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Augustine and Heidegger: Curiosity and the Structure of Time

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Augustine and Heidegger: Curiosity and the Structure of Time

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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*an forte nescio, quemadmodum dicam quod scio? ei mihi, qui nescio saltem quid nesciam!*¹

While it feels like I have been thinking about the issue of time in Augustine and Heidegger for a *long* time, I still think there is a great disparity between my perception about the topic and my ability to communicate and clarify the problem at hand. I am comforted by the idea that walking through *Being and Time* is like “forty years in the desert.”² Regardless, the point of acknowledging this difficulty is to make sure that any deficiencies in the following text are not due to a lack of talent or understanding in my instructors.

During the spring 2015 semester at Louisiana State University (LSU), I was able to take Dr. Gregory Schufreider’s phenomenology course on Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and Dr. Mary Sirridge’s medieval philosophy course, which included a reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*. The simultaneous experience of these two courses created a reading of Heidegger as influenced by Augustine, and a reading of Augustine as a Heideggerian. While this effect may be for better or worse, I have found each individual offers an insightful reading of the other, but I have also attempted to understand both thinkers in their own right. In order to accomplish this I have spent hours in discussion with both Dr. Schufreider and Dr. Sirridge. This has included scheduled meetings, brief discussions between classes, and at times taking up most of their office hours. But since

¹ Augustine, *Confessions* 11.25.32. Latin text from O’Donnell. F. J. Sheed translates, “Or perhaps I do know, but simply do not know how to express what I know. Alas for me, I do not even know what I do not know!”

² From Dr. G. Schufreider’s phenomenology course at LSU, spring 2015.

their offices at the time were next door to one another, this project could not have been made any more convenient in that respect.

In addition to my professors in philosophy, Dr. Joseph Kronick in the English Department has encouraged this investigation through numerous conversations and guidance in reading Heidegger's writing on poetry and language in a course on criticism.³ This has provided a better understanding of Heidegger's concepts, especially in regard to the nature of thinking and being in the world. His enthusiasm was an important piece in helping me move forward with the thesis. It is these three professors, Drs. Kronick, Schufreider, and Sirridge that have made this project possible and I will always be grateful for their instruction.

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³ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1971).

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Finally, I want to thank my wife, Ashley, for her patience and strength. In March of 2015 we welcomed our first child, Evangeline Kate. Since that moment our lives have changed dramatically, but Ashley has constantly sacrificed and supported this project and my academic pursuits. She has listened to my ramblings about Augustine, Heidegger, and time. My first stint at LSU began in 2005 and ended unpleasantly in 2007. When I returned in 2013 there were two aspects of my life that had change dramatically, my faith and my family. Ashley has given me a stability and strength that was nonexistent in my earlier years. Without her my return to LSU, and much less this project, would not have been possible.

Abstract

In the following I am attempting to show how Augustine's critique of curiosity and analysis of time in *Confessions* presents a structure of time that is similar to the structure found in Martin Heidegger's "authentic temporality" from *Being and Time*. In order to do this I will begin by addressing the ways Augustine's concept of time has been historically presented: (i) the Aristotelian succession of present moments, (ii) the Husserlian view of internal time-consciousness or psychological time, (iii) a combination of an external time and internal time, and (iv) in relation to a redemptive history.

Next, I will provide an analysis from *Confessions* XI to show how each of the views reveals an aspect of Augustine's overall system. While many have recognized a combination of the accounts above, no presentation has thoroughly explained Augustine's understanding of time and our relation to it. In the analysis I will show how time, for Augustine, includes a redemptive history in its relationship to God or the eternal, the *distentio animi*, the three-fold present, overall structure and form, and a successive experience. While the close analysis will be on Augustine, I will acknowledge Heidegger's attempt to detheologize philosophy by removing the relationship between time and eternity in philosophy in order to understand his approach to Augustine. At this point I will also introduce the concept of "Authentic Temporality" in order to apply this notion to Augustine's structure of time.

Finally, I will examine Augustine's critique of curiosity from Book X within his overall system of time. This will show that, according to Augustine, in the structure of time, which includes a relationship to the past, present, and future, an individual can prioritize different aspects of time, particularly the present. His criticism of curiosity,

therefore, is that it causes an individual to prioritize the present instead of the future. I am arguing that this structural feature and ability to prioritize an aspect of time is similar to Heidegger's criticism of *falling* as prioritizing the present and his concept of authentic temporality, which is being essentially futural. If I can show this, it will reveal a significant element from Augustine that is present in Heidegger's understanding of time.

1. Introduction

There is a difficulty specific to the reading of Saint Augustine, so much does he appear to one and the same time unavoidable and inaccessible.⁴

The relationship between the thought of Augustine and Martin Heidegger is extensive, a connection that has not gone unnoticed by scholars. This assertion is neither difficult nor unfounded, especially considering the earlier part of Heidegger's career when Augustine was a primary course topic.⁵ In regard to Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*, Augustine's influence is explicitly found in §36 with a lengthy quotation from his critique of curiosity in book X of *Confessions*.⁶ At this point in *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to illustrate the mode of everyday Dasein that abandons itself to the world and this mode reveals the phenomenon of falling. However, while Heidegger incorporates this inquiry into curiosity from Augustine, in regard to the more important issue of time, he adamantly criticizes Augustine's view as essentially following the Aristotelian tradition. But is Heidegger's critique of Augustine justified? In what follows, part of the goal will be to show that Heidegger oversimplifies Augustine's understanding by only presenting a part of his overall theory of time. After this is established, I will argue that analyzing Augustine's critique of curiosity within his structure of time reveals the ability to prioritize an aspect of time. This ability is an important feature in Heidegger, and will demonstrate a greater compatibility between the two thinkers than has been previously acknowledged.

⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1.

⁵ See *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* by Martin Heidegger, which includes the course, "Augustine and Neo-Platonism" for the summer semester 1921.

⁶ References to the English translation of Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (*Being and Time* [New York: Harper, 1962]) will appear as "BT" followed by the appropriate page number.

Augustine's understanding of time can be drawn from *Confessions*, *City of God*, *The Trinity*, and *On Genesis*. Historically, *Confessions* has received the most attention; and since this is the only Augustinian reference in Heidegger's critique, the following discussion will not look at the other works that include references to time. Despite this restriction, an overall and thorough view of Augustine's concept can still be determined. But before looking at Augustine more closely, a review of how his concept of time has been approached will be useful when examining *Confessions* XI more closely. While the following chapter does not provide an exhaustive list of individuals or approaches, it does include the significant contributions and predominant interpretations of Augustine's understanding of time. Once this survey has been completed, an analysis of *Confessions* XI will reveal four fundamental elements to Augustine's theory of time. After Augustine's understanding of time has been presented, a brief chapter on Heidegger will introduce two important concepts. First, I will try to contextualize Heidegger's approach to Augustine by understanding the process of detheologizing philosophy and the removing eternity from the meaning of time. Second, I will present the concept of "authentic temporality" in order to apply this structure to Augustine. Finally, I will compare each author's criticisms of curiosity and how it functions within their framework on time.

2. Approaching Augustine's Theory of Time

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Augustine's work and influence, both in his own period and in the subsequent history of Western philosophy.⁷

2.1 Aristotle and Present Succession

In the second part of the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims "the ordinary way of understanding [time] has become explicit in an interpretation precipitated in the traditional concept of time, which has persisted from Aristotle to Bergson and even later."⁸ More than 400 pages later, he explains that this ordinary or traditional interpretation of time "shows itself as a sequence of 'nows' which are constantly 'present-at-hand,' simultaneously passing away and coming along."⁹ In this way, what we call the present is gone as soon as we have named it. While Augustine is implicitly included in this broad sweep of history, Heidegger makes his faults explicit in two separate lectures, *The Concept of Time* and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.¹⁰

The Concept of Time is taken from a lecture delivered to the Marburg Theological Society in 1924, and begins by distinguishing between philosophy and theology. I will return to this distinction below when acknowledging Heidegger's project of de-theologization, but for now the focus is on his reference to Augustine. After his introductory remarks, Heidegger investigates what a clock and the "now" can reveal about time with the following questions: "Do I dispose over the Being of time, and do I also mean myself in the now? Am I myself the now and my existence time? Or is it

⁷ David Vincent Meconie and Eleonore Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

⁸ *BT*, 39.

⁹ *BT*, 474.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time; The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.

ultimately time itself that procures for itself the clock in us?”¹¹ Immediately after this series of questions, Heidegger claims, “Augustine in the eleventh book of his *Confessions*, pursued the question so far as to ask whether the spirit itself is time. And Augustine left the question standing at this point.”¹² He then quotes the Latin from *Confessions* XI.27.36, and offers his own paraphrase:

In you, my spirit, I measure times; you I measure, as I measure time. Do not cross my path with the question: How is that? Do not mislead me into looking away from you through a false question. Do not obstruct your own path with the confusion of what may concern you yourself. In you, I say repeatedly, I measure time; the transitory things encountered bring you into a disposition which remains, while those things disappear. The disposition I measure in present existence, not the things that pass in order that this disposition first arise. My very finding myself disposed, I repeat, is what I measure when I measure time.¹³

Heidegger uses Augustine’s idea of measuring time within the mind for two reasons: first, to justify his claim that the historical understanding of time has followed Aristotle, and second, to introduce the being that is Dasein.

In the quote above, Augustine claims the mind is in a “present existence” that encounters “transitory things” that “disappear” as they pass. Therefore, for Augustine, according to Heidegger, the “now” is a present existence that has the ability to measure time by measuring entities that go from existence to non-existence, which Augustine claims earlier in *Confessions* XI. Accordingly, reading this passage in isolation, Heidegger can declare that Augustine has followed Aristotle by presenting time as a successive experience of present moments. In addition to this association, Heidegger uses this section from *Confessions* to introduce the being that is Dasein within the framework

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 5E.

¹² Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 5E-6E

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 6E; while the translators use “spirit” for both *anime* and *Geist*, I will follow the more common translation of “mind.”

of the lecture. Heidegger claims that Augustine left the question “standing,” but recognizes him for acknowledging the problem of time and the difficulty in attempting to explain the relation between time and the mind. Therefore, according to Heidegger, the proper understanding of the relation between a human being and time has been problematic and still needs to be explained: “indeed, it would then have to be the case that being temporal, correctly understood, is the fundamental assertion of Dasein with respect to its Being.”¹⁴

While *The Concept of Time* offers a brief explanation in understanding Heidegger’s criticism of Augustine, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* is more explicit. In §19 of *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger addresses the issue of time and temporality by attempting to present the “common understanding of time.”¹⁵ He acknowledges the “strange and puzzling” aspect of understanding time and again, cites a lengthy passage from *Confessions*:

What then is time; who can explain it easily and briefly? Who has comprehended it in thought so as to speak of it? But what is there that we mention in our discourse more familiar and better known than time? And we always understand it whenever we speak of it, and we understand it too when we hear someone else speak of it. –What then is time? If no one asks me about it, I know; if I am supposed to explain it to one who asks, I do not know; yet I say confidently that I know: if nothing were to pass away there would be no past time, and if nothing were coming there would be no time to come, and if nothing were to exist there would be no present time.¹⁶

Again, Heidegger’s use of Augustine has two purposes.

First, Augustine suggests a coming towards and passing away of time, which reflects the succession of present moments. Again, Heidegger can use this to limit

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 7E.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indiana University Press, 1988), 229.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 229.

Augustine's understanding of time to the Aristotelian concept. Second, since time has historically been such a problematic concept, Heidegger can declare the need to return to "primordial time" in order to gain a proper understanding of the phenomenon. After the introductory remarks in §19, Heidegger addresses what has been considered the two "standard" interpretations of time, which can be found in Aristotle's *Physics* and Augustine's *Confessions*. However, according to Heidegger, Augustine's interpretation is the same as Aristotle's because he agrees with him "on a series of essential determinations."¹⁷ He explains, "Aristotle's investigations are conceptually more rigorous and stronger while Augustine sees some dimensions of the time phenomenon more originally."¹⁸ Still, regardless of Augustine's ability to recognize some unique aspects of time, these passages from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* show that when Heidegger makes his criticism of the traditional understanding of time that spans from Aristotle to Bergson in *Being and Time*, he is fully aware of *Confessions XI* and his incorporation of Augustine within the tradition. But Heidegger is not the only philosopher who claims Aristotle and Augustine are essentially the same.

In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine by Jean-Luc Marion is a phenomenological reading of *Confessions* that compares Augustine's notion of selfhood with postmodernity. In the chapter "Time, or the Advent," Marion offers a detailed analysis of Augustine's concept of time, which includes references to several works by Augustine, but is primarily focused on *Confessions XI*. While Marion recognizes that in order to fully understand Augustine, one must recognize the theological framework and

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 231

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 232

relationship between time and eternity in *Confessions*, he also fully supports Heidegger's critique with the following:

Contrary to what current commentaries say, the Augustinian aporia of time has nothing original about it, since it retrieves that, more original, of Aristotle. It is neither a positive doctrine of Saint Augustine responding to a previous section nor a difficulty that he himself would have discovered but just a simple reformulation of a Greek aporia. If ever Saint Augustine does contribute some new elements, they will serve to address this previous aporia, in no way to pursue it or to confirm it.¹⁹

Marion's assertion is both surprising and problematic because of his detailed analysis and his ability to recognize the implications of Augustine's understanding. Before the comparison to Aristotle, Marion carefully makes the following point: "Let us therefore admit the hypothesis that, for Saint Augustine the question of time can and should be posed only on the basis of creation, so as to be articulated together with eternity."²⁰

However, Augustine's attempt to understand time in the present in relation to the eternal and redemptive history makes his theory of time essentially different from Aristotle. This detail will be looked at more closely in the analysis of *Confessions* XI below, but now the focus will be on the psychological interpretation of Augustine and his relationship to Edmund Husserl.

2.2 Husserl and Psychological Time

In Simo Knuutila's essay "Time and creation in Augustine," he concludes that

Augustine's theory of time is nothing more than a treatise on psychology:

Augustine's terminology is close to Husserl's account of phenomenological time, which is based on a distinction between primal impression, retention, and protention which is associated with the temporal determination of now, past, and future ... Contrary to what has often been maintained, Augustine does not offer

¹⁹ Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 205.

²⁰ Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 195.

any philosophical or theological definition of time in Book 11 of *Confessions*. He tries to explain how we are aware of time and how its existence could be explained from the psychological point of view.²¹

Knuuttila's is not alone in his association of Augustine with Husserl. In the first volume of his trilogy *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricouer claims that Augustine's genius is found in the relationship between the threefold present and the distention of the mind, which leads Ricouer to declare that both Augustine and Husserl have a "subjective hermeneutics" of time.²² In addition to this association, as we will see below, Ricouer will go on to promote an interpretation of Augustine's theory of time, which includes both subjective and objective elements.

Still, it is hard to argue against the association between Augustine and Husserl, especially after reading Husserl's first paragraph to a 1905 lecture on internal time-consciousness:

The analysis of time-consciousness is an ancient burden for descriptive psychology and epistemology. The first person who sensed profoundly the enormous difficulties inherent in this analysis, and who struggled with them almost to despair, was Augustine. Even today, anyone occupied with the problem of time must still study Chapters 14-28 of Book XI of the *Confessiones* thoroughly. For in these matters our modern age, so proud of its knowledge, has failed to surpass or even to match the splendid achievement of this great thinker who grappled so earnestly with the problem of time. We may still say today with Augustine: *si nemo a me quaerat, scio, si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio*.²³

Besides revealing the impact and importance of Augustine in Husserl's thinking, the introduction shows how Augustine's theory of time essentially becomes a treatise on psychology.

²¹ Simo Knuuttila, "Time and creation in Augustine" in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 94.

²² Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative, volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 16, 84-86.

²³ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Springer, 2008), 1.

From the beginning Husserl associates the problem of time with how an individual experiences time in the mind. He, therefore, is not concerned with the relationship between creation and time or the eternal and time. Instead, his focus is on features in Augustine that would act as precursors to his own understanding. We can see this if we compare the content of chapters 14 and 28 of *Confessions* (the first and last in Husserl's recommendation) with Husserl's concept of retention and protention.

At the end of chapter 14, Augustine claims that "we can affirm that time is only in that it tends towards not-being."²⁴ But this is not Augustine's ultimate conclusion since he will retract it, reintroduce it, and then modify it at the conclusion of the book. In chapter 28 Augustine explains how the mind experiences time: "For the mind expects, attends and remembers: what it expects passes away, by way of what it attends to, into what it remembers."²⁵ Now consider the following from Husserl in a section titled "The Constituted Immanent Contents":

In each primal phase that originally constitutes the immanent content we have retentions of the preceding phases and protentions of the coming phases of precisely this content, and these protentions are fulfilled just as long as this content endures. These 'determinate' retentions and protentions have an obscure horizon; in flowing away, they turn into indeterminate retentions and protentions related to the past and future course of the stream.²⁶

In both Augustine and Husserl there is the notion of time flowing from what is expected to what passes away. This explains why Husserl would recommend focusing on chapters 14-28 in Book XI of *Confessions*, but this implies that only this portion of Book XI is focused on time or that only this section is significant in addressing the problem. As a result, chapters 1-13 and 29-31 of Book XI are immediately excluded from Husserl's

²⁴ *Confessions* XI.14.17, 243.

²⁵ *Confessions* XI.18.37, 254.

²⁶ Husserl, *Internal Time*, 89.

analysis, as well as anyone who may follow his instruction. So while chapters 14-28 are essential to Augustine's theory, this focus neglects the overarching structure of how time relates to creation and eternity, which of course are not important to Husserl's analysis or understanding. Still, this explains how Augustine has become so closely associated with Husserl with respect to time.

There is one final approach to Augustine's theory of time that needs to be addressed before moving forward, and this attempts to find a middle ground between the interpretations by Husserl and Heidegger.

2.3 A Combination of the External and Internal

In Heidegger's analysis of Augustine, time is essentially an external event that happens as a series of successive present moments. In Husserl, Augustine's concept of time becomes a psychological or internal experience of how an individual encounters time. In addition to these interpretations, some have used Augustine's theory of time to introduce a concept that recognizes a tension between an internal and external time. The most notable examples come from Paul Ricouer's narrative time and Richard James Severson's redemptive time.

In his trilogy, *Time and Narrative*, Ricouer offers a comprehensive analysis of time by addressing Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger. Ricouer's first analysis begins with the problem of time in Augustine's *Confessions* XI, which he claims has a "psychological solution."²⁷ With this initial examination, Ricouer introduces the foundation of his argument for "narrative time," which is that no "pure phenomenology

²⁷ Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, I, 6.

of time” can exist.²⁸ The reason for this, according to Ricouer, is because “genuine discoveries of the phenomenology of time cannot be definitively removed from the aporetic realm.”²⁹ Instead, a phenomenology of time must account for inherent tensions between the phenomenological and physical:

Our narrative poetics needs the complicity as well as the contrast between internal time-consciousness and objective succession, making all the more urgent the search for narrative mediations between the discordant concordance of phenomenological time and the simple succession of physical time.³⁰

Narrative time, for Ricouer, is able to hold on to the tension that arises between the internal and external world. It allows us to “admit that a psychological theory and a cosmological theory mutually occlude each other to the very extent they imply each other.”³¹ Ricouer recognizes the ability of the mind to grasp time in both an internal and external aspect, which I argue is a fundamental feature in Augustine, but he also declares that Augustine removed all aporias from his concept of time. Of course this allows Ricouer to introduce the concept of narrative time, which explicitly acknowledges the aporetic element.³² But as Richard Severson sees it, Ricouer fails to acknowledge what he calls the relationship between “redemptive time” and “creative time.”³³

In *Time, Death, and Eternity: Reflecting on Augustine’s ‘Confessions’ in Light of Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’*, Severson argues that Ricouer fails to properly acknowledge the theological implications in Augustine’s theory of time by not

²⁸ Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, I, 6.

²⁹ Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, I, 83.

³⁰ Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, III, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 22.

³¹ Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, III, 14.

³² Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, I, 83.

³³ Richard James Severson, *Time, Death, and Eternity: Reflecting on Augustine’s ‘Confessions’ in Light of Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’*, (Scarecrow Press, 1995), 150.

recognizing the emphasis on the relationship between God and the world in time.

According to Severson, there are two different ways God is related to time in Augustine and that is “redemptive time (God acting in the soul)” and “creative time (God acting in the world).”³⁴ And while Severson thinks Augustine’s theory falls short because he “does not adequately distinguish these two different senses of time,” he does recognize that Augustine’s inquiry is not entirely focused on the psychological presence of time.³⁵

Finally, one more interpretation in relation to Augustine’s theory on time must be addressed, and it comes from Joseph Rivera in “Figuring the Porous Self: St. Augustine and the Phenomenology of Temporality.”³⁶ While Ricouer argues that Augustine essentially maintains a psychological view of time, and Severson suggests that Augustine does not adequately differentiate between redemptive time and creative time, Rivera fully credits Augustine with holding a view of the self that exists oscillating between an external and internal world:

By locating the self in ‘between’ the interior and exterior spheres of disclosure, we maintain that Augustine propounded a porous self that does justice to the intrinsic dignity of the physical body and its circumspection within the temporal horizon of the world and yet also to the soul’s interior spiritual ascent to the eternal through contemplation.³⁷

Rivera goes on to explain, “For Augustine, human existence is pervaded by the flow of temporality, a factum, thanks to creation.”³⁸ Rivera’s focus is on the nature of a porous self that is “created in time and exists in its finitude thrown from past to future and back

³⁴ Severson, *Time, Death, and Eternity*, 150.

³⁵ Severson, *Time, Death, and Eternity*, 150.

³⁶ Joseph Rivera, “Figuring the Porous Self: St. Augustine and the Phenomenology of Temporality,” *Modern Theology* 29:1 (2013), 83-103.

³⁷ Joseph Rivera, “Porous Self,” 85.

³⁸ Joseph Rivera, “Porous Self,” 89.

again in constant mutability.”³⁹ Rivera recognizes that Augustine reveals a relationship between the individual and the unity of time, which is the project of *Confessions*, in revealing a being that is related to the past and moving forward. Still, Rivera’s emphasis on how the self is revealed in the present fails to acknowledge the structure of objective time that is outside the self for Augustine.

While the sections above have references to several individuals, the goal has been to show three prominent and distinctive approaches in understanding Augustine’s theory of time. Also, in each interpretation there is an element of truth that should prove to be advantageous as we look at *Confessions* XI in the next chapter.

³⁹ Joseph Rivera, “Porous Self,” 90.

3. Augustine and Time in *Confessions* XI

The *Confessions* are a masterpiece of strictly intellectual autobiography. Augustine communicates such a sense of intense personal involvement in the ideas he is handling, that we are made to forget that it is an exceptionally difficult book.⁴⁰

Augustine begins Book XI of *Confessions* with a plea to understand how God relates to the world and the individual in time: “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?”⁴¹ As a result of the questions he starts with, Augustine will use all 31 chapters of Book XI to reveal his journey and attempt to determine the nature of time itself. As he proceeds the development of his thought is, simply, complicated. His investigation is filled with proclamations of doubt and when he proposes conclusions, he will usually retract them when he introduces the next problem. Regardless of this feature as a literary device to affect the reader, Augustine reveals a tension between how an individual understands time compared to how one experiences time. Ultimately, there are four basic features to Augustine’s theory of time in *Confessions* XI: objective time of history, the subjective experience of time for the individual, the sequential nature of objective and subjective time, and finally the form and structure of time in relationship to eternity.

3.1 Objective Time of the World and History

For Augustine, the meaning and essence of time cannot be separated from eternity, and this will be a major point of contention for Heidegger. Still, as Marion pointed out above, in order to understand Augustine one must see his philosophy within a theological

⁴⁰ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1967), 160.

⁴¹ *Confessions* XI.1.1, 233.

framework. Even Wilhelm Dilthey, on whom Heidegger depends heavily on in the final sections of *Being and Time*, acknowledged this when examining the philosophy of history: “The philosophy of history more than any other area of metaphysics is clearly rooted in religious experience, and withers and decays when this connection is severed.”⁴² So with that understanding, we come back to Augustine, who after a series of prayers for wisdom, begins to focus on the mechanics of creation in order to understand time.

He begins with allusions to Aristotle’s theory of time by affirming the relationship between time and movement when God speaks: “From this 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.”⁴³ Movement, therefore, is only possible within time. But this does not lead Augustine to the idea that time is determined by movement. He explicitly affirms this at the conclusion of chapter 24 after recalling in chapter 23 how the sun stood still while the Israelites slaughtered the Amorites: “Therefore time is not the movement of a body.”⁴⁴ Still, he needs to explain further the difference between time and eternity.

After declaring that change and movement must happen in time, Augustine examines the nature of God’s words to describe eternity:

For this is not an utterance in which what has been said passes away that the next thing may be said and so finally the whole utterance be complete: but all in one

⁴² Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works, Volume I: Introduction to the Human Sciences*, editors Rudolf A. Makkreeel and Frithjof Rodi, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 147.

⁴³ *Confessions*, XI.6.8, 237. The “moving image of eternity” can also be found in Plato’s *Timaeus*. However, throughout Heidegger’s analysis, Augustine is always compared to Aristotle in regard to the concept of time.

⁴⁴ *Confessions* XI.24.31, 250.

act, yet abiding eternally: otherwise it would be but time and change and no true eternity, no true immortality.⁴⁵

According to Augustine, God's words reveal a nature without movement or conclusion, for these are determining features of time. This leads to a distinguishing feature between time and eternity, which is their respective to the present.

If movement happens in time, but is not possible in eternity, then movement in time is associated with the existence of the past, present, and future. Something must go from being still to being in motion. In addition to movement revealing the three different aspects of time, eternity, according to Augustine, determines the past and future, revealing a history of objective time outside of any individual: "see that time with its past and future must be determined by eternity, which stands and does not pass, which has in itself no past or future."⁴⁶ While this already reveals the sequential nature of time, for now the focus is on how time is the moving image of eternity. In eternity, there is no aspect of past or future, but all is present. In time, however, the created world exists in time that has been determined by eternity. Everything that exists for God simultaneously is unrolling in time as the future moves to the past. This predetermined past and future is created in time and independent of any individual human being. The existence of time is not dependent or isolated to what is subjective or only a psychological phenomenon. Still, Augustine suggests that how an individual understands and experience this objective time is subjective.

3.2 Subjective Time and the *distentio animi*

⁴⁵ *Confessions* XI.7.9, 238.

⁴⁶ *Confessions* XI.11.13, 241.

One of the main problems for Augustine in *Confessions* XI is how it is possible to measure time. The issue is initially hinted at in chapter 11 when he states, “a long time is long only from the multitude of movements.”⁴⁷ However, in chapter 14 he concludes that time goes from being towards not-being, and this leads him deeper into the problem of measuring time: “But in what sense can that which does not exist be long or short?”⁴⁸ To address this enigma he begins by attempting to better understand the present, effectively following the Aristotelian tradition: “If we conceive of some point of time which cannot be divided into even the minutest parts of moments, that is the only point that can be called present.”⁴⁹ But this does not resolve the problem for Augustine, because he still holds that once the point has passed it no longer exists. Therefore, at the end of chapter 17 he retracts his previous conclusion for the non-existence of the past and future by stating, “both past and future must exist.”⁵⁰ But now the problem has shifted from the ability to measure time to the location of time that is not the present: “If the future and past exist, I want to know where they are.”⁵¹

Augustine does not try to propose an alternative reality that would account for measuring the past and future. Instead, he quickly modifies his previous conclusion and transitions to the issue of how an individual experiences time as the past, present, and future. Since time can only exist here and nowhere else, and there is the intuition that time moves from the future to the past, then the future and past exist “only as present.”⁵² This means time that has already happened is present as memory, and time that has not

⁴⁷ *Confessions* XI.11.13, 241.

⁴⁸ *Confessions* XI.15.18, 243.

⁴⁹ *Confessions* XI.15.20, 244.

⁵⁰ *Confessions* XI.16.22, 245.

⁵¹ *Confessions* XI.17.23, 245.

⁵² *Confessions* XI.17.23, 245.

yet happened is foretold from the present, which leads to Augustine's notion of the threefold present: "there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things future."⁵³

The threefold present is fundamental to understanding how an individual experiences and relates to time. For Augustine, the individual that exists in time must orient herself from the present and so the past is related to as past experiences and the future as future experiences. But this has not yet resolved the problem of measurement, because the duration of time that is measured, whether to the past or to the future, no longer exists because everything is now set in the present. There must be some sort of stretching out or extension, i.e. the *distentio animi*.

As Augustine considers the passing of time, he returns to the relationship between time and movement. It is here that he uses the mass slaughter of the Amorites to affirm that movement does not determine time. In the midst of this explanation he states, "Therefore I see time as in some way extended," and then immediately asks, "But do I see it? Or do I only seem to see it?"⁵⁴ F. J. Sheed points out that the word for extended, *distentio*, carries a meaning of extension that is compounded by distress, which explains Augustine's afflicted digression in the next chapter: "Alas for me, I do not even know what I do not know!" While Socrates might have criticized the bishop at this point, Augustine is closer to presenting a theory explaining how the mind experiences time.⁵⁵

Since Augustine has maintained that an individual exists in a threefold present and measures time as it is passing, he concludes that the mind is extended by time. At this

⁵³ *Confessions* XI.20.26, 246.

⁵⁴ *Confessions* XI.23.30, 250.

⁵⁵ Socrates often criticizes people of Athens for assuming to know something they do not. Famously, he declares that he at least knows that he does not know.

point, it is important to point out that by subjective time I do not mean a relative experience that is unique to a particular individual. By subjective time I mean how an individual subject that is a human being experiences time in general. While that may appear to be contradictory, it is not. Augustine is presenting the mind as stretching out with time, but this is not just an illusion in the mind. Similarly, Sheed wants to separate the *distention animi* from what has been considered subjective or psychological time: “Augustine boldly conjectures not that the mind merely experiences time in different ways (so-called subjective or psychological time), but that human knowing and consciousness are constitutive of *all* time.”⁵⁶ In regard to the concept of subjective time, I am not suggesting an experience that may be considered to be unreal. For Augustine, the *distentio animi* displays the real way that a human being exists in time, and now he can finally explain how time is measured:

It is in you, O my mind, that I measure time . . . What I measure is the impress produced in you by things as they pass and abiding in you when they have passed: and it is present. I do not measure the things themselves whose passage produced the impress; it is the impress that I measure when I measure time. Thus either that is what time is, or I am not measuring time at all.⁵⁷

Augustine’s proposed impression on the mind brings together objective time that exists in the external world and how time exists internally for a human being.

As the external world passes through its present moments from the future to the past, the individual is stretched out through impressions. The impressions in the mind must stretch out so that they are not themselves sequential moments. Otherwise, they would not be capable of measurement, as the problem of non-existence would reoccur as they moved from the present to the past. Also, Augustine does not suggest that this is an

⁵⁶ *Confessions*, 252. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ *Confessions* XI.27.36, 253.

illusion but the reality of time for the individual as he concludes with the affirmation, “that is what time is.”⁵⁸

At this point, Augustine wants to account for how the impression in the mind relates to the past, present, and future. Here, Augustine’s theory looks most like a forerunner to Husserl’s phenomenology: “For the mind expects, attends and remembers: what it expects passes, by way of what it attends to, into what it remembers.”⁵⁹ While this describes how the mind acts in relation to time, it does confirm that an individual experiences time sequentially as opposed to God’s experience of a present without succession.

3.3 Sequential Nature of Time

The sequential nature of time in Augustine is the fundamental reason Heidegger accuses him of following in the footsteps of Aristotle. Indeed, Augustine does maintain the element of succession in both objective time of the world and subjective time in the individual. Objective time in the world proceeds out of creation and moves forward through the present, as the future moves toward the past. As an impression in the mind, the present still experiences sequences in a similar way, even though the extendedness seems to stretch the present attention. However, aside from the relationship between time and eternity, Augustine’s theory is unique because regardless of time passing there is a form with a beginning and an end or a past and a future that is real. While Augustine clearly holds a present orientation for subjective time, the next section will show that the form always exists.

⁵⁸ *Confessions* XI.27.36, 253.

⁵⁹ *Confessions* XI.28.37, 252.

3.4 Form and Structure in the Canticle

In the middle of chapter 28, Augustine explains how reciting a psalm illustrates how the mind expects, attends, and remembers time, and he uses this to show how these acts exist simultaneously:

Whole energy of the action is divided between my memory, in regard to what I have said, and my expectation, in regard to what I am still to say. But there is a present act of attention, by which what was future passes on its way to becoming past. The further I go in my recitation, the more my expectation is diminished and my memory lengthened, until the whole of my expectation is used up when the action is completed and has passed wholly into my memory.⁶⁰

Augustine's description suggests that while the psalm may be recited and only one part is being attended to in the present, the past in memory and the future in anticipation still persist. The form of the song or object as a whole does not cease to exist. And if Augustine had ended the analogy at this point, he would just be giving a psychological account of how an individual mind works in relation to a particular object. Instead, he extends the illustration to apply to the life of an individual and history as a whole:

And what is true of the whole psalm, is true for each part of the whole, and for each syllable: and likewise for any longer action, of which the canticle may be only a part: indeed it is the same for the whole life of man, of which all a man's actions are parts: and likewise for the whole history of the human race, of which all the lives of all men are parts.⁶¹

Just as a canticle has an overall form and structure that continues to exist when an individual part is being attended to, the life of an individual has an absolute form and structure beyond what is revealed in the present moment. Not only does an individual life have form and structure, but also the entire history of the world.

⁶⁰ *Confessions* XI.28.38, 254.

⁶¹ *Confessions* XI.28.38, 254-255.

At this point, Augustine has returned to the idea that time is the unrolling of a reality, which also has an existence in eternity, with a predetermined beginning and end. Initially, the canticle illustration provided an account of subjective time and the mind's ability to remember, attend, and expect. However, Augustine gives the analogy a double meaning in order to bring together the relationship between time and eternity. Since Augustine believes that God is in "a today which does not yield place to any tomorrow or follow upon any yesterday," there is no future for God. Everything *is*. Therefore, the future of each individual human being as well as the entire race of mankind, which is "present" before God, must be revealed in time.

Also, for Augustine, the beginning and end of each individual is both distinct and similar. Within Augustine's theological framework, the entire human race is affected by the fall, which is also applied to each individual specifically. This is revealed as a motivating principle in his writing of *Confessions*:

Not to Thee, O my God, but in Thy presence I am telling it to my own kind, to the race of men, or rather to that small part of the human race that may come upon these writings. And to what purpose do I tell it? Simply that I and any other who may read may realise out of what depths we must cry to Thee.⁶²

The fall is a decisive event in the past that continues to affect each and every individual, explaining the nature of the human race and describing the great moral separation between God and creation. While this past event continues to perpetuate itself throughout history, those fortunate enough to live after Christ have the opportunity to be redeemed from the fall. Now, two events that occurred in the past of objective time continue to affect the individual in the present and the orientation to the future.

⁶² *Confessions* II.3.5, 27.

In Book X, Augustine describes his present situation and how he is oriented towards God: “It is true that now we see through a glass in a dark manner and not yet face to face, so that as long as I am on pilgrimage and not with You, I am more present to myself than to You.”⁶³ Augustine describes his himself as being in the present and looking towards a future reality when he will be in the presence of God. But there is a tension when Augustine claims he is “more present” to himself than to God.

Augustine as an individual that exists in time cannot exist in eternity or be more present to God. Still, there is a future reality of being with God toward which he orients himself towards, which represents the end of time for the individual and the end of the structure of the canticle. Also, as the *Confessions* show, this orientation is capable of changing during the course of life depending on the nature of the redeemed relationship. Altogether, the fall of man and death of Christ in the past and the complete presence with God in the future come together to be revealed in the present. This is the whole of the canticle for the individual and the entire human race. What still has to be shown is how Augustine reveals an ability to prioritize the future over the present through his critique of curiosity. But first, Heidegger’s approach to Augustine and authentic temporality needs to be addressed.

⁶³ *Confessions* X.5.6, 192.

4. Understanding Heidegger's Approach to Augustine

Whereas theology involves throwing oneself upon God, philosophy involves the throwing life back upon itself.⁶⁴

Heidegger obviously considered Augustine an individual worthy of discussion. He is a prominent figure in multiple lecture courses and is referenced multiple times in *Being and Time*. Still, Heidegger does not consider Augustine's understanding of time to offer anything fundamentally different from Aristotle, because, for Heidegger, philosophy does not look at time in relationship to eternity.

4.1 De-theologizing Philosophy

Early into the lecture, *The Concept of Time*, Heidegger explains the fundamental distinction between theology and philosophy in regard to the understanding of time:

Theology is concerned with human existence as Being before God. It is concerned with the temporal Being of such existence in its relation to eternity . . . The philosopher does not believe. If the philosopher asks about time, then he has resolved to understand time in terms of time.⁶⁵

Philosophy and theology, according to Heidegger, are fundamentally different because of the relationship to the subject matter: "Religion differs from philosophy not in terms of its content, but merely in terms of the relation it maintains with that content."⁶⁶ Heidegger wanted to de-theologize philosophy by removing any understanding that was based on theological processes. Now, this explains how, in Heidegger's thinking, Aristotle and Augustine have the same understanding of time. When time is no longer the unrolling of eternity, then a future reality in Augustine (that is, presence with God) does not exist.

⁶⁴ Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 109.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 1E-2E

⁶⁶ Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, 112.

then time in Augustine simply becomes a series of present moments. Then what is the correct relationship to time for Heidegger? The answer: authentic temporality.

4.2 Authentic Temporality

In §74 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger presents time as something that is unified between Dasein's having-been and anticipation of the future that is thrown back into the present:

Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially futural so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factual 'there' by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own thrownness and be in the moment of vision for 'its time.' Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate—that is to say, authentic historicity.⁶⁷

For the purposes of this paper, the point to recognize is that time is the unity of three dimensions that cannot be reduced to a series of present successions. Also, Dasein is able to prioritize one dimension over the other, which is the case when Dasein gives itself over to curiosity.

Before moving forward, I need to briefly address the relationship between Being-towards-death and authenticity. In Heidegger, death for Dasein is in each case its own, acting as a horizon that causes Dasein to be thrown back onto itself in its own facticity. There is a parallel feature in Augustine in the relationship between the individual and eternity. The future reality with God, or the eternal, does not lead to transcendence for the individual, but acts as the "limiting horizon."⁶⁸ The individual in time is thrown back upon itself as the result of eternity revealing the individual's temporal nature.

⁶⁷ *BT* 437.

⁶⁸ Severson, *Time*, 21.

5. Curiosity

In both Augustine and Heidegger, curiosity is considered to be an idle curiosity that is empty and without purpose. Heidegger's critique has been challenged as anti-intellectual, but this should not be the case. The idea is of a curiosity without direction. After examining how Heidegger incorporates the phenomenon of curiosity within his understanding of time, I will attempt to show a similar criticism and structure is present in *Confessions*.

5.1 The Falling of Dasein

In §36 of *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger uses Augustine's concept of curiosity to show the falling of Dasein that occurs in the everyday Being of Being-there. According to Heidegger, curiosity is a way that Dasein is absorbed into the world and conceals itself. This concealing is Dasein in its inauthentic existence, which can occur in the falling of the everyday being of Dasein through the existential modes of idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. Each mode includes an emptiness that shows language, knowledge and understanding to become meaningless, and so Dasein fails to be in a way that is authentic.

When Heidegger introduces curiosity (*Neugier*), he initially explains that sight is the disclosure of understanding in which Dasein can "comport" itself to the world.⁶⁹ In the everydayness of seeing, there is the tendency of curiosity to reveal itself in perception. Heidegger wants the understanding of curiosity to be existential-ontological, which is how curiosity appears to the being of Dasein in a particular way. This is fundamentally different, according to Heidegger, from the basic notion of cognition

⁶⁹ *BT*, 214.

throughout the history of western philosophy. The tradition of cognition maintained that truth came from beholding or seeing.⁷⁰ As a result, this idea argues that human beings exist as a subject that beholds a particular object. Heidegger wants to move beyond this distinction and seek an understanding of how the world appears to Dasein through the phenomenon of curiosity.

In order to show this, Heidegger begins by using Augustine's analysis from *Confessions* Book X, Chapter 35, to show that seeing is referred to in language as a way of reflecting understanding or knowledge:

Seeing belongs properly to the eyes. But we even use this word 'seeing' for the other senses when we devote them to cognizing. For we do not say 'Hear how it glows,' or 'Smell how it glistens,' or 'Taste how it shines,' or 'Feel how it flashes'; but we say of each, 'See'; we say that all this is seen. We not only say, 'See how that shines,' when the eyes alone can perceive it; but we even say, 'See how that sounds,' 'See how that is scented,' 'See how that tastes,' 'See how hard that is.' Therefore the experience of the senses in general is designated as the 'lust of the eyes;' for when the issue is one of knowing something, the other senses, by a certain resemblance, take to themselves the function of seeing—a function in which the eyes have priority.⁷¹

This interpretation from Augustine reveals distinct features of human beings that reveal the kind of being that Dasein is. Dasein exists as Being-in-the-world that is thrown into the world within a particular surrounding. As a result, Dasein comports itself towards the world in a way of interpreting the world as surrounding. This interpretation is Dasein disclosing itself through sensual distinctions that are revealed through the equiprimordiality of being and the world.

Immediately after the quotation from Augustine, Heidegger addresses how Dasein as Being-in-the-world is directed towards its surroundings. Heidegger claims that "Being-

⁷⁰ *BT*, 215.

⁷¹ *BT*, 215-216. Heidegger is quoting from Augustine's *Confessions* book X, chapter 35.

in-the-world is proximally absorbed in the world of concern,” and “this concern is guided by circumspection.”⁷² Concern, for Dasein, is the attention or the focus that is given to something, and this comes about through circumspection, which is an intentional directing and discerning. Curiosity, however, is consumed with seeing “*just* in order to see.” It appears to be actively engaged, but it is only preoccupied with an image. Heidegger claims that curiosity is only concerned with novelty because it is new, becomes restless and distracted, and is groundless without any intentionality. “Curiosity is everywhere and nowhere.”⁷³ Heidegger views this kind of curiosity as consuming Dasein without Dasein being aware of this activity. Dasein is overcome by the world, but is deceived by the appearance of obtaining information. Within the structure of temporality, curiosity reveals when Dasein has prioritized the present over the past and future.

5.2. Curiosity Distracts the Soul from God

There are several chapters in Book X of *Confessions*, where Augustine is addressing the relationship between the senses and temptations. Towards the end of this analysis, Augustine brings his attention to what he considers to be a more dangerous temptation: the lust of the eyes.⁷⁴ Augustine takes this phrase from John’s first epistle in the New Testament, and he interprets this to be the gluttony that can come from the appetite to know. Augustine’s view is that the senses, as well as many desires are designed to bring an individual to proper worship of God; however, due to the fallen nature of man, these

⁷² *BT*, 216.

⁷³ *BT*, 217.

⁷⁴ *Confessions* X.35.54, 219.

can be overcome by temptation and lead to overindulgence. Augustine views the desire for knowledge in the same light. There is a proper way in which knowledge is intended to function, but it can succumb to temptation and, according to Augustine, lead to “vain desire and curiosity” that is “cloaked under the name of learning and knowledge.”⁷⁵

At this point in *Confessions*, Augustine examines terminology related to sight when referring to the other senses: “see how it smells.”⁷⁶ He uses the phenomenon to argue that sight is the primary sense for acquiring knowledge. Next, Augustine distinguishes between pleasure and curiosity. Augustine assumes a Platonic notion of higher goods and claims that pleasure directs the senses towards that which is beautiful. Curiosity, he claims, is directed towards lesser goods “through a mere itch to experience and find out.”⁷⁷ This leads to Augustine’s first illustration in the chapter, and he inquires what pleasure can be gained from observing a mutilated body. He recognizes that spectators often respond with panic and shock, but this does not cause them to cease seeking out such events. He continues that “this disease of curiosity” is the reason for showing “various freaks... in the theatres.”⁷⁸ Augustine is reinforcing the idea that curiosity is a temptation that comes from the perversion of the desire to know. But ultimately, curiosity takes an individual’s focus away from God:

For when our heart is made the stage for such things and is overladen with the throngs of this endless vanity, our prayers are often interrupted and distracted . . . the great business of prayer is broken off through the inrush of every sort of idle thought.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Confessions* X.35.54, 219.

⁷⁶ *Confessions* X.35.54, 219.

⁷⁷ *Confessions* X.35.55, 220.

⁷⁸ *Confessions* X.35.55, 220.

⁷⁹ *Confessions* X.35.57, 221.

Besides the nature of the lowly distractions that overwhelm the individual Augustine, the main issue of concern is how the distractions affect one's prayers and focus towards God.

At the end of analyzing *Confessions* XI, we found that the canticle revealed that a form and structure of time existed for every individual. For Augustine, an individual is in proper standing when primarily focused on the relationship with God, a relationship that will be ultimately fulfilled in the future. Curiosity, however, breaks up the unity and becomes isolated in the present. As Joseph Torchia explains this in his analysis on *Confessions* X, "Curiosity confines the soul's attention to what is partial and fragmented, to the neglect of the whole."⁸⁰ The structure of time is not made as explicit in Augustine's critique of curiosity, but the moral implications reveal that he maintains a view similar to Heidegger where one dimension of time can be prioritized over another.

⁸⁰ Joseph Torchia, O.P., *Restless Mind: Curiositas & The Scope of Inquiry in St. Augustine's Psychology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2013), 140.

6. Conclusion

Both Augustine and Heidegger in their own right present a structure of temporality that reveals a unity and extension. In this project I am not necessarily arguing for Augustine to be considered a proto-phenomenologist nor am I addressing the issue of returning to Augustine after Heidegger. However, we can see that Augustine's temporality is not simply a sequence of 'nows' from the future to the past, but includes elements of objective time, subjective time, being sequential, and maintaining a form and unified structure. Hopefully, comparing each individual's critique of curiosity reveals that Augustine presents a relationship between the individual and time that is similar to Heidegger's notion of being able to prioritize one dimension of time over another.

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