly. Time’s passage, therefore, is not mere clock-time, as Aristotle would describe it in the *Physics*. Indeed the Trinity manuscript of the poem includes a subtitle, crossed out, that reads, ‘To be set on a clock case’.[18] A conscious decision on the part of the poet distinguishes psychologized time from clock-time, turning the source of Milton’s conception of temporality towards Augustine.[19]

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[18] See Orgel and Goldberg’s prefatory notes on page 741 of John Milton’s *Major Works*.
[19] The previous chapter describes this view in detail.

The subsequent line ostensibly contradicts this anti-clock-time formulation through its assertion that Time, in essence, is the movement of nothing more than the pendulum and weights. This reading, however, misses the mocking tone of the poem. Addressed to Time itself, the poem enacts a valiant struggle between the forces of temporality and eternity, with eternity the ever-victor.[20] The poet, therefore, does not designate Time as something real, represented by the medium of the clock; rather, Time is merely a product of man's desire to track the sequence of actions, represented *by* the movements of the hands of the clock. Interpreted in this way, Time reduces again to the psychology of the subject, stripping the concept of any external being. Like Augustine, Milton presents Time as a human creation, standing as a barrier between the created and the creator. Only after the end of Time, once Time "glut thyself with what they womb devours," can the temporal creations join divine eternity in constant bliss (4). Continuing his attack, Milton observes Time's consumption as that "Which is no more than what is false and vain, / And merely mortal dross" (5-6). Extending his critique beyond the person or concept of Time, the poet denounces all things temporal. Their great mutability and miniscule durability amount to little when compared with the always constant eternity. Similarly, Milton here attributes what he and Augustine in the previous section proffered as the first sin, pride, to Time's great meal. What is subject to Time's devouring womb is but 'false' and 'vain', further adding to the devalued state of the

[20] The description of time appears to mirror John Donne's Holy Sonnet 16, *Death be not proud*. In Donne's poem, the speaker addresses and challenges Death, devaluing his power below that of poppies and sleep in an attempt to champion the power of God.

substance of creation. Because of their 'mortal' condition (and perhaps even as a result of the Fall), all things temporal, like Time itself, will succumb to death.

Milton continues his assessment of the state of Time through an analysis of its approaching end. He declares, "So little is our loss, / So little is thy gain. / For whenas each thing bad thou hast entombed, / And last of all, they greedy self consumed" (7-10). Though filled, like the previous lines, with attacks on the significance of Time, the poem more importantly completes its description of Time's inherent sinful nature. Already 'glut'[ting] itself with things 'false' and 'vain', Time will, in the end, consume its own 'greedy' being. Seemingly mirroring the state of humans and original sin, Time's sin too has a need of redemption from its anthropomorphized, but wholly intrinsic, crimes. Paradoxically, its redemption comes in the form of exponentially greater sin; through an increase in gluttony and greed, Time will consume itself with all other created things. The poem turns, therefore, on the defeat of Time and the repercussions for humanity: "Then long eternity shall greet our bliss / With an individual kiss;" (11-12). Humorously ascribing a duration to eternity, Milton emphasizes the incomparability of defeated Time and invincible eternity. Here, instead of the petty and sin-filled Time, the poet presents eternity as inseparably paired with heavenly 'bliss'. The binary, therefore, returns and asserts itself as one decidedly oppositional and antagonistic. Departing from corrupt temporality, one finds peace in eternity. Milton returns to echo his underestimation of the longevity of eternity with his description of the

'individual', or more appropriately 'indivisible', kiss of everlastingness.[21] Dismantling the constituent parts of time is of great concern for Augustine in the *Confessions*, appropriately utilizing the analogy of a poem's lines, feet, words, and syllables to represent both time and the poem's nearly infinitesimally small parts. The philosopher concludes with doubt that time outside the mind truly exists, opting instead to argue in favor of psychological time. In *On Time*, therefore, Milton has followed the Augustinian trajectory.

In opposition to the intrinsically perverse wanderings of Time, eternity, the final half of the poem informs, embodies what is divine and therefore good. Milton proclaims, "And joy shall overtake us as a flood, / When everything that is sincerely good / And perfectly divine, / With truth, and peace, and love shall ever shine" (13-16). The final pronouncement erects a trinity of good to contrast with the false, vain, and greedy Time; with Time having been conquered by its own gluttony, joy carries away the temporal creations themselves in a deluge of divine grace. The flood of eternity's joy, salvation through Christ's return, reintroduces the relationship of redemption and distention to the temporal order. Roland Teske characterizes Augustine's conceptions of the distention of the mind - the mind's expansion into past, present, and future to comprehend time's flow - as inherently linked to the fall away from God through being pulled away into "manyness" (28-9). Humanity, however, is constantly being called back to the creator. Taken in this way, the Fall is understood as a descent into time. With the Fall as temporality, Milton's sinful and 'envious Time' must be

[21] Orgel and Goldberg's note to 'individual' provides 'indivisible', meaning everlasting, as an alternative interpretation. See page 741, n. 15-6 in *The Major Works*.

transgressed in order to reach the splendor of eternity. Indeed Augustine argues that "as we have flowed down from the One, so through continence we are being pulled together and led back to the One" (Teske, 31 - See note 121).

The poem concludes with a resolution to enter into eternity and perpetually 'sit' with God in the stable Miltonic posture. It reads, "When once our heavenly-guided soul shall climb, / Then all this earthly grossness quit, / Attired with stars, we shall for ever sit, / Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time" (19-22). The soul here has the directionality that Augustine posits in the *Confessions* as its teleology points to its heavenly completion. Having thrown-off the shackles of temporality, the soul reaches eternity to do nothing more (or less) than 'sit' before God's throne. This posture, featured in most if not all of Milton's major poems, acts as a representation of divine atemporality through its absence of discernible action, removing the subject from the sequence of tenses that characterize temporality. Pulled back from scattered 'manyness', the soul rests forever at the throne of God. The poet succeeds in dismantling Time with the redemption of Christ's return for, as Augustine notes, "we have come down into temporal things, and by love of them we are kept from eternal things" (*De Vera Religione* - see notes 114-5). The end of time and the collective resurrection of humanity simultaneously end the power of Death and destroy the barrier between the temporal creations and the eternal creator.

If *On Time* introduces Milton's conception of temporality and its Augustinian relationship to eternity, *On The Morning of Christ's Nativity*[22], or the *Nativity Ode*, displays the poet's first application of Christ's time-altering

[22] See appendix for the complete poem.

emergence in creation through the Incarnation. Documenting the entrance of God into time, the *Nativity Ode,* by blending the epic and pastoral poetic genres, conflates the eternal and the temporal in a beatific vision of time's ending. First, the placement of the poem in Milton's first publication gives insight to the poet's generic intent. Milton, much like previous major poets, intentionally follows the trajectory of the master classical poet, Vergil. Through this *rota Vergili*,[23] the writer consciously constructs his poetic career in the stages of Pastoral, Georgic, and Epic. Here, as the first poem published in the 1645 volume, the Pastoral conventions reign. Its typical subject matter, however, often concerns nothing of greater significance than shepherds and their sheep, detailing the daily lives of simple people.[24] Despite this generically[25] lowly subject matter, Milton infuses what could be a characteristic occasional poem with the matter of epic, notably the inclusion of the birth commemorated being that of the Son of God. The poet writes, "This is the month, and this the happy morn / Wherein the son of heaven's eternal kind, / Of wedded maid, and virgin mother born, / Our great redemption from above did bring;" (1-4). Beginning with the mystery of the Incarnation and the miracle of the virgin birth, the first stanza of the ode thrusts on the reader an unexpectedly dense topic, suitable more to the likes of John Donne, Richard Crashaw or the other metaphysical poets. Similarly, the third stanza of what I will call the proem (a convention of epic itself) features an invocation of the muses: "Say heavenly muse…" (15). A trope of classical poetic

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[23] Literally, 'path of Vergil'.

[24] A prime example of this genre is Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. Also working in the model of the *rota Vergili*, Spenser begins his poetic career in the Pastoral.

[25] With reference to the various genres of poetry.

inspiration, the invocation functions to announce its high matter and the seriousness of the poet's undertaking.

More than mere interpretive flourishes, the concatenation of generically disparate concerns stands in for the grander movement of Christ into creation, eternity into temporality. In the same way that Milton injects the elevated epic into the lowly pastoral, he plays with the meaning of God's entrance into time, its disruptive effects on the created order, and its eventual ending of the temporal dimension through the prophesied return of Christ. All of these dramatic events, however, occur within a constructed framework that moves freely through the present of the poem and past of the poet, the night of the nativity, the present of the poet writing the poem, and the future and triumphant return of Christ. Echoing *On Time*, the *Nativity Ode* also looks to a moment when Time will end and all will be one.

A return to the opening of the poem presents the temporal fluidity enacted by Christ's birth. In addition to beginning with the matter of the Incarnation, the poem's start creates a complex combination of the divine atemporality descending onto the time of the poem and the created world: "This is the month, and this the happy morn / Wherein the son of heaven's eternal king," (1-2). Milton designates what ostensibly is the temporal location of the poem and, indeed, goes as far as to place it on a specific day on the calendar. Originating at the first Christmas and the nativity scene, the poem constructs the arrival of Christ into the world as an arrival into time, or rather a specific time. Here Milton equates time and the world, allowing the temporal marker to stand in

place of any spatial location. The privileging, therefore, of time as the broader subject of the *Nativity Ode* repositions the import of redemption to the subject of rectifying temporality through calling back the fallen from, as Augustine would label it, scattered 'manyness'. Indeed Milton typically eschews the subject of corporeality and, in this poem especially, avoids focusing on physical bodies, going so far as to omit the nativity's traditional maternal nursing (Rambuss, 522). [26] It is through this de-emphasis of the flesh that the fulfillment of the transformation of the Incarnation into a temporal, rather than physical, event so radically turns.

This intense focus on the timeliness of the poem and the event it commemorates is displaced, however, by the subsequent inclusion of the eternal within the decidedly temporal framework. Reminding the reader of the greatness of the birth of Christ, Milton designates the birth as the arrival of the son of the king, more specifically of the 'eternal' king. The inclusion of this temporally conscious descriptor emphasizes the extent to which the nativity is more concerned with the workings of time than of the physical manifestation of God on earth. If the goal of the Incarnation is not the eventual redemptive crucifixion but the redemption itself - the ending of time through embracing eternity - then it only seems appropriate that time is the marker for that change. Milton appears to operate within this exchange of bodies for time as he continues the stanza: "Of wedded maid, and virgin mother born, / Our great redemption from above did

[26] For more on this subject see Rambuss' "Sacred Subjects" n 71 and his contrast of Milton's preference for incorporeality to Richard Crashaw's representations of bodily excess and over-corporealization. Rambuss' *Closet Devotions* delves deeper into this idea on page 134.

bring;" (3-4). The divine sacrifice of the crucifixion has been elided in favor of a truncated account of salvation that is wholly spiritual. Here, with the arrival of the newborn Christ, Milton advances to the time when the redemptive act has already taken place. The virgin mother, though having given birth to the son of heaven's 'eternal king', more precisely, for Milton, has given birth to redemption itself. The traditionally separated actions of birth and purchase of eternal life meet in the contemporaneous tenses of the poem. Both accounted for in the same theological and temporal moment, the nativity and redemption stand side by side, outside the sequence of tenses.

To further elucidate the tense-altering effect that the morning of Christ's nativity has on the Augustinian flow of time, Milton continues his ode with a look to the past and a vision of the future to come. He concludes the stanza, "For so the holy sages once did sing, / That he our deadly forfeit should release, / And with his father work us a perpetual peace" (5-7). The narrative of the poem shifts once more, this time to the poet's present in order to recount the prophecies concerning Christ's future redemption of humanity. Those prophecies, however, are not relegated to the past by their position in history; rather, as prophecies they must inherently contain the future or, more appropriately in Augustinian terms, the present expectation of things. Indeed the stanza concludes with a desire for the future in which Christ will return to enact that 'perpetual peace'. This unending peace will come, the poem's final stanza will assure, with an ending of Time that gives way to a peace in perpetuity experienced simultaneously with the eternal presence of God. This is, as Milton describes it,

salvation.

It is through this perspective of the eternal, I argue, that Milton constructs the *Nativity Ode*. All times seemingly experienced simultaneously, the poem disregards the normal (i.e. chronological) flow of the sequences of events in favor of an understanding of the 'all'. In the same way that the ode's first stanza conflates the poet's present with the present of the nativity, the remainder of the poem plays with time's operations in order to diminish the significance of temporality. The poet himself, for example, experiences the moment of Christ's nativity through dismantling his own temporal constraints and inscribing himself within the ode. He recounts, "See how from far upon the eastern road / The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet, / O run, prevent them with thy humble ode" (22-24). Addressing himself in a meta-poetic construction in which the poet instructs himself and his craft, Milton places his actions alongside those of the three wise men journeying to greet the new-born Christ. Through including himself with the Magi, indeed before or even to the exclusion of the Magi having 'prevented' them, Milton disregards reality's temporal constraints as he presents the new-born with his own gift; his gift, however, is not perfume but instead his ode. This transition in time to the subject of the poem, the nativity, blends his positions as poet, believer, and prophet.

As the faithful 'sit' eternally before the divine throne at the conclusion of *On Time*, *all* things - nature, animals, shepherds - 'stand' transformed by Christ's arrival in the nativity: action is replaced by awe of eternity. The gods of the past, however, cower in fear. The Winter hides in shame (40), the ancient oracles are

struck dumb (172), Apollo is silenced (175), the nymphs 'mourn' the passing of paganism (188), Peor, Baalim (197), Moloch (205), and Osiris flee their temples (213). "Nor can [Osiris] be at rest" (216). The striking dichotomy between the reactions of the natural world and the pagan deities, if taken with an understanding of the application of time and eternity to the nativity, demonstrates the truth found in the eternal (Christ) and its power to eradicate what is false (the old gods). Furthermore if, as Augustine argues, the Fall is more specifically a fall into time, the arrival of the eternal into the temporal through the mystery of the Incarnation serves to correct the errors of time. As the 'perversions' of the good are displaced from the scene by Christ's nativity,[27] they are driven to greater movement and action. This movement stands in direct contrast to the Miltonic postures that represent eternity. While fixed positions reflect the stillness of the individual as he contemplates the divine, the fleeing of the pagan gods expresses the ever-moving temporality of fallen nature. The faithful, therefore, move closer to eternity while the old gods fly further into constant change and time.

Perhaps the clearest example of movement standing-in for the antithesis of the good, Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the instantiation of perversion of God's creation, is marked specifically by his mutability. Having been defeated in the war in heaven, Satan awakes to realize he and his followers have both changed location and appearance. He remarks, "…but O how fallen! How changed / From him, who in the happy realms of light / Clothed with transcendent brightness

[27] See the previous section for Milton's understanding of evil as privation or perversion of good as derived from Augustine's philosophical theology.

didst outshine / Myriads though bright:..." (PL I.84-87). Punning on his fall away from God, Satan recounts his physical fall out of heaven in terms of distance. Separated from God by his expulsion from paradise, the fallen angel inhabits a new space of his own making. Here, however, his luminescence resulting from being the 'bearer of light' changes to dullness.

No longer reflecting the light of God, Satan's appearance, like his spatial location, undergoes change. The appropriately titled Prince of Darkness continues his lament: "Nor what the potent victor in his rage / Can else inflict, do I repent or change, / Though changed in outward lustre; that fixed mind" (PL, 1.95-97). Having recognized his altered appearance, the fallen angel resolves to resist any further change and keep his mind 'fixed'. The forgetfulness that Regina Schwartz notes as characteristic of Satan appears again as he exhibits a (conscious or unconscious) selective memory. Satan, desiring to persist unaltered, ignores his already changed mind. It is in his transition from loyal follower to adamant rival that marks his first change of mind. With his decision to oppose God and his followers, Satan undergoes his mental change. His desire for constancy or fixity of mind, therefore, is descriptive of an attempt to mirror God's unchanging nature. Operating within the Neoplatonic tradition that informs Augustine's conception of God, Milton describes Satan as fashioning himself as his own creator and, therefore, as unalterable. Fulfilling this desire, of course, is impossible. Satan seemingly spends all of the epic traveling between his own chaos and the earth's Eden, tempting the first couple to forget. In this way, because of his adamantly rebellious pursuits, the fallen angel remains

unable to properly 'sit' with God.

With this contrast to the ideal Miltonic postures demonstrated in *Paradise Lost*, the aspirant state of fixation that the created things express at the moment of the nativity becomes apparent. For, though the pagan deities flee in fear of the Christian redeemer, "The stars with deep amaze / Stand fixed in steadfast gaze, / Bending one way their precious influence," (*Nativity Ode,* 69-71). The focus on the infant is unwavering: not only do the stars 'stand' in awe of Christ, they are immovable. Not only do the stars 'gaze' at the infant, they can look nowhere else. Exemplifying the epitome of what Laura Mulvey refers to as to-be-looked-at-ness, the newborn Christ halts all of nature with his birth, commanding that time stop in reverence (Mulvey, 809).[28] Indeed the light of the stars only shines in one direction, that is, toward the nativity scene. The standing posture, therefore, extends beyond the fixed footing and posture as such and includes the mental state of the observer. Though celestial bodies, the stars are animate and their desire for gazing at the infant is wholly consuming.

As if to refute any notion of time, the poem continues recounting the stars' firm placement and inability to give way to the temporal flow. The poet observes, "And will not take their flight, / For all the morning light," (72-3). Intractable, the stars forgo time's passage and stay in place with the sun/Son. Refusing to take 'flight', the posture in which Satan often finds himself in the epic, the stars force a blending of day and night as they occur, and therefore are experienced,

[28] Laura Mulvey's essay is clear that its designation of to-be-looked-at-ness is constrained within the active/male passive/female binaries used so heavily in classic cinema. I am extending the usage to include that power to command the gaze beyond the cinema such that the gender constraints are not of concern.

simultaneously.[29] Here Milton presents a glimpse from the perspective of the eternal. Christ's temporally disruptive birth and redemptive death provide insight into the coming age (though the vocabulary concerning time is inappropriate) when he will return to end time and all will be brought back from the Fall to the eternal. "But wisest fate says no, / This must not yet be so, / The babe lies yet in smiling infancy" (149-151). Jolting the poetic narrative back to the nativity's present, Milton reminds the faithful that their reward of eternity is not yet purchased: the redeemer remains an infant and the payment of the crucifixion has not 'yet' been exacted. Despite the vision of a time-less world, harmonious and unconstrained by temporal sequences, the time is not 'yet' for all to be all. Instead, in order to demonstrate the persisting bounds of time, the newborn Christ is simply a newborn, incapable of anything other than lying and 'smiling'. He, like everyone and everything fallen, will follow the rules of time until he erases time itself.

Having detailed the present and future ramifications of Christ's birth, the ode concludes with a return to the genre-blending nativity scene in which mother and child rest in the Miltonic, static postures of the eternal. Milton instructs, "But see the virgin blest, / Hath laid her babe to rest, / Time is our tedious song should here have ending:" (237-239). With the Blessed Virgin putting her child to sleep, the future-victorious redeemer for now does nothing more than lie in repose. Sleeping, the infant simply exists in his manger. He does nothing else, nor is he required to. His purpose, like that of the believer, is to

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[29] This is similar to *Paradise Lost's* depiction of the unfallen seasons. Pre-lapsarian Spring and Autumn dance 'hand in hand'. See PL 5.395.

exist with God until he is called upon to act. The directive, coupled with an indictment of time, justifies its lack of grand gestures by challenging time's flow with a deliberately ambiguous analysis of its movement. Not fully contained by temporality, the poem shifts constantly throughout the phases of time. If taken with its most apparent meaning, the poet both hails the promised end of time and labels its movement (I am using this term deliberately) as the direct opposite of the ideal posture. Said in a different way, time itself is always moving into the future. Since the present, as defined by Augustine, is merely the moment at which the future slips into the past, time continually alters its 'position' in order to account for what is to come. Its ending, therefore, would mean a lack of movement or a fixed position that would recall the eternal.

Understood through an alternative reading, however, the line concerning time's ending transforms into another instance of the meta-poetics discussed previously. For Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, an equally persuasive rendering of the poet's declaration reads, "It is time our tedious song should have ending" (*The Major Works*, 740). In this version, instead of a general call for time's termination, it is Milton's call for an end to his 'song', his poem. Having belabored his 'humble ode', the poet desires to conclude his gift (the poem itself) to the newborn Christ and join the eternal posture. As time travels full-circle in the *Ode* from nativity to prophesied redemption, so too does the work of the poet. His 'song' must end in order that he might cease action and be in the eternal. The final lines of the poem reflect this attitude: "Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending: / And all about the courtly stable, / Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable" (242-4). In the epic-ode setting of the

generically paradoxical courtly and rustic nativity, Christ lies, the Blessed Virgin watches, and the angels sit. In an attempt to preview the future in which time is not present, the Miltonic postures demonstrated in *Sonnet 16, On Time*, and *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* assume a purpose that brings the faithful closer to eternity and, therefore, God.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in John Milton's poetry through an application of Augustinian philosophy, time is the final barrier to full communion with God in eternity. In much the same way that Augustine's theories concerning pre-lapsarian life, ideas of sin and its origin, and the nature of God manifest in Milton's prose and verse, so too can we see the pervading influence of the philosopher's conception of psychological time. Having adopted St. Augustine's understanding of a scattered and distended temporal mind, Milton demonstrates a paradoxically confused and proximally eternal viewpoint of the created world, mixing and resequencing the passage of time in an attempt to move closer to God. Particularly evident in the *Nativity Ode*, Milton positions himself as poet at the arrival of the eternal within the temporal - the birth of Christ.

With the time-altering effects demonstrated throughout the narrative of the poetry, the instantiation of eternity appears not in a direct reference to Augustine or an explicit utterance of God's view of temporality. Rather, eternity emerges out of representations of the simple, static postures of the devout faithful. Through the use of these postures of 'sitting' and 'standing', Milton applies the Augustinian distention of time and pulls the individual back from scattered 'manyness' to be with the divine in unmoving eternity. To 'stand and wait' at the conclusion of *Sonnet 16*, to 'sit' before both the throne of God and the manger of the infant in *On Time* and *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* is all

that the creator asks of his followers. Thus God moves them to be still in the 'all is'[30] in closer relation to the one they seek.

Though my project is concerned primarily with Milton's early poetry, the application of Augustine' s philosophy of time is also relevant to the later work as well. Of particular interest for future study are *Paradise Lost* (here only referenced in passing), *Paradise Regained*, and *A Masque*. Just as the faithful are called to 'stand' before the throne of God in *On Time*, so too does the Lady, the central figure of *A Masque* and the incarnation of chastity, sit in defiance of her sorcerer tempter. By simply sitting and, therefore, *being* outside the changes of the temporal world can the faithful be closer to the creator in divine eternity.

[30] This is in reference to Milton's *Sonnet 7*. "All is, if I have grace to use it so / As ever in my great task master's eye."

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