

The Confessions (Book XI)

Augustine of Hippo

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Confession

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INTRODUCTION

Why does Genesis begin "In the beginning"? What was God doing before creation? Augustine's answer — that time itself is a creature, and that God exists in an eternal present in which "before" has no meaning — leads him to one of the most celebrated analyses of time in Western philosophy. "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one who asks, I know not." These pages are read as seriously by philosophers as by theologians.

The design of his confessions being declared, he seeks from God the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and begins to expound the words of Genesis 1:1, concerning the creation of the world. The questions of rash disputers being refuted, What did God before he created the world? That he might the better overcome his opponents, he adds a copious disquisition concerning time.

Chapter 1. By Confession He Desires to Stimulate Towards God His Own Love and That of His Readers.

O Lord, since eternity is Yours, are You ignorant of the things which I say unto You? Or see Thou at the time that which comes to pass in time? Why, therefore, do I place before You so many relations of things? Not surely that You might know them through me, but that I may awaken my own love and that of my readers towards You, that we may all say, Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. I have already said, and shall say, for the love of Your love do I this. For we also pray, and yet Truth says, Your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him. Matthew 6:8 Therefore do we make known unto You our love, in confessing unto You our own miseries and Your mercies upon us, that You may free us altogether, since You have begun, that we may cease to be wretched in ourselves, and that we may be blessed in You; since You have called us, that we may be poor in spirit, and meek, and mourners, and hungering and thirsty after righteousness, and merciful, and pure in heart, and peacemakers. Matthew 5:3-9 Behold, I have told unto You many things, which I could and which I would, for You first would have me confess unto You, the Lord my God, for You are good, since Your mercy endures forever.

Chapter 2. He Begs of God that Through the Holy Scriptures He May Be Led to Truth.

But when shall I suffice with the tongue of my pen to express all Your exhortations, and all Your terrors, and comforts, and guidances, whereby You have led me to preach Your Word and to dispense Your Sacrament unto Your people? And if I suffice to utter these things in order, the drops of time are dear to me. Long time have I burned to meditate in Your law, and in it to confess to You my knowledge and ignorance, the beginning of Your enlightening, and the remains of my darkness, until infirmity be swallowed up by strength. And I would not that to anything else those hours should flow away, which I find free from the necessities of refreshing my body, and the care of my mind, and of the service which we owe to men, and which, though we owe not, even yet we pay.

O Lord my God, hear my prayer, and let Your mercy regard my longing, since it burns not for myself alone, but because it desires to benefit brotherly charity; and You see into my heart, that so it is. I would sacrifice to You the service of my thought and tongue; and do Thou give what I may offer unto You. For I am poor and needy, Thou rich unto all that call upon You, Romans 10:12 who free from care carest for us. Circumcise from all rashness and from all lying my inward and outward lips. Exodus 6:12 Let Your Scriptures be my chaste delights. Neither let me be deceived in them, nor deceive out of them. Lord, hear and pity, O Lord my God, light of the blind, and strength of the weak; even also light of those that see, and strength of the strong, hearken unto my soul, and hear it crying out of the depths. For unless Your ears be present in the depths also, whither shall we go? Whither shall we cry? The day is Yours, and the night also is Yours. At Your nod the moments flee by. Grant thereof space for our meditations among the hidden things of Your law, nor close it against us who knock. For not in vain have You willed that the obscure secret of so many pages should be written. Nor is it that those forests have not their harts, betaking themselves therein, and ranging, and walking, and feeding, lying down, and ruminating. Perfect me, O Lord, and reveal them unto me. Behold, Your voice is my joy, Your voice surpasses the abundance of pleasures. Give that which I love, for I do love; and this have You given. Abandon not Your own gifts, nor despise Your grass that thirsts. Let me confess unto You whatsoever I shall have found in Your books, and let me hear the voice of praise, and let me imbibe You, and reflect on the wonderful things of Your law; even from the beginning, wherein You made the heaven and the earth, unto the everlasting kingdom of Your holy city that is with You.

Lord, have mercy on me and hear my desire. For I think that it is not of the earth, nor of gold and silver, and precious stones, nor gorgeous apparel, nor honours and powers, nor the pleasures of the flesh, nor necessities for the body, and this life of our pilgrimage; all which are added to those that seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Matthew 6:33 Behold, O Lord my God, whence is my desire. The unrighteous have told me of delights, but not such as Your law, O Lord. Behold whence is my desire. Behold, Father, look and see, and approve; and let it be pleasing in the sight of Your mercy, that I may find grace before You, that the secret things of Your Word may be opened unto me when I knock. I beseech, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, the Man of Your right hand, the Son of man, whom You made strong for Yourself, as Your Mediator and ours, through whom You have sought us, although not seeking You, but sought us that we might seek You, — Your Word through whom You have made all things, John 1:3 and among them me also, Your Only-begotten, through whom You have

called to adoption the believing people, and therein me also. I beseech You through Him, who sits at Your right hand, and makes intercession for us, Romans 8:34 in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:3 Him do I seek in Your books. Of Him did Moses write; John 5:4-6 this says Himself; this says the Truth.

Chapter 3. He Begins from the Creation of the World — Not Understanding the Hebrew Text.

Let me hear and understand how in the beginning Thou made the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1:1 Moses wrote this; he wrote and departed — passed hence from You to You. Nor now is he before me; for if he were I would hold him, and ask him, and would adjure him by You that he would open unto me these things, and I would lend the ears of my body to the sounds bursting forth from his mouth. And should he speak in the Hebrew tongue, in vain would it beat on my senses, nor would anything touch my mind; but if in Latin, I should know what he said. But whence should I know whether he said what was true? But if I knew this even, should I know it from him? Verily within me, within in the chamber of my thought, Truth, neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian, without the organs of voice and tongue, without the sound of syllables, would say, He speaks the truth, and I, immediately assured of it, confidently would say unto that man of Yours, You speak the truth. As, then, I cannot inquire of him, I beseech You — You, O Truth, full of whom he spoke truth — You, my God, I beseech, forgive my sins; and do Thou, who gave to that Your servant to speak these things, grant to me also to understand them.

Chapter 4. Heaven and Earth Cry Out that They Have Been Created by God.

Behold, the heaven and earth are; they proclaim that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whereas whatsoever has not been made, and yet has being, has nothing in it which there was not before; this is what it is to be changed and varied. They also proclaim that they made not themselves; therefore we are, because we have been made; we were not therefore before we were, so that we could have made ourselves. And the voice of those that speak is in itself an evidence. You, therefore, Lord, made these things; Thou who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou who art good, for they are good; Thou who art, for they are. Nor even so are they beautiful, nor good, nor are they, as Thou their Creator art; compared with whom they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor are at all. These things we know, thanks be to You. And our knowledge, compared with Your knowledge, is ignorance.

Chapter 5. God Created the World Not from Any Certain Matter, But in His Own Word.

But how did Thou make the heaven and the earth, and what was the instrument of Your so mighty work? For it was not as a human worker fashioning body from body, according to the fancy of his mind, in somewise able to assign a form which it perceives in itself by its inner eye. And whence should he be able to do this, had not Thou made that mind? And he assigns to it already existing, and as it were

having a being, a form, as clay, or stone, or wood, or gold, or such like. And whence should these things be, had not Thou appointed them? Thou made for the workman his body — Thou the mind commanding the limbs — Thou the matter whereof he makes anything, — Thou the capacity whereby he may apprehend his art, and see within what he may do without — Thou the sense of his body, by which, as by an interpreter, he may from mind unto matter convey that which he does, and report to his mind what may have been done, that it within may consult the truth, presiding over itself, whether it be well done. All these things praise You, the Creator of all. But how do You make them? How, O God, did Thou make heaven and earth? Truly, neither in the heaven nor in the earth did Thou make heaven and earth; nor in the air, nor in the waters, since these also belong to the heaven and the earth; nor in the whole world did Thou make the whole world; because there was no place wherein it could be made before it was made, that it might be; nor did Thou hold anything in Your hand wherewith to make heaven and earth. For whence could You have what You had not made, whereof to make anything? For what is, save because You are? Therefore You spoke and they were made, and in Your Word You made these things.

Chapter 6. He Did Not, However, Create It by a Sounding and Passing Word.

But how did Thou speak? Was it in that manner in which the voice came from the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son? Matthew 17:5 For that voice was uttered and passed away, began and ended. The syllables sounded and passed by, the second after the first, the third after the second, and thence in order, until the last after the rest, and silence after the last. Hence it is clear and plain that the motion of a creature expressed it, itself temporal, obeying Your Eternal will. And these your words formed at the time, the outer ear conveyed to the intelligent mind, whose inner ear lay attentive to Your eternal word. But it compared these words sounding in time with Your eternal word in silence, and said, It is different, very different. These words are far beneath me, nor are they, since they flee and pass away; but the Word of my Lord remains above me forever. If, then, in sounding and fleeting words Thou said that heaven and earth should be made, and thus made heaven and earth, there was already a corporeal creature before heaven and earth by whose temporal motions that voice might take its course in time. But there was nothing corporeal before heaven and earth; or if there were, certainly Thou without a transitory voice had created that whence You would make the passing voice, by which to say that the heaven and the earth should be made. For whatsoever that were of which such a voice was made, unless it were made by You, it could not be at all. By what word of Yours was it decreed that a body might be made, whereby these words might be made?

Chapter 7. By His Co-Eternal Word He Speaks, and All Things are Done.

You call us, therefore, to understand the Word, God with You, God, John 1:1 which is spoken eternally, and by it are all things spoken eternally. For what was spoken was not finished, and another spoken until all were spoken; but all things at once and forever. For otherwise have we time and change, and not a true eternity, nor a true immortality. This I know, O my God, and give thanks. I know, I confess to You, O Lord, and whosoever is not unthankful to certain truth, knows and blesses You with me. We know, O Lord, we know; since in proportion as anything is not what it was, and is what it was not, in that proportion does it die and arise. Not anything, therefore, of Your Word gives place and comes into place again, because it is truly immortal and eternal. And, therefore, unto the Word co-eternal with You, You at once and for ever say all that You say; and whatever You say shall be made, is made; nor do You make otherwise than by speaking; yet all things are not made both together and everlasting which You make by speaking.

Chapter 8. That Word Itself is the Beginning of All Things, in the Which We are Instructed as to Evangelical Truth.

Why is this, I beseech You, O Lord my God? I see it, however; but how I shall express it, I know not, unless that everything which begins to be and ceases to be, then begins and ceases when in Your eternal Reason it is known that it ought to begin or cease where nothing begins or ceases. The same is Your Word, which is also the Beginning, because also It speaks unto us. Thus, in the gospel He speaks through the flesh; and this sounded outwardly in the ears of men, that it might be believed and sought inwardly, and that it might be found in the eternal Truth, where the good and only Master teaches all His disciples. There, O Lord, I hear Your voice, the voice of one speaking unto me, since He speaks unto us who teaches us. But He that teaches us not, although He speaks, speaks not to us. Moreover, who

teaches us, unless it be the immutable Truth? For even when we are admonished through a changeable creature, we are led to the Truth immutable. There we learn truly while we stand and hear Him, and rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice, John 3:29 restoring us to that whence we are. And, therefore, the Beginning, because unless It remained, there would not, where we strayed, be whither to return. But when we return from error, it is by knowing that we return. But that we may know, He teaches us, because He is the Beginning and speaks unto us.

Chapter 9. Wisdom and the Beginning.

In this Beginning, O God, have You made heaven and earth — in Your Word, in Your Son, in Your Power, in Your Wisdom, in Your Truth, wondrously speaking and wondrously making. Who shall comprehend? Who shall relate it? What is that which shines through me, and strikes my heart without injury, and I both shudder and burn? I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike it; and I burn inasmuch as I am like it. It is Wisdom itself that shines through me, clearing my cloudiness, which again overwhelms me, fainting from it, in the darkness and amount of my punishment. For my strength is brought down in need, so that I cannot endure my blessings, until Thou, O Lord, who hast been gracious to all mine iniquities, heal also all mine infirmities; because You shall also redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with Your loving-kindness and mercy, and shall satisfy my desire with good things, because my youth shall be renewed like the eagle's. For by hope we are saved; and through patience we await Your promises. Romans 8:24-25 Let him that is able hear You discoursing within. I will with confidence cry out from Your oracle, How wonderful are Your works, O Lord, in Wisdom have You made them all. And this Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning have You made heaven and earth.

Chapter 10. The Rashness of Those Who Inquire What God Did Before He Created Heaven and Earth.

Lo, are they not full of their ancient way, who say to us, What was God doing before He made heaven and earth? For if, say they, He were unoccupied, and did nothing, why does He not for ever also, and from henceforth, cease from working, as in times past He did? For if any new motion has arisen in God, and a new will, to form a creature which He had never before formed, however can that be a true eternity where there arises a will which was not before? For the will of God is not a creature, but before the creature; because nothing could be created unless the will of the Creator were before it. The will of God, therefore, pertains to His very Substance. But if anything has arisen in the Substance of God which was not before, that Substance is not truly called eternal. But if it was the eternal will of God that the creature should be, why was not the creature also from eternity?

Chapter 11. They Who Ask This Have Not as Yet Known the Eternity of God, Which is Exempt from the Relation of Time.

Those who say these things do not as yet understand You, O Thou Wisdom of God, Thou light of souls; not as yet do they understand how these things be made which are made by and in You. They even endeavour to comprehend things eternal; but as yet their heart flies about in the past and future motions

of things, and is still wavering. Who shall hold it and fix it, that it may rest a little, and by degrees catch the glory of that everstanding eternity, and compare it with the times which never stand, and see that it is incomparable; and that a long time cannot become long, save from the many motions that pass by, which cannot at the same instant be prolonged; but that in the Eternal nothing passes away, but that the whole is present; but no time is wholly present; and let him see that all time past is forced on by the future, and that all the future follows from the past, and that all, both past and future, is created and issues from that which is always present? Who will hold the heart of man, that it may stand still, and see how the still-standing eternity, itself neither future nor past, utters the times future and past? Can my hand accomplish this, or the hand of my mouth by persuasion bring about a thing so great?

Chapter 12. What God Did Before the Creation of the World.

Behold, I answer to him who asks, What was God doing before He made heaven and earth? I answer not, as a certain person is reported to have done facetiously (avoiding the pressure of the question), He was preparing hell, says he, for those who pry into mysteries. It is one thing to perceive, another to laugh — these things I answer not. For more willingly would I have answered, I know not what I know not, than that I should make him a laughing-stock who asks deep things, and gain praise as one who answers false things. But I say that Thou, our God, art the Creator of every creature; and if by the term heaven and earth every creature is understood, I boldly say, That before God made heaven and earth, He made not anything. For if He did, what did He make unless the creature? And would that I knew whatever I desire to know to my advantage, as I know that no creature was made before any creature was made.

Chapter 13. Before the Times Created by God, Times Were Not.

But if the roving thought of any one should wander through the images of bygone time, and wonder that You, the God Almighty, and All-creating, and All-sustaining, the Architect of heaven and earth, for innumerable ages refrained from so great a work before You would make it, let him awake and consider that he wonders at false things. For whence could innumerable ages pass by which You did not make, since You are the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by You? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? Since, therefore, You are the Creator of all times, if any time was before You made heaven and earth, why is it said that You refrained from working? For that very time You made, nor could times pass by before You made times. But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What were You doing then? For there was no then when time was not.

Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else would not Thou precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity, Thou precedest all times past, and survivest all future times, because they are future, and when they have come they will be past; but You are the same, and Your years shall have no end. Your years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come, that all may come. All Your years stand at once since they do stand; nor were they when departing excluded by coming years, because they pass not away; but all these of ours shall be when all shall cease to be. Your years are one day,

and Your day is not daily, but today; because Your today yields not with tomorrow, for neither does it follow yesterday. Your today is eternity; therefore You begot the Co-eternal, to whom You said, This day have I begotten You. You have made all time; and before all times You are, nor in any time was there not time.

Chapter 14. Neither Time Past Nor Future, But the Present Only, Really is.

At no time, therefore, had Thou not made anything, because You had made time itself. And no times are co-eternal with You, because You remain for ever; but should these continue, they would not be times. For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who even in thought can comprehend it, even to the pronouncing of a word concerning it? But what in speaking do we refer to more familiarly and knowingly than time? And certainly we understand when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another. What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not. Yet I say with confidence, that I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time. Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not; and the future is not as yet? But should the present be always present, and should it not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present — if it be time — only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be — namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?

Chapter 15. There is Only a Moment of Present Time.

And yet we say that time is long and time is short; nor do we speak of this save of time past and future. A long time past, for example, we call a hundred years ago; in like manner a long time to come, a hundred years hence. But a short time past we call, say, ten days ago: and a short time to come, ten days hence. But in what sense is that long or short which is not? For the past is not now, and the future is not yet. Therefore let us not say, It is long; but let us say of the past, It has been long, and of the future, It will be long. O my Lord, my light, shall not even here Your truth deride man? For that past time which was long, was it long when it was already past, or when it was as yet present? For then it might be long when there was that which could be long, but when past it no longer was; wherefore that could not be long which was not at all. Let us not, therefore, say, Time past has been long; for we shall not find what may have been long, seeing that since it was past it is not; but let us say that present time was long, because when it was present it was long. For it had not as yet passed away so as not to be, and therefore there was that which could be long. But after it passed, that ceased also to be long which ceased to be.

Let us therefore see, O human soul, whether present time can be long; for to you is it given to perceive and to measure periods of time. What will you reply to me? Is a hundred years when present a long time? See, first, whether a hundred years can be present. For if the first year of these is current, that is present, but the other ninety and nine are future, and therefore they are not as yet. But if the second year is current, one is already past, the other present, the rest future. And thus, if we fix on any middle year of this hundred as present, those before it are past, those after it are future; wherefore a hundred years cannot be present. See at least whether that year itself which is current can be present. For if its first month be current, the rest are future; if the second, the first has already passed, and the remainder are not yet. Therefore neither is the year which is current as a whole present; and if it is not present as a whole, then the year is not present. For twelve months make the year, of which each individual month which is current is itself present, but the rest are either past or future. Although neither is that month

which is current present, but one day only: if the first, the rest being to come, if the last, the rest being past; if any of the middle, then between past and future.

Behold, the present time, which alone we found could be called long, is abridged to the space scarcely of one day. But let us discuss even that, for there is not one day present as a whole. For it is made up of four-and-twenty hours of night and day, whereof the first has the rest future, the last has them past, but any one of the intervening has those before it past, those after it future. And that one hour passes away in fleeting particles. Whatever of it has flown away is past, whatever remains is future. If any portion of time be conceived which cannot now be divided into even the minutest particles of moments, this only is that which may be called present; which, however, flies so rapidly from future to past, that it cannot be extended by any delay. For if it be extended, it is divided into the past and future; but the present has no space. Where, therefore, is the time which we may call long? Is it nature? Indeed we do not say, It is long, because it is not yet, so as to be long; but we say, It will be long. When, then, will it be? For if even then, since as yet it is future, it will not be long, because what may be long is not as yet; but it shall be long, when from the future, which as yet is not, it shall already have begun to be, and will have become present, so that there could be that which may be long; then does the present time cry out in the words above that it cannot be long.

Chapter 16. Time Can Only Be Perceived or Measured While It is Passing.

And yet, O Lord, we perceive intervals of times, and we compare them with themselves, and we say some are longer, others shorter. We even measure by how much shorter or longer this time may be than that; and we answer, That this is double or treble, while that is but once, or only as much as that. But we measure times passing when we measure them by perceiving them; but past times, which now are not, or future times, which as yet are not, who can measure them? Unless, perchance, any one will dare to say, that that can be measured which is not. When, therefore, time is passing, it can be perceived and measured; but when it has passed, it cannot, since it is not.

Chapter 17. Nevertheless There is Time Past and Future.

I ask, Father, I do not affirm. O my God, rule and guide me. Who is there who can say to me that there are not three times (as we learned when boys, and as we have taught boys), the past, present, and future, but only present, because these two are not? Or are they also; but when from future it becomes present, comes it forth from some secret place, and when from the present it becomes past, does it retire into anything secret? For where have they, who have foretold future things, seen these things, if as yet they are not? For that which is not cannot be seen. And they who relate things past could not relate them as true, did they not perceive them in their mind. Which things, if they were not, they could in no way be discerned. There are therefore things both future and past.

Chapter 18. Past and Future Times Cannot Be Thought of But as Present.

Allow me, O Lord, to seek further; O my Hope, let not my purpose be confounded. For if there are times past and future, I desire to know where they are. But if as yet I do not succeed, I still know, wherever they are, that they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if there also they be future, they are not as yet there; if even there they be past, they are no longer there. Wheresoever, therefore, they are, whatsoever they are, they are only so as present. Although past things are related as true, they are drawn out from the memory, — not the things themselves, which have passed, but the words conceived from the images of the things which they have formed in the mind as footprints in their passage through the senses. My childhood, indeed, which no longer is, is in time past, which now is not; but when I call to mind its image, and speak of it, I behold it in the present, because it is as yet in my memory. Whether there be a like cause of foretelling future things, that of things which as yet are not the images may be perceived as already existing, I confess, my God, I know not. This certainly I know, that we generally think before on our future actions, and that this premeditation is present; but that the action whereon we premeditate is not yet, because it is future; which when we shall have entered upon, and have begun to do that which we were premeditating, then shall that action be, because then it is not future, but present.

In whatever manner, therefore, this secret preconception of future things may be, nothing can be seen, save what is. But what now is is not future, but present. When, therefore, they say that things future are seen, it is not themselves, which as yet are not (that is, which are future); but their causes or their signs perhaps are seen, the which already are. Therefore, to those already beholding them, they are not future, but present, from which future things conceived in the mind are foretold. Which conceptions again now are, and they who foretell those things behold these conceptions present before them. Let now so multitudinous a variety of things afford me some example. I behold daybreak; I foretell that the sun is about to rise. That which I behold is present; what I foretell is future — not that the sun is future, which already is; but his rising, which is not yet. Yet even its rising I could not predict unless I had an image of it in my mind, as now I have while I speak. But that dawn which I see in the sky is not the rising of the sun, although it may go before it, nor that imagination in my mind; which two are seen as present, that the other which is future may be foretold. Future things, therefore, are not as yet; and if they are not as yet, they are not. And if they are not, they cannot be seen at all; but they can be foretold from things present which now are, and are seen.

Chapter 19. We are Ignorant in What Manner God Teaches Future Things.

You, therefore, Ruler of Your creatures, what is the method by which Thou teachest souls those things which are future? For You have taught Your prophets. What is that way by which Thou, to whom nothing is future, dost teach future things; or rather of future things dost teach present? For what is not, of a certainty cannot be taught. Too far is this way from my view; it is too mighty for me, I cannot attain unto it; but by You I shall be enabled, when You shall have granted it, sweet light of my hidden eyes.

Chapter 20. In What Manner Time May Properly Be Designated.

But what now is manifest and clear is, that neither are there future nor past things. Nor is it fitly said, There are three times, past, present and future; but perchance it might be fitly said, There are three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future. For these three do somehow exist in the soul, and otherwise I see them not: present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation. If of these things we are permitted to speak, I see three times, and I grant there are three. It may also be said, There are three times, past, present and future, as usage falsely has it. See, I trouble not, nor gainsay, nor reprove; provided always that which is said may be understood, that neither the future, nor that which is past, now is. For there are but few things which we speak properly, many things improperly; but what we may wish to say is understood.

Chapter 21. How Time May Be Measured.

I have just now said, then, that we measure times as they pass, that we may be able to say that this time is twice as much as that one, or that this is only as much as that, and so of any other of the parts of time which we are able to tell by measuring. Wherefore, as I said, we measure times as they pass. And if any one should ask me, Whence do you know? I can answer, I know, because we measure; nor can we measure things that are not; and things past and future are not. But how do we measure present time, since it has not space? It is measured while it passes; but when it shall have passed, it is not measured; for there will not be anything that can be measured. But whence, in what way, and whither does it pass while it is being measured? Whence, but from the future? Which way, save through the present? Whither, but into the past? From that, therefore, which as yet is not, through that which has no space, into that which now is not. But what do we measure, unless time in some space? For we say not single, and double, and triple, and equal, or in any other way in which we speak of time, unless with respect to the spaces of times. In what space, then, do we measure passing time? Is it in the future, whence it passes over? But what yet we measure not, is not. Or is it in the present, by which it passes? But no space, we do not measure. Or in the past, whither it passes? But that which is not now, we measure not.

Chapter 22. He Prays God that He Would Explain This Most Entangled Enigma.

My soul yearns to know this most entangled enigma. Forbear to shut up, O Lord my God, good Father — through Christ I beseech You — forbear to shut up these things, both usual and hidden, from my desire, that it may be hindered from penetrating them; but let them dawn through Your enlightening mercy, O Lord. Of whom shall I inquire concerning these things? And to whom shall I with more advantage confess my ignorance than to You, to whom these my studies, so vehemently kindled towards Your Scriptures, are not troublesome? Give that which I love; for I do love, and this have You given me. Give, Father, who truly know to give good gifts unto Your children. Matthew 7:11 Give, since I have undertaken to know, and trouble is before me until Thou dost open it. Through Christ, I beseech You, in His name, Holy of Holies, let no man interrupt me. For I believed, and therefore do I speak. This is my hope; for this do I live, that I may contemplate the delights of the Lord. Behold, You have made my days old, and they pass away, and in what manner I know not. And we speak as to time and time, times and times — How long is the time since he said this? How long the time since he did this? and, How long the time since I saw that? and, This syllable has double the time of that single short syllable. These words we speak, and these we hear; and we are understood, and we understand. They are most manifest and most usual, and the same things again lie hidden too deeply, and the discovery of them is new.

Chapter 23. That Time is a Certain Extension.

I have heard from a learned man that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars constituted time, and I assented not. For why should not rather the motions of all bodies be time? What if the lights of heaven should cease, and a potter's wheel run round, would there be no time by which we might measure those revolutions, and say either that it turned with equal pauses, or, if it were moved at one time more slowly, at another more quickly, that some revolutions were longer, others less so? Or while we were saying

this, should we not also be speaking in time? Or should there in our words be some syllables long, others short, but because those sounded in a longer time, these in a shorter? God grant to men to see in a small thing ideas common to things great and small. Both the stars and luminaries of heaven are for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. Genesis 1:14 No doubt they are; but neither should I say that the circuit of that wooden wheel was a day, nor yet should he say that therefore there was no time.

I desire to know the power and nature of time, by which we measure the motions of bodies, and say (for example) that this motion is twice as long as that. For, I ask, since day declares not the stay only of the sun upon the earth, according to which day is one thing, night another, but also its entire circuit from east even to east — according to which we say, So many days have passed (the nights being included when we say so many days, and their spaces not counted apart) — since, then, the day is finished by the motion of the sun, and by his circuit from east to east, I ask, whether the motion itself is the day, or the period in which that motion is completed, or both? For if the first be the day, then would there be a day although the sun should finish that course in so small a space of time as an hour. If the second, then that would not be a day if from one sunrise to another there were but so short a period as an hour, but the sun must go round four-and-twenty times to complete a day. If both, neither could that be called a day if the sun should run his entire round in the space of an hour; nor that, if, while the sun stood still, so much time should pass as the sun is accustomed to accomplish his whole course in from morning to morning. I shall not therefore now ask, what that is which is called day, but what time is, by which we, measuring the circuit of the sun, should say that it was accomplished in half the space of time it was wont, if it had been completed in so small a space as twelve hours; and comparing both times, we should call that single, this double time, although the sun should run his course from east to east sometimes in that single, sometimes in that double time. Let no man then tell me that the motions of the heavenly bodies are times, because, when at the prayer of one the sun stood still in order that he might achieve his victorious battle, the sun stood still, but time went on. For in such space of time as was sufficient was that battle fought and ended. Joshua 10:12-14 I see that time, then, is a certain extension. But do I see it, or do I seem to see it? Thou, O Light and Truth, will show me.

Chapter 24. That Time is Not a Motion of a Body Which We Measure by Time.

Do you command that I should assent, if any one should say that time is the motion of a body? Thou dost not command me. For I hear that no body is moved but in time. This You say; but that the very motion of a body is time, I hear not; You say it not. For when a body is moved, I by time measure how long it may be moving from the time in which it began to be moved till it left off. And if I saw not whence it began, and it continued to be moved, so that I see not when it leaves off, I cannot measure unless, perchance, from the time I began until I cease to see. But if I look long, I only proclaim that the time is long, but not how long it may be because when we say, How long, we speak by comparison, as, This is as long as that, or, This is double as long as that, or any other thing of the kind. But if we were able to note down the distances of places whence and whither comes the body which is moved, or its parts, if it moved as in a wheel, we can say in how much time the motion of the body or its part, from this place unto that, was performed. Since, then, the motion of a body is one thing, that by which

we measure how long it is another, who cannot see which of these is rather to be called time? For, although a body be sometimes moved, sometimes stand still, we measure not its motion only, but also its standing still, by time; and we say, It stood still as much as it moved; or, It stood still twice or thrice as long as it moved; and if any other space which our measuring has either determined or imagined, more or less, as we are accustomed to say. Time, therefore, is not the motion of a body.

Chapter 25. He Calls on God to Enlighten His Mind.

And I confess unto You, O Lord, that I am as yet ignorant as to what time is, and again I confess unto You, O Lord, that I know that I speak these things in time, and that I have already long spoken of time, and that very long is not long save by the stay of time. How, then, know I this, when I know not what time is? Or is it, perchance, that I know not in what wise I may express what I know? Alas for me, that I do not at least know the extent of my own ignorance! Behold, O my God, before You I lie not. As I speak, so is my heart. You shall light my candle; Thou, O Lord my God, will enlighten my darkness.

Chapter 26. We Measure Longer Events by Shorter in Time.

Does not my soul pour out unto You truly in confession that I do measure times? But do I thus measure, O my God, and know not what I measure? I measure the motion of a body by time; and the time itself do I not measure? But, in truth, could I measure the motion of a body, how long it is, and how long it is in coming from this place to that, unless I should measure the time in which it is moved? How, therefore, do I measure this very time itself? Or do we by a shorter time measure a longer, as by the space of a cubit the space of a crossbeam? For thus, indeed, we seem by the space of a short syllable to measure the space of a long syllable, and to say that this is double. Thus we measure the spaces of stanzas by the spaces of the verses, and the spaces of the verses by the spaces of the feet, and the spaces of the feet by the spaces of the syllables, and the spaces of long by the spaces of short syllables; not measuring by pages (for in that manner we measure spaces, not times), but when in uttering the words they pass by, and we say, It is a long stanza because it is made up of so many verses; long verses, because they consist of so many feet; long feet, because they are prolonged by so many syllables; a long syllable, because double a short one. But neither thus is any certain measure of time obtained; since it is possible that a shorter verse, if it be pronounced more fully, may take up more time than a longer one, if pronounced more hurriedly. Thus for a stanzas, thus for a foot, thus for a syllable. Whence it appeared to me that time is nothing else than protraction; but of what I know not. It is wonderful to me, if it be not of the mind itself. For what do I measure, I beseech You, O my God, even when I say either indefinitely, This time is longer than that; or even definitely, This is double that? That I measure time, I know. But I measure not the future, for it is not yet; nor do I measure the present, because it is extended by no space; nor do I measure the past, because it no longer is. What, therefore, do I measure? Is it times passing, not past? For thus had I said.

Chapter 27. Times are Measured in Proportion as They Pass by.

Persevere, O my mind, and give earnest heed. God is our helper; He made us, and not we ourselves. Give heed, where truth dawns. Lo, suppose the voice of a body begins to sound, and does sound, and sounds on, and lo! It ceases — it is now silence, and that voice is past and is no longer a voice. It was future before it sounded, and could not be measured, because as yet it was not; and now it cannot, because it no longer is. Then, therefore, while it was sounding, it might, because there was then that which might be measured. But even then it did not stand still, for it was going and passing away. Could it, then, on that account be measured the more? For, while passing, it was being extended into some space of time, in which it might be measured, since the present has no space. If, therefore, then it might be measured, lo! suppose another voice has begun to sound, and still sounds, in a continued tenor without any interruption, we can measure it while it is sounding; for when it shall have ceased to sound, it will be already past, and there will not be that which can be measured. Let us measure it truly, and let us say how much it is. But as yet it sounds, nor can it be measured, save from that instant in which it began to sound, even to the end in which it left off. For the interval itself we measure from some beginning unto some end. On which account, a voice which is not yet ended cannot be measured, so that it may be said how long or how short it may be; nor can it be said to be equal to another, or single or double in respect of it, or the like. But when it is ended, it no longer is. In what manner, therefore, may it be measured? And yet we measure times; still not those which as yet are not, nor those which no longer are, nor those which are protracted by some delay, nor those which have no limits. We, therefore, measure neither future times, nor past, nor present, nor those passing by; and yet we do measure times.

Deus Creator omnium; this verse of eight syllables alternates between short and long syllables. The four short, then, the first, third, fifth and seventh, are single in respect of the four long, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth. Each of these has a double time to every one of those. I pronounce them, report on them, and thus it is, as is perceived by common sense. By common sense, then, I measure a long by a short syllable, and I find that it has twice as much. But when one sounds after another, if the former be short the latter long, how shall I hold the short one, and how measuring shall I apply it to the long, so that I may find out that this has twice as much, when indeed the long does not begin to sound unless the short leaves off sounding? That very long one I measure not as present, since I measure it not save when ended. But its ending is its passing away. What, then, is it that I can measure? Where is the short syllable by which I measure? Where is the long one which I measure? Both have sounded, have flown, have passed away, and are no longer; and still I measure, and I confidently answer (so far as is trusted to a practised sense), that as to space of time this syllable is single, that double. Nor could I do this, unless because they have past, and are ended. Therefore do I not measure themselves, which now are not, but something in my memory, which remains fixed.

In you, O my mind, I measure times. Do not overwhelm me with your clamour. That is, do not overwhelm yourself with the multitude of your impressions. In you, I say, I measure times; the impression which things as they pass by make on you, and which, when they have passed by, remains, that I measure as time present, not those things which have passed by, that the impression should be made. This I measure when I measure times. Either, then, these are times, or I do not measure times. What when we measure silence, and say that this silence has lasted as long as that voice lasts? Do we not extend our thought to the measure of a voice, as if it sounded, so that we may be able to declare some-

thing concerning the intervals of silence in a given space of time? For when both the voice and tongue are still, we go over in thought poems and verses, and any discourse, or dimensions of motions; and declare concerning the spaces of times, how much this may be in respect of that, not otherwise than if uttering them we should pronounce them. Should any one wish to utter a lengthened sound, and had with forethought determined how long it should be, that man has in silence verily gone through a space of time, and, committing it to memory, he begins to utter that speech, which sounds until it be extended to the end proposed; truly it has sounded, and will sound. For what of it is already finished has verily sounded, but what remains will sound; and thus does it pass on, until the present intention carry over the future into the past; the past increasing by the diminution of the future, until, by the consumption of the future, all be past.

Chapter 28. Time in the Human Mind, Which Expects, Considers, and Remembers.

But how is that future diminished or consumed which as yet is not? Or how does the past, which is no longer, increase, unless in the mind which enacts this there are three things done? For it both expects, and considers, and remembers, that that which it expects, through that which it considers, may pass into that which it remembers. Who, therefore, denies that future things as yet are not? But yet there is already in the mind the expectation of things future. And who denies that past things are now no longer? But, however, there is still in the mind the memory of things past. And who denies that time present wants space, because it passes away in a moment? But yet our consideration endures, through which that which may be present may proceed to become absent. Future time, which is not, is not therefore long; but a long future is a long expectation of the future. Nor is time past, which is now no longer, long; but a long past is a long memory of the past.

I am about to repeat a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my attention is extended to the whole; but when I have begun, as much of it as becomes past by my saying it is extended in my memory; and the life of this action of mine is divided between my memory, on account of what I have repeated, and my expectation, on account of what I am about to repeat; yet my consideration is present with me, through which that which was future may be carried over so that it may become past. Which the more it is done and repeated, by so much (expectation being shortened) the memory is enlarged, until the whole expectation be exhausted, when that whole action being ended shall have passed into memory. And what takes place in the entire psalm, takes place also in each individual part of it, and in each individual syllable: this holds in the longer action, of which that psalm is perchance a portion; the same holds in the whole life of man, of which all the actions of man are parts; the same holds in the whole age of the sons of men, of which all the lives of men are parts.

Chapter 29. That Human Life is a Distraction But that Through the Mercy of God He Was Intent on the Prize of His Heavenly Calling.

But because Your loving-kindness is better than life, behold, my life is but a distraction, and Your right hand upheld me in my Lord, the Son of man, the Mediator between You, 1 Timothy 2:5 The One, and

us the many — in many distractions amid many things — that through Him I may apprehend in whom I have been apprehended, and may be recollected from my old days, following The One, forgetting the things that are past; and not distracted, but drawn on, not to those things which shall be and shall pass away, but to those things which are before, Philippians 3:13 not distractedly, but intently, I follow on for the prize of my heavenly calling, where I may hear the voice of Your praise, and contemplate Your delights, neither coming nor passing away. But now are my years spent in mourning. And You, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting. But I have been divided amid times, the order of which I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together unto You, purged and molten in the fire of Your love.

Chapter 30. Again He Refutes the Empty Question, What Did God Before the Creation of the World?

And I will be immoveable, and fixed in You, in my mould, Your truth; nor will I endure the questions of men, who by a penal disease thirst for more than they can hold, and say, What did God make before He made heaven and earth? Or, How came it into His mind to make anything, when He never before made anything? Grant to them, O Lord, to think well what they say, and to see that where there is no time, they cannot say never. What, therefore, He is said never to have made, what else is it but to say, that in no time was it made? Let them therefore see that there could be no time without a created being, and let them cease to speak that vanity. Let them also be extended unto those things which are before, Philippians 3:13 and understand that you, the eternal Creator of all times, art before all times, and that no times are co-eternal with You, nor any creature, even if there be any creature beyond all times.

Chapter 31. How the Knowledge of God Differs from that of Man.

O Lord my God, what is that secret place of Your mystery, and how far thence have the consequences of my transgressions cast me? Heal my eyes, that I may enjoy Your light. Surely, if there be a mind, so greatly abounding in knowledge and foreknowledge, to which all things past and future are so known as one psalm is well known to me, that mind is exceedingly wonderful, and very astonishing; because whatever is so past, and whatever is to come of after ages, is no more concealed from Him than was it hidden from me when singing that psalm, what and how much of it had been sung from the beginning, what and how much remained unto the end. But far be it that Thou, the Creator of the universe, the Creator of souls and bodies — far be it that You should know all things future and past. Far, far more wonderfully, and far more mysteriously, You know them. For it is not as the feelings of one singing known things, or hearing a known song, are — through expectation of future words, and in remembrance of those that are past — varied, and his senses divided, that anything happens unto You, unchangeably eternal, that is, the truly eternal Creator of minds. As, then, Thou in the Beginning knew the heaven and the earth without any change of Your knowledge, so in the Beginning Thou made heaven and earth without any distraction of Your action. Let him who understands confess unto You; and let him who understands not, confess unto You. Oh, how exalted are You, and yet the humble in heart are Your dwelling-place; for Thou raisest up those that are bowed down, and they whose exaltation You are fall not.

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