

## 5. Confessions

### Book 2

4.9. Certainly, O Lord, your law punishes theft; and it is a law written upon human hearts, a law that not even iniquity itself erases. After all, what thief will tolerate another thief? Even a rich thief will not put up with someone who steals out of need. And yet I willed to steal, and I carried out the theft, driven by no need—except that I was bereft of justice—which I loathed—and crammed full of iniquity. For I stole something of which I already had plenty, and much better than what I stole. Nor did I want to enjoy the thing that I desired to steal; what I wanted to enjoy was the theft itself, the sin.

There was a pear tree near our orchard, laden with fruit that was not enticing in either appearance or taste. One wretched night—it was our unhealthy custom to keep up our games in the streets well into the night, and we had done so then—a band of altogether worthless young men set out to shake that tree and run off with its fruit. We took away an enormous haul, not for our own food but to throw to the pigs. Perhaps we ate something, but even if we did, it was for the fun of doing what was not allowed that we took the pears. Behold my heart, O God; behold my heart, on which you had mercy in the depths of that abyss. Behold, let my heart tell you now what it was seeking there: seeking in such a way that I would be wicked for no reason, so that there would be no cause for my wickedness but wickedness itself. It was foul, this wickedness, and yet I loved it. I loved perishing. I loved my own falling away: I did not love the thing into which I fell, but the fall itself. In my very soul I was vile, and I leapt down from your firmament into destruction, not striving for something disgraceful, but seeking disgrace.

5.10. Truly there is a loveliness in beautiful bodies, in gold and silver and all the rest; in fleshly touch there

is great power in harmony; and each of the other senses has a bodily quality accommodated to it. Honor in this age and the power to command and subdue have their splendor; from them arises the eagerness to exact vengeance. And yet in striving after all these things we must not depart from you, O Lord, or stray from your law. The life that we live here has an attractiveness all its own because of the due measure of its beauty and its fitting relation to all these things that are the lowest of beautiful objects. Human friendship, too, is sweet in its precious bond because it makes many souls one. On account of all these things, and others like them, we make room for sin: because of our ungoverned inclination toward these things—for though they are goods, they are the lowest goods—we abandon the better and the highest goods; we abandon you, O Lord, and your truth and your law. For even those lowest things have their delights, but not like my God, who created all things; for the just delight in God, and he is the delight of those who are upright in heart.

5.11. When a question arises about the cause of some criminal act's being done, people do not typically accept any explanation until it appears that there was a desire to attain, or a fear of losing, one of those goods that we have called the lowest goods. These are beautiful and becoming, though they are abject and contemptible in comparison with superior and beatific goods. Someone has committed murder. Why did he do it? He loved his victim's wife or estate, or he wanted to steal enough to live on, or he was afraid of losing something to his victim, or he was burning to revenge himself on someone who had injured him. Surely no one has ever committed murder simply because he delighted in murder itself! Who would believe such a thing? Even for that savage and most cruel man of whom it was said that he was wicked and cruel for no reason, a cause is nonetheless stated: "lest through idleness," it says, "his hand or spirit should become useless." And ask again: "Why did he do this?" It was so that once he seized the city through the practice of his crimes, he might obtain honors, powers, and riches, and he would be free from the law and "from

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the burden of the poverty of his estate—and his own consciousness of the guilt of his crimes.” So not even Catiline loved his crimes; he loved something else that was the cause of his committing those crimes.

6.12. What I did I—wretch that I was—love in you, my theft, my crime by night in my sixteenth year? You were not beautiful, for you were a theft. Or are you indeed anything at all, so that I might speak to you? Those pears that we stole were beautiful, for they were created by you, O most beautiful of all, Creator of all, good God, God my supreme good and my true good. Those pears were beautiful, but they were not what my wretched soul lusted after. After all, I had plenty of better pears; I picked those merely in order to steal. The pears that I had plucked I threw away. The only thing I tasted from them was iniquity; enjoying that was what made me happy. For even if something from those pears did enter my mouth, it was the crime that gave it savor. And now, O Lord my God, I am asking what delighted me in that theft, and behold! there is no beauty there. I do not merely mean such beauty as is found in equity and practical wisdom, or in the human mind and memory and the senses and the life of the body; not even as the stars are beautiful and adorn their proper places, as the earth and the sea are beautiful, teeming with new lives that are born to take the place of things that are passing away—it lacked even the abortive and shadowy beauty of deceptive vices.

6.13. For pride mimics loftiness, when in fact you are the one God, Most High above all things. What does ambition seek but honors and glory, when in fact you are the one who is to be honored before all things and are glorious unto eternity? The cruelty of the powerful is meant to inspire fear, but who is to be feared except the one God? And in what respect can his power be curtailed or lessened, when or where or how or by whom? The enticements of the lustful are meant to arouse love, but nothing is more enticing than your charity, and no love is more wholesome than the love of your Truth, which surpasses all things in beauty and splendor. Curiosity makes a show of zeal for knowledge, when in fact it is you who supremely know all things. Even ignorance and stupidity are concealed under the name of simplicity and harmlessness. For nothing simpler than you can be found; and what is more harmless than you, since it is their own works

that are the enemies of the wicked? Idleness desires rest, but what rest is there apart from the Lord? Luxury would like to be called repletion and wealth, but you are fullness and the never-failing abundance of incorruptible sweetness. Extravagance masquerades as generosity, but you are the supremely bountiful giver of all good things. Avarice wants to possess many things, but you possess everything. Envy struggles for preeminence. What is more preeminent than you? Anger seeks vengeance. Who exacts vengeance more justly than you? Fear shrinks from unexpected and sudden threats to things it loves, while it takes precautions to keep them secure. For what is unexpected to you? What is sudden? Or who will separate you from what you love? Or where, except in you, is unfaltering security? Sadness pines for things it has lost, things that cupidity had delighted in. It would wish to lose nothing, as nothing can be taken away from you.

6.14. Thus the soul commits fornication when it turns away from you and seeks outside you those things that it cannot find pure and unadulterated unless it returns to you. All those who place themselves far from you and exalt themselves against you are perversely imitating you. But even in this way, by imitating you they declare that you are the Creator of all of nature, and so there is nowhere they can flee from you altogether. What, then, did I love in that theft of mine, and in what way was I viciously, perversely, imitating my Lord? Did it please me to act against your law, at least by deceit—since I could not do so by force—and thus mimic the curtailed freedom of a prisoner by getting away with doing what was not permitted, in a shadowy likeness of omnipotence? Look at that slave, fleeing his master and chasing after a shadow. What rotteness! What a monstrous life, and what an abyss of death! Could he do, freely, what was not permitted, for no other reason than that it was not permitted?

7.15. What shall I offer to the Lord in thanksgiving for recalling these things to my memory in such a way that my soul is not made fearful thereby? I will love you, Lord, and give thanks to you and confess your name, because you have forgiven me for such wicked and abominable deeds. I owe it to your grace and to your mercy that you have melted my sins like ice. To your grace I owe also whatever evil things I did not do: for what was I not capable of doing, I who loved even

theft for no reason at all? And I acknowledge I have been forgiven for all these things, both those I did of my own accord and those I refrained from doing because you were guiding me. Who among human beings, seeing how feeble they are, would dare to ascribe their chastity or innocence to their own powers and so love you less, as though they had less need of your mercy, by which you forgive the sins of those who turn to you? As for those who have been called by you and have followed your voice and have avoided the things they have read about me, the things that I have recorded and acknowledged about myself, let them not mock me because I have been healed by the same physician who was present with them so that they did not fall ill—or rather, so that they were less gravely ill. And let them therefore love you as much—no, let them love you even more—because they see that he who has rescued me from the great infirmities of my sins has kept them from being ensnared by such great infirmities of sin.

8.16. What fruit had I then, wretch that I was, in these things that I now blush to recall, and especially in that theft in which I loved the theft itself, and nothing else, when indeed the theft was nothing and I was all the more wretched on account of it? And yet I would not have done it by myself—this is how I remember my state of mind—I would certainly not have done it by myself. So I also loved the companionship of those with whom I did it. So is it true after all that I loved nothing other than the theft? To be sure, I loved nothing else, since that companionship too is nothing. What is it, really? (Who is it that teaches me, but the one who enlightens my heart and pierces its shadows?) What is it? I am impelled to ask this question and discuss it and ponder it, because if I had loved the fruit that I stole and wanted to enjoy it, I could have done that even if I had been by myself; if I had been after only the thrill of committing the evil act, I would not have inflamed the itch of my cupidity by rubbing up against souls who shared my guilt. But since there was

no pleasure for me in the pears themselves, the pleasure was in the crime itself, and it was my companionship with fellow-sinners that created this pleasure.

9.17. What was that disposition of mind? It was most assuredly very base, and plainly so; and woe is me, that I had it. But what was it? Who understands sins? It was a joke; our hearts were tickled that we were deceiving people who did not expect us to do such things and fervently wanted us not to. Why, then, did it please me that I was not doing it by myself? Is it that no one is easily moved to laughter when alone? Not easily, perhaps, but still, a laugh will sometimes get the better of people when they are quite alone and no one else is around, if something quite ridiculous strikes their senses or their mind. But I would not have done it by myself. I would certainly not have done it by myself. Behold before you, my God, this living recollection of my soul. If I had been by myself, I would not have done that theft in which what pleased me was not what I stole, but that I stole; it would not have pleased me to do it alone, and I wouldn't have done it. O you too unfriendly friendship, unsearchable seduction of the mind! Out of playing and joking came a passion to do harm and a desire to damage someone else without any gain for myself, without any lust for revenge! But when someone says, "Let's go, let's do it," we are ashamed not to be shameless.

10.18. Who will unloose this most twisted, this most tangled intricacy? It is foul: I shrink from considering it; I do not want to look upon it. I want to look upon you, beautiful and seemly justice and innocence, with honorable eyes and with a desire that is always satisfied but never sated. In your presence there is rest indeed, and a life that knows no disturbance. Those who enter into you enter into the joy of their Lord; they will not be afraid, and all will be supremely well with them as they dwell in the one who is supremely good. I deserted you and wandered away, my God, very much astray from your steadfastness in my youth; and I became for myself a land of destitution.

## 6. Confessions

### Book 7

9.13. And first, because it was your will to show me how you resist the proud but give grace to the humble, and how great is your mercy, which you have shown to human beings by the way of humility, in that your Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, you obtained for me, through a certain fellow who was puffed up with the most monstrous arrogance, certain books of the Platonists translated from Greek into Latin. And in them I read—not indeed in these words, but exactly the same teaching, presented persuasively with many arguments of many different kinds—that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made. What was made is, in him, life;<sup>1</sup> and the life was the light of human beings. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not engulfed it.” I read also that the human soul, although it “bears witness to the light, is nevertheless not itself that light”; rather, God the Word is “the true light that enlightens every human being who comes into this world.” I read also that “he was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not recognize him.” But that “he came to his own things, and his own people did not receive him; but to as many as received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God”: those things I did not read in them.

9.14. I likewise read in those books that God the Word “was born, not of blood, nor of the will of a man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.” But that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”: that I did not read in them. And indeed I discovered in those

writings, stated in many and various ways, that the Son was in the form of the Father but “did not regard equality with God as robbery,” since he is by nature the very same as God. But that “he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave; and being made into the likeness of human beings and found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross; therefore God has raised him from the dead and given him a name that is above every name, so that in the name of Jesus every knee will bend, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”: those books did not contain these things. One finds in them that before all times and beyond all times your only-begotten Son, who is coeternal with you, abides unchangeably, and that from his fullness souls receive blessedness, and that by sharing in the wisdom that abides in him souls are renewed so that they become wise. But one does not find that within time “he died for the ungodly,” and that “you did not spare your only Son, but gave him up for us all.” For “you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little children,” so that “those who labor and are burdened will come to him, and he will refresh them; for he is meek and humble of heart.” And he will guide the meek in judgment and teach the gentle his ways, looking upon our humility and our labor and forgiving all our sins. But as for those who are lofty, as though placed on the pedestal of a more sublime teaching, and so do not hear him saying “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls,” even if they know God, “they do not glorify him as God or give him thanks; but their thoughts become barren and their foolish hearts are darkened. Though they profess themselves wise, they have become fools.”

9.15. And for this reason I also read in those books that they exchanged the glory of your incorruption for idols and various phantoms, for the likeness of an image of corruptible human beings and birds and four-footed creatures and serpents, that Egyptian food for

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1. For this punctuation of John 1:4, see Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John* tr. 1.17.

the sake of which Esau gave up his rights as firstborn. For the hearts of your firstborn people were turned back to Egypt, and they worshiped the head of a four-footed beast instead of you. They bowed your image—their souls—before the image of a calf that eats hay. These things I found there, but I did not partake of them. For it pleased you, Lord, to remove from Jacob the reproach of his inferiority, so that the elder would serve the younger; and you called the nations into your inheritance. And I had come to you from the nations; I had devoted myself to the gold that your people had, by your will, carried off from the land of Egypt—for that gold was yours, no matter where it was. And through your Apostle you said to the Athenians that in you we live and move and have our being, as some of their authorities had said. Those books were indeed from there. But I did not devote myself to the idols of the Egyptians, which they served with your gold, they who transformed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

10.16. Admonished by these books to return to myself, I entered into my inmost self with you as my guide; and I was able to do this because you had become my helper. I entered, and by some sort of eye of my soul I saw—above that eye of my soul, above my mind—unchangeable Light. It was not the light that is common and visible to all flesh; nor was it a light of the same sort, only nobler, as if the common light had grown clearer and brighter and become so great that it filled all things. No, the Light was not that; it was something altogether different from all these things. And it was not above my mind in the way that oil is over water or the sky is above the earth; it was superior, for that Light made me, and I was inferior, for I was made by it. One who knows the Truth knows this Light, and one who knows this Light knows eternity. Love knows this Light. O eternal Truth and true Love and beloved Eternity, you are my God; I sigh for you day and night! And when I first came to know you, you lifted me up so that I could see that what I saw has being, but that I who saw it did not yet have being. And you repelled the weakness of my gaze, beaming upon me with great force, and I trembled with love and with terror. I found that I was far away from you in a land of unlikeness, as though I heard your voice from on high: “I am food for those who are full-grown; grow,

and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you, as you change the food of your flesh, but instead you will be changed into me.” And I recognized that you have chastened human beings because of their sin and caused my soul to melt away like a spider’s web; and I said, “Then is truth nothing, because it is not spread out across any finite or infinite expanse of places?” And you called from afar, “No indeed; truly, I am who I am.” And I heard, as one hears in the heart; and I no longer had any room to doubt. I would more easily have doubted that I was alive than I could have doubted the existence of the Truth that is perceived through the things that have been made.

11.17. I examined the other things that are below you, and I saw that they neither wholly have being nor wholly lack being: they do indeed have being because they exist from you; but they lack being, because they are not what you are. For what truly has being is what abides unchangeably. My good, however, is to cleave to God, because if I do not abide in him, he cannot abide in me. But he, abiding in himself, makes all things new; and he is my Lord, because he has no need of the goods that are mine.

12.18. And it was made plain to me that things that are corrupted are good. For they could not be corrupted if they were the highest goods, but neither could they be corrupted if they were not good at all. If they were the highest goods, they would be incorruptible; but if they were not good at all, there would be nothing in them to be corrupted. Corruption, after all, harms something; and unless it diminished some good, it would not do harm. So either corruption harms nothing, which is impossible, or else—what is most certainly the case—everything that is corrupted is deprived of some good. Now if something is deprived of *all* good, it will not exist at all. For if it still exists and can no longer be corrupted, it will be better, because it will persist incorruptibly: and what could be more monstrous than to say that something that has lost all good has become better? Therefore, if something is deprived of all good, it will not exist at all. So as long as things exist, they are good. Therefore, all things that have being are good, and that evil whose origin I was inquiring about is not a substance. For if it were a substance, it would be good, since it would be either an incorruptible substance, and thus of course a great

good, or a corruptible substance, which would not be corruptible unless it were good. And so I saw, and it was made plain to me, that you made all things good and that there are no substances that you did not make. And it is because you did not make all things equal that all things exist: for individually they are good, and taken together they are very good, because our God made all things very good.

13.19. For you evil does not exist at all—and not only for you, but for your whole creation, since there is nothing outside it that breaks in and corrupts the order that you have imposed upon it. To be sure, certain parts of it are regarded as bad because they do not fit harmoniously with other parts; but even they fit with still other parts and thus are good, and they are also good in themselves. And all these things that do not fit harmoniously with each other are well-suited to the inferior portion of things, which we call earth, which has a cloudy and windy sky suited to it. Far be it from me to say, “These things ought not to be”: for even if I could see nothing but them and indeed longed for better things, I would still owe you thanks for these things by themselves. For the things of the earth—dragons and all the deeps, fire and hail, snow and ice, the stormy winds that do your word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, reptiles and winged birds—reveal that you are worthy of praise. Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth, young men and maidens, old and young together: let them praise your name. Let them also praise you from the heavens; let them praise you, our Lord. All your angels in the heights, all your powers, the sun and moon, all the stars and the light, the heaven of heavens and the waters that are above the heavens: let them praise your name. I no longer desired better things, because I held all things in my thought; and with a sounder judgment I regarded the higher things as being of course better than the lower, but all things together as being better than the higher things by themselves.

14.20. There is no soundness in those who are displeased by any creature of yours, just as there was no soundness in me when I was displeased with many things that you made. And because my soul did not have the effrontery to be displeased with my God, it

did not want anything that displeased it to be yours. And from that starting-point it had proceeded to the view that there are two substances; but it did not find rest there, and it gave voice to opinions that were not really its own. And returning from there it had made for itself a god extended through the infinite expanse of all places; and it thought that this god was you. It set up this god in its heart and again became a temple for its own idol, an abomination before you. Yet afterwards you laid my head upon your lap, though I did not know it, and you closed my eyes so that I would not look upon worthlessness. For a little while I rested from myself, and my frenzy was lulled to sleep; and I woke up and saw that you are infinite, but in a different way. And that vision did not derive from the flesh.

15.21. And I turned my attention to other things, and I saw that they owe their existence to you, and that all finite things exist in you, though in a different way. They do not exist in you as though in a place, but in the sense that you hold all things in your hand, the Truth, and they are all true insofar as they have being. Nor is falsity anything, except when one thinks that something is what it is not. I saw also that all things fit harmoniously not only with their places but also with their times, and that you, who alone are eternal, did not begin to act after countless intervals of times; for all intervals of times, those that have passed away and those that will pass away, would neither go away nor come to be apart from your acting and abiding.

16.22. I had learned by experience that it is no surprise when bread that tastes sweet to a healthy palate is repugnant to one that is unhealthy, and when light that is pleasant to untainted eyes is hateful to eyes that are diseased. Even your righteousness displeases the wicked, let alone vipers and worms, which you created good and well-suited to the lower parts of your creation—to which the wicked themselves are well-suited, the more unlike you they are; but they are well-suited for the higher parts, the more they become like you. And I asked what wickedness was, and what I found was not a substance, but rather the perversity of a will that is turned away from the supreme substance—from you, O God—a will that casts away what lies within itself and is swollen with what is found outside.

## 7. Confessions

### Book 11

3.5. I would like to hear and understand how in the beginning you made heaven and earth. Moses wrote these words. He wrote them and departed; he passed over from here, from you to you, and he is not now before me. If he were, I could get hold of him and ask him and implore him, for your sake, to explain them to me. And I would open my ears to the sounds that would emerge from his mouth. If he spoke in Hebrew, he would strike against my sense in vain, and nothing of what he said would touch my mind; but if he spoke in Latin, I would know what he was saying. But from what source would I know whether it was true? And if I did know this, I would surely not know it from him, would I? No, indeed: the inward truth, within me in the dwelling-place of my thought, would say to me—not in Hebrew or Greek or Latin or any barbarous language, without any organ of mouth or tongue, without any rattling of syllables—“What he says is true.” And I with certainty and confidence would immediately say to him, “What you say is true.” So, since I cannot question Moses, I ask you, God; it was by being filled with you, who are Truth, that Moses said true things. I ask you, God: have mercy on my sins, and as you empowered your servant to say these things, empower me to understand them.

4.6. Consider: heaven and earth exist. They cry out that they were made, for they undergo change and variation. By contrast, if anything was not made and yet exists, there is nothing in it that was not in it before—which is what it is to undergo change and variation. They also cry out that they did not make themselves: “We exist because we were made. So before we existed, we were not anything, so as to be able to make ourselves.” And it is by their manifest character that they say these things. Therefore, you, O Lord,

made them: you who are beautiful (for they are beautiful), who are good (for they are good), who have being (for they have being). And they are not as beautiful or as good as you, their Creator, nor do they have being as you have being; in comparison with you they have neither goodness nor beauty nor being. We know these things, thanks to you; and our knowledge, in comparison with yours, is but ignorance.

5.7. But how did you make heaven and earth? What was the mechanism by which you carried out so great a work of yours? A human craftsman decides to shape a material thing, and the soul that makes this decision has the power, somehow, to impose on that material thing a form that it perceives within itself by its inward eye. But this is not how you form material things—and indeed how would a human craftsman have the power to do this, except because you made his mind? Further, he imposes a form on something that already exists and has being, such as earth or stone or wood or gold or something of that sort. And how would any of those things exist unless you had established them? You made the craftsman’s body. You made the soul that commands his bodily members. You made the matter out of which he makes something. You made the talent by which he grasps his art and sees within himself what he will make outside himself. You made the bodily sense by which he translates his work from mind into matter and then reports back to the mind what he has made, so that he may take counsel with the truth that presides within him to see whether the work has been well made.

All these things praise you, the Creator of them all. But how did you make them? How, God, did you make heaven and earth? It was not *in* heaven and earth that you made heaven and earth; nor was it in the air or in the waters, for they too belong to heaven and earth. Nor you did you make the whole world in the whole world, since before it was made, there was no place in which it could be made so that it might exist. Nor did you hold in your hand something from which you would make heaven and earth, for where would this thing have come from—this thing that you did

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not make—from which you would make something? What, indeed, exists at all, except because you exist? Therefore, you spoke and they were made; and in your word you made them.

6.8. But how did you speak? Was it in the same way in which a voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son”? That voice went forth and was completed; it had a beginning and an ending. Its syllables sounded and passed away: the second after the first, the third after the second, and the rest in order, until the last syllable sounded after all the rest, and after the last was silence. From this it is clear and evident that the movement of a creature pronounced that voice; it was a temporal thing serving your eternal will. These words of yours, made in accordance with time, were conveyed by the outward ear to the understanding mind whose inward ear is attuned to your eternal Word. Then the mind compared these words that sounded in time with your eternal Word in his silence, and it said, “They are far different. They are far different. These temporal words are far beneath me; nor do they really have being, since they flee and pass away. But the Word of my God is above me, and he abides for ever.” So if it was by words that sounded and then passed away that you spoke, so that heaven and earth might be made, and in that way you made heaven and earth, then there was already some bodily creature before you made heaven and earth, and by the temporal movements of that creature your utterance was extended through time. But there was no body before heaven and earth—or if there was, you had certainly made it without any transitory speech, so that from it you would make the transitory speech by which you would say, “Let heaven and earth be made.” For whatever that might have been, by which such a speech would be made, it would not have existed at all unless you had made it. By what word, then, did you make the body by which those words would be made?

7.9. And so you call us into understanding the Word, God with you, O God: the Word who is uttered eternally and by whom all things are uttered eternally. It is not that one word is completed and then another word is spoken, so that all things may be uttered; all are uttered at once and eternally. Otherwise there would already be time and change, not true eternity and true immortality. I know this, my God, and I give

you thanks. I know this and I confess to you, Lord; and everyone who is thankful for assured truth joins me in knowing it and in blessing you. We know this, Lord; we know this because insofar as anything is not what it once was, and is what it once was not, it passes away and comes to be. Therefore, nothing of your Word gives place to another or follows another, since he is truly immortal and eternal. And so it is by the Word, coeternal with you, that you all at once and eternally utter all the things that you utter; and it is by him that whatever you speak into existence is made. You make these things precisely by speaking them, and yet the things that you make by speaking are not made all at once, and they are not made to be eternal.

8.10. Why is this, I ask you, O Lord my God? I do see it, in a way, but I do not know how to express it, unless it is because all that begins to be and ceases to be begins and ceases at the right time as it is known in the eternal reason where nothing either begins or ceases. This is your eternal Word, who is also the beginning, because he speaks to us. In this way he speaks to us in the Gospel through the flesh; he proclaimed it outwardly to human ears so that the word might be believed and sought within and found in that eternal truth where the good Teacher, the only Teacher, teaches all his students. In that eternal truth, O Lord, I hear your voice, the voice of one who is speaking to me. For anyone who teaches us speaks to us, whereas one who does not teach us does not speak to us, even if he does speak. And indeed what teaches us, besides unwavering Truth? For even when we are admonished by a changeable creature, we are led to unwavering Truth; that is where we truly learn when we stand and listen to him and exult with joy because of the bridegroom’s voice, giving ourselves back to him from whom we have our being. And this is why he is the Beginning: for if he did not abide when we went astray, there would be nowhere for us to return. Now when we return from error, it is of course by knowing that we return; and in order that we might know, he teaches us, because he is the Beginning and speaks to us.

9.11. In this Beginning, God, you made heaven and earth in your Word, your Son, your Power, your Wisdom, uttering them in a wondrous way, and in a wondrous way making them. Who can grasp this?



Who can set it forth in words? What is this that shines through me and buffets my heart without injury? I shudder and I am alight: I shudder insofar as I am unlike him; I am alight insofar as I am like him. It is Wisdom, Wisdom itself that shines through me and pierces the clouds that surround me. But when I fall away from Wisdom because of that gloom and the burden of my punishments, the clouds envelop me again. For in my neediness my strength has wasted away, so that I cannot support my good until you, Lord, who have forgiven all my sins, also heal all my infirmities; for you will also redeem my life from corruption and crown me with mercy and loving-kindness; and you will satisfy my desire with good things, since my youth will be renewed like an eagle's. For in hope we have been saved, and through patience we look for your promises. Let those who are able hear you speaking within. I will cry out confidently in words that you have provided: "How magnificent are your works, O Lord; in Wisdom you have made them all." And that Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning you made heaven and earth.

10.12. Those who say to us, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" are undoubtedly full of their old carnal nature. "For if he was idle," they say, "and was not doing anything, why did he not always stay that way from then on, just as up to that point he had always refrained from action? After all, if some new motion and new will arose in God, so that he created something he had never created before, how will that be a true eternity in which a will comes into being that once did not exist? For God's will is not a creature; it is before any creature, since nothing would be created unless the Creator's will came first. Therefore, God's will belongs to his very substance. And if something came into being in God's substance that had not existed before, his substance cannot with truth be called eternal. Yet if God's will that creation should exist is eternal, why is creation not also eternal?"

11.13. Those who say these things do not yet understand you, O Wisdom of God, Light of Minds; they do not yet understand how those things are made that are made by you and in you. Such people strive to be wise concerning what is eternal, but their heart is still flitting about in past and future movements of things and is still deceived. Who will catch hold of their heart

and pin it down so that it will be still for just a little while and seize, for just a little while, the glory of an eternity that remains ever steadfast and set it beside times that never remain steadfast and see that eternity is in no way comparable to them? Then their heart would see that a time can become long only through many movements that pass away and cannot be stretched out all at once, but that in eternity nothing passes away, but the whole is present—whereas no time is present as a whole. And their heart would see that everything past is thrust back from the future and everything future follows upon the past, and everything past and future is created and set in motion by that which is always present. Who will catch hold of the human heart so that it will be still and see how eternity, which stands still and so has neither past nor future, decrees both future and past times? Does my hand have the strength to do this? Does the hand of my mouth accomplish so great a deed by the power of its speech?

12.14. Look, I shall answer the one who asks, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" I do not give the answer that one fellow is reported to have given, making a joke to evade the force of the question: "He was preparing hell for people who pry into deep matters." Ridiculing a question is quite different from seeing the answer, so that is not how I will respond. I would much more willingly say "I don't know" when I don't know than offer a response that mocks someone who has asked about deep matters and wins me praise for a false answer. Rather, I say that you, our God, are the Creator of every creature; and if by "heaven and earth" is meant every creature, then I confidently say, "Before God made heaven and earth, he was not making or doing anything." After all, if he was making something, what would he have been making other than some creature? If only I knew everything that I desire to know for my own benefit with as much clarity as I know that no creature was made before any creature was made!

13.15. But if some flighty mind wanders through images of times gone by and marvels that you, Almighty and All-creating and All-sustaining God, Maker of heaven and earth, should have refrained for countless ages from so great a work until at last you carried it out, he needs to wake up and pay attention, because he is

marveling at falsehoods. How could countless ages pass that you had not made? For you are the author and creator of all the ages. And what were these times that you had not created? How could they have passed if they never existed? Since, therefore, all times are your work, what sense does it make to say that you refrained from any work if in fact there was some time before you made heaven and earth? That time itself was something you had made; times could not pass before you made times. But if there was no time before you made heaven and earth, what sense is there in asking what you were doing then? There was no “then,” for there was no time.

13.16. It is not in time that you precede time, since otherwise you would not precede all times. No, it is by the loftiness of ever-present eternity that you precede all past things, and you surpass all future things because they are future, and once they have come, they will be past. But you are the selfsame, and your years will not fail. Your years do not come and go. Our years come and go, so that they all may come; your years stand all at once because they stand still, and those that go do not give way to those that come, for your years do not pass away. Our years will be completed only when they will all no longer exist. Your years are one day, and your day is not day-after-day but today, because your today does not give way to any tomorrow or follow after any yesterday. Your today is eternity. And so it was one coeternal with yourself whom you begot, to whom you said, “Today have I begotten you.” You made all times, and before all times, you are. Nor was there any time at which there was no time.

14.17. Therefore, there was no time at which you had not made anything, since you made time itself. And no times are coeternal with you, since you persist, whereas they would not be times if they persisted. What, after all, is time? Is there any short and simple answer to that question? Can anyone even wrap his mind around time so as to express it in words? Is there anything we talk about more familiarly, more knowingly, than time? And surely we understand it when we talk about it; we even understand it when we hear someone else talking about it. So what is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know. Yet I say with confidence

that I know that if nothing passed away, there would be no past time, and that if nothing were approaching, there would be no future time, and that if nothing existed, there would be no present time. So how do those two times, the past and the future, exist when the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist? Yet if the present were always present and did not flow away into the past, it would no longer be time, but eternity. So if, in order to be time, the present comes into being precisely by flowing into the past, how can we say that the present exists, given that it exists only because it will not exist? In other words, if time did not tend toward non-existence, we could not truly say that it exists at all.

15.18. And yet we speak of “a long time” and “a short time,” and we say this only of the past or the future. For example, we call a hundred years ago a long time in the past and a hundred years from now a long time in the future; but we call, say, ten days ago a short time in the past and ten days from now a short time in the future. But how is something that does not exist either long or short? The past, after all, no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist. So let us not say, “It is long,” but instead let us say of the past, “It was long,” and of the future, “It *will be* long.” Even so, my Lord and my Light, won’t your truth scoff at human beings? This past time that was long: was it long when it was already past or when it was still present? It could be long only when it existed so that it could be long. But once it was past, it did not exist any more; hence, it also could not be long, since it was not anything at all. Therefore, let us not say, “The past time was long,” we will not even be able to find the thing that was long—by the very fact that it is past, it does not exist—but instead let us say, “That present time was long,” since when it was present, it was long. For at that point it had not yet passed away into non-existence, and therefore there was something that could be long; after it had become past, however, that which ceased to be also, at that very same time, ceased to be long.

15.19. Let us see, then, O human soul, whether a present time can be long—for you have been given the power to perceive duration and to measure it. What answer will you give me? Are one hundred present years a long time? Examine first whether one hundred years can *be* present. If the first of those years is

in progress, then it is present, but the other ninety-nine are future and therefore do not yet exist. If, however, the second year is in progress, then one year is already past, another year is present, and the rest are future. And so it is if we assume that any one of the years in the middle of the hundred is present: there will be past years before it and future years after it. Accordingly, one hundred years cannot be present.

Now examine whether that one year, at any rate, can be present as it is in progress. If its first month is in progress, the other months are future. If the second month is underway, the first month has already passed and the remaining months do not yet exist. So not even the whole year that is in progress is present. And if the whole is not present, the year is not present. For that matter, not even the month that is in progress is present, but only one day. If the first day of the month is present, the rest are future; if the last, the rest are past; if one in the middle, it is between past days and future days.

15.20. Look! The present time, which we found to be the only time that can be called “long,” has shrunk to the size of barely one day. But let us break up even that: for not even one whole day is present. It comprises twenty-four hours of day and night. The first of these hours has other hours future to it, the last has others past, and any of the hours in between has some past hours before it and some future hours after it. And that one hour passes by in small, fleeting pieces. Any part of it that has flown away is past, and any part that remains is future. If any part of time can be conceived that cannot be further divided into even the tiniest parts of moments, that alone is what should be called “present.” Yet that present flies away into the past with such speed that it cannot be extended by even the slightest amount. For if it is extended, it is divided into past and future; but the present has no duration.

Where, then, is a time that we can call “long”? Is it in the future? Then we do not in fact say, “It is long,” because the thing that would be long does not yet exist; but instead we say, “It will be long.” So when will it exist? If even then it is still future, it will not be long, because the thing that would be long does not yet exist. Suppose instead that it will be long when, out of the future that does not yet exist, it begins to exist and becomes present and thus exists so that it can be long.

In that case, the present time cries out, in the words already spoken, that it cannot be long.

16.21. And yet, Lord, we experience intervals of time and compare them with each other. We say that some are longer, others shorter. We even measure how much longer or shorter one time is than another; we determine that one is twice as long or three times as long as another, or that two are equally long. But when we measure times by experiencing them, we are measuring things that are passing away. And who can measure past things, which no longer exist, or future things, which do not yet exist? Surely no one will be so brazen as to say that what does not exist can be measured. So while time is passing, it can be experienced and measured; but once it has passed, it cannot, because it does not exist.

17.22. I am inquiring, Father, not making assertions. My God, guide me and govern me. We learned as children, and we have taught children, that there are three times: past, present, and future. Will someone tell me that this is not so: that there are not three times, but only one, the present, because the other two do not exist? Or do they perhaps exist after all, but time comes forth from some secret place when the future becomes present and recedes into some secret place when the present becomes past? Where did those who prophesied future events see them, if future things do not yet exist? After all, what does not yet exist cannot be seen. And those who tell stories of the past would certainly not be telling the truth if they did not perceive those past things in their mind; and if no past things existed, they could not in any way be perceived. It follows, then, that both future and past things exist.

18.23. Permit me to inquire further, O Lord, my hope; do not let my attention be distracted. If indeed future and past things exist, I want to know where they are. If I do not yet have the strength to know where they are, I do at least know that wherever they are, they are not future or past there, but present. For if they are future there, they do not yet exist there; and if they are past there, they no longer exist there. So wherever they are, whatever they are, they must be present. Yet when a true story is told about past things, it is not the things themselves that are brought forth out of memory—for the things themselves have passed away—but words conceived from images of the things. These images

are like imprints that the things themselves, as they were passing away, stamped on the soul through the senses. My boyhood, for example, which no longer exists, is in past time, which no longer exists. But when I recall it and tell stories about it, I see an image of it in the present time, since it still exists in my memory. Whether there is a similar explanation for foretellings of the future—that already-existing images of things that do not yet exist are made present—I must confess, my God, I do not know. This much I do know: we often deliberate about our future actions, and that deliberation is present, although the action that we are deliberating about does not yet exist, because it is future. Once we undertake the action that we were deliberating about and begin to do it, the action will exist, because then it will be present, not future.

18.24. Whatever else is true of the mysterious presentiment of things yet to come, it is not possible for something to be seen that does not exist. Further, what already exists is present, not future. So when we say that future things are seen, it is not the things themselves that are seen—for they do not yet exist; they are in the future—but perhaps their causes or signs, which do already exist. So the things conceived by the mind, on the basis of which future things are predicted, are present to those who see them, rather than future. Again, these conceptions already exist, and those who foretell future things look upon these present conceptions within themselves.

There is such a great multitude of these things, but just one can serve me as an example. I see the dawn and I foretell that the sun is going to rise. What I see is present; what I foretell is future. The *sun* is not future—it already exists—but its rising, which does not yet exist, is future. Still, I would not be able to predict the sunrise unless I were imagining it in my mind, in the way that I am doing now as I speak. Now the dawn that I see in the sky is not the sunrise, although it does precede the sunrise; nor is that image in my mind the sunrise. Perceiving these two present things is what allows me to speak beforehand of the future thing. So future things do not yet exist; and if they do not exist yet, they do not exist; and if they do not exist, they cannot in any way be seen, though they can be predicted on the basis of present things that already exist and are seen.

19.25. And you, Sovereign of your creation, how do you teach souls those things that are future? Certainly you have taught your prophets. How do you, to whom nothing is future, teach future things? Or do you instead teach present things concerning future things? For what does not exist cannot even be taught. The way in which you do this is beyond my ken; it is too much for me. In my own strength I cannot attain to it. But in the strength that comes from you, sweet Light of my hidden eyes, I will be able to attain to it, when you have granted me your help.

20.26. It is now clear and evident that neither future things nor past things exist. Nor is it strictly correct to say, “There are three times: past, present, and future.” Instead, it would perhaps be correct to say, “There are three times: the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future.” These are certainly three things in the soul (and I do not see them anywhere else): the present of things past is memory, the present of things present is attention, and the present of things future is expectation. If we are allowed to use such language, I see three times, and I acknowledge that they are three. And go ahead and say, “There are three times: past, present, and future,” as ordinary language inaptly puts it; go ahead and say that. I do not mind; I do not object or find fault, provided that one understands what is being said, and that neither the future nor the past now exists. There are few things that our ordinary language expresses correctly, and many things that it does not; but we know what we mean.

21.27. I said a bit earlier that we measure passing times, so that we can say this time is twice as long as that one, or this time is exactly as long as that one, and whatever else we can say by way of measuring the parts of time. So, as I was saying, we measure passing times; and if anyone asks me, “How do you know this?” I will answer, “I know because we measure them, and we cannot measure what does not exist, and past and future things do not exist.” But how do we measure present time, which has no duration? It must be measured as it passes, since once it has passed, it is not measured—for then there is no longer anything there to be measured. But when it is measured, where does it come from, by what path does it go, and to where does it pass? There are no answers but these: it comes from

the future, goes through the present, and passes into the past. So it comes from what does not yet exist, goes through what has no duration, and passes into what no longer exists. Yet our measurements of time are always in terms of some duration. We say that a time is one unit long, or that one time is twice as long or three times as long or equally long as another; and all such statements, and others like them, are in terms of some duration. So in what duration do we measure passing time? In the future, from which it comes? We do not measure what does not yet exist. In the present, through which it goes? We do not measure what has no duration. In the past, into which it passes? We do not measure what no longer exists.

22.28. My mind is on fire to solve this most perplexing mystery. O Lord my God, good Father, I implore you in the name of Christ: do not hide these things, so familiar and yet so secret, from my longing; let me break through to them until they begin to shine by the light of your mercy, O Lord. From whom shall I earnestly seek answers to these questions? To whom shall I more profitably confess my ignorance than to you? For you are not displeased by the raging fire of my zeal to understand your Scriptures. Grant what I love—for I do love it, and even that love is your gift. Grant it, Father, who truly know how to give good gifts to your children; grant it, because I have set out to understand these things but the labor is too great for me, until you open a path. I implore you in the name of Christ, in the name of him who is the Holy of Holies, let no one hinder me. I have believed, and therefore I speak. This is my hope, and for this I live, that I might gaze upon the delight of the Lord. Behold, you have made my days old; and they pass away, I know not how. We speak of time and time, of times and times: “How long ago did he say that?” and “How long ago did he do that?” and “For how long a time have I not seen that?” and “This syllable takes twice the time of that short, simple syllable.” We say these things and hear them; we are understood and we understand. They are utterly obvious, utterly familiar—and yet they are desperately obscure, a fresh discovery.

23.29. A certain learned person once said to me that the movements of the sun and moon and stars are times, but I did not agree. Why not rather say that the movements of *all* bodies are times? If the heavenly lights stood still but a potter’s wheel moved, would there not be time by which we would measure its rev-

olutions and say that they were of equal periods—or, if the wheel moved at an unsteady speed, that some revolutions took less time and others more? And as we said these things, would not we ourselves be speaking in time? Would not some syllables in our speech be short and others long—and that only because the longer syllables sounded for a longer time and the shorter syllables for a shorter time? God, grant human beings the power to see in small things the common principles of things both small and great. Stars and heavenly lights are for signs and times and days and years. That is certainly true. But I would not say that the rotation of that little wooden wheel is a day; and that learned man should not say that if the heavenly bodies stood still, there would be no time.

23.30. I desire to know the power and nature of the time by which we measure the movements of bodies and say that (for example) this movement takes twice as long as that one. Here is my question: ‘day’ is used not only for the period in which the sun is over the earth—this is the sense in which day is distinguished from night—but also for the whole of its circuit from east to east. In this latter sense we say “So-and-so many days have passed” (the number of days here includes nights as well; the periods of night are not regarded as extra). So since a day is completed along with the movement and circuit of the sun from east to east, I ask whether a day is this motion itself, or instead the amount of time that elapses while that motion takes place, or both. If the motion itself were a day, then even if the sun completed its course in an interval of time equal to one hour, that would be a day. If a day is the amount of time, then if the interval between one sunrise and the next were as short as one hour, that would not constitute a day; the sun would have to complete twenty-four revolutions for one day to pass. If both the motion and the amount of time are a day, then it would not be called a day if the sun completed its revolution in the space of one hour; nor would it be called a day if the sun stood still but the amount of time passed in which the sun ordinarily makes its circuit from one morning to the next.

And so I will not ask now what it is that is called a day. Instead I will ask this: what is the time by which we measure the sun’s circuit, so that if it were completed in the span of time in which twelve hours elapse, we would say that it was completed in half the

time it ordinarily takes; and, comparing the two times, we would say that one is a single period and the other double, even if the sun completed its circuit from sunrise to sunrise sometimes in the single period and sometimes in the double? So let no one say to me that times are the movements of the heavenly bodies. For once, in answer to someone's prayer, the sun stood still so that a battle might be fought to victory; the sun stood still, but time passed. Indeed, the fighting was carried out and completed over a span of time that was sufficient for it. I see, therefore, that time is a kind of distention. But do I see this, or do I merely think I see it? You, Light and Truth, will show me.

24.31. Do you command me to agree when someone says that time is the movement of a body? You do not. For I hear that no body moves except in time; you say this. But I do not hear that the movement of a body is itself time; you do not say that. For when a body is moved, I measure in time how long its movement takes, from when it begins to move until it stops. If I did not see when it began to move, and it continues to move and I do not see when it stops, I cannot measure—except perhaps from when I begin to see it until I stop paying attention. If I watch it for a good while, I can report only that it was a long time, but not how long, since when we say how long something lasts, we do so by means of a comparison: for example, “This is as long as that” or “This is twice as long as that” or something of that sort. But if we can mark off the spans of the places from which and to which a moving body goes—or its parts, if it is moved as on a lathe—we can say how long a time it takes for that body (or its parts) to move from this place to that. And so the body's movement and that by which we measure it are two distinct things. That being so, does anyone not realize which of these two is more properly called “time”? If a body sometimes moves and sometimes is at rest, we measure not only its motion but also its rest in time. We say “It was at rest as long as it was in motion” or “It was at rest twice as long, or three times as long, as it was in motion” or whatever else our measurement might be, whether we have determined it exactly or merely estimated (“more or less,” as we say).

25.32. I confess to you, Lord, that even now I do not know what time is. And again I confess to you, Lord, that I know I am saying these things in time, and that I have already been speaking for a long while

about time, and that this long while is long only as a period of time. How, then, do I know all this when I do not know what time is? Do I perhaps not know how to express what I do know? Woe is me: I do not even know what it is I do not know! Behold, my God, before you I do not lie. As I am speaking, so is my heart. You, O Lord, will light my lamp; my God, you will make my darkness bright.

26.33. Does not my soul confess to you in a true confession that I measure times? So I measure, my God, and I do not know what it is I am measuring. By time I measure the movement of a body. Do I not likewise measure time itself? Could I, in fact, measure the movement of a body—how long it is, and how long it takes in going from here to there—without measuring the time in which it moves? How, then, do I measure that time itself? Do we measure a longer time by a shorter time in the way that we measure the length of a crossbeam by a yardstick? That would seem to be how we measure the length of a long syllable by that of a short syllable and say that the former is double the latter. It is how we measure the length of poems by the length of their lines, and the length of lines by the length of their feet, and the length of feet by the length of their syllables, and the length of long syllables by the length of short syllables: not in pages (that is a way for us to measure places, not times), but as the sounds pass by in being pronounced. And we say, “The poem is long because it contains so many lines; the lines are long because they consist of so many feet; the feet are long because they stretch out for so many syllables; the syllable is long because it is double a short syllable.” But even this does not establish a reliable measure of time, because a shorter line, if recited very deliberately, might sound for a greater length of time than a longer line spoken hastily. And the same goes for poems, feet, and syllables. Hence it appears to me that time is nothing other than distention—but a distention of *what* I do not know. I should be surprised if it were not a distention of the mind itself. I implore you, God: what, then, am I measuring when I say, indefinitely, “This time is longer than that one,” or even, definitely, “This time is twice as long as that”? I am measuring time—so much I know. But I am not measuring the future, which does not yet exist; I am not measuring the present, which is not extended for any duration; I am not measuring the past, because it no

longer exists. What, then, am I measuring? Not *past* times, but *passing* times? So I said earlier.

27.34. Be still, my mind; be vigorous in your attention. God is our helper; it is he who has made us, and not we ourselves. Give your attention where the truth is beginning to dawn. A bodily voice, let us say, begins to sound; it sounds and keeps sounding. Then it stops. Now there is silence, and the voice is past and is no longer a voice. Before it sounded, it was future; and it could not be measured, because it did not yet exist. And it cannot be measured now, because it no longer exists. So it could be measured while it was sounding, because that was when a voice existed that could be measured. But even then it was not standing still; it was moving and passing away. Or was that all the more reason it *could* be measured? For in passing away it was extended through some span of time that could be measured, since the present has no duration.

So let us assume that it could be measured then, and imagine another voice. It begins to sound and keeps sounding uniformly and without interruption. Let us measure it while it is sounding. After all, once it has stopped sounding, it will already be past and there will be nothing to measure. Let us measure it with precision and say how great it is. But it is still sounding, and it can be measured only from its beginning, when it starts to sound, to its end, when it stops. (What we measure is, of course, the interval between a beginning and an end.) So a voice that is not yet finished cannot be measured so that one can say how long or short it is, or that it is equal to another, or that in relation to another it is single or double or anything else. But once it has been completed, it will no longer exist. How, then, will anyone be able to measure it? And yet we do measure times: but not those that do not yet exist, nor those that no longer exist, nor those that are not extended for any duration, nor those that have no ending-point. It follows that we do not measure future times, or past times, or present times, or passing times. And yet we do measure times.

27.35. *Deus Creator omnium*:<sup>1</sup> This eight-syllable line alternates between short and long syllables. The

four short syllables (the first, third, fifth, and seventh) are single in comparison with the four long syllables (the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth). Each long syllable takes twice as much time as each short syllable. I recite the line and report this; and it is true, so far as I experience it with clear perception. So far as my perception is clear, I measure the long syllable by the short one and perceive that it is exactly twice as long. But since one sounds after the other—the short one first, and then the long—how will I retain the short one and set it against the long one to measure it so that I find the long one to be exactly twice as long? For the long syllable does not begin to sound until the short one stops sounding. Do I measure the long syllable when it is still present? Surely not, since I do not measure it until it is complete. But once it is complete, it is in the past: so then what am I measuring? Where is the short syllable by which I measure it? And where is the long syllable that I measure? Both have sounded. They have fled and passed away. They no longer exist. But I do measure, and I answer with all the confidence that one can repose in finely-honed perception, that the short syllable is single and the long one double, in terms of the time they take. I cannot do this unless they have passed away and are complete. So I am not measuring the syllables themselves, which no longer exist; I measure something in my memory that stays imprinted there.

27.36. It is in you, my soul, that I measure times. Do not hinder me—that is, do not let the tumult of your impressions hinder you. In you, I say, I measure times. I measure the impression that passing things make on you, an impression that remains after the things have passed away. I measure the impression, which is present, not the things that made the impression by passing away. It is the impression that I measure when I measure times. So either these impressions are times, or else I do not measure times. And when we measure a silence and say that this silence lasted for just as long a time as that voice, do we not distend our thought to measure the voice as if it were sounding, so that we can report something about the duration of the silences within a span of time? With voice and lips stilled, in our thought we run through poems and lines and any discourse and any measurements of motion; and we report on their duration and relative lengths just as we would if we said them aloud. Suppose someone wanted to

1. “O God, Creator of all,” the opening line of a hymn for evening composed by Saint Ambrose, who baptized Augustine.

make a rather long sound, and he settled beforehand how long it was going to be. He has of course thought through that span of time in silence, and commending it to his memory, he begins to make the sound, which sounds until it is brought to the ending-point that he had in view. Or rather, it has sounded and will sound: for whatever part of it is already finished has sounded, whereas whatever remains will sound. And thus the sound is being completed as long as present intention propels the future into the past; as the part of the sound that is future shrinks, its past grows, until its future is completely used up and the whole sound is past.

28.37. But how does the future, which does not yet exist, shrink or get used up? How does the past, which no longer exists, grow? It can only be because these three exist in the mind, which accomplishes this. For the mind looks ahead, it attends, and it remembers, so that what it looks ahead to passes through what it attends to and into what it remembers. Who, then, denies that future things do not yet exist? But even so, in the mind there is already an expectation of future things. And who denies that past things no longer exist? But even so, in the mind there is still a memory of past things. And who denies that the present time lacks duration, since it passes away in an instant? But even

so, attention endures; and that which will be passes through attention on its way to being no more. So future time, which does not exist, is not long; a long future is a long expectation of the future. And past time, which does not exist, is not long; a long past is a long memory of the past.

28.38. I am about to recite a song that I know. Before I begin, my expectation is stretched out through the whole song. But once I have begun, my memory too is stretched out, over as much as I have gathered from my expectation and stored in the past. And the life of this action of mine is distended into memory because of what I have already recited and into expectation because of what I am going to recite. But my attention is present and exists now, and what was future passes through my attention so that it becomes past. As more and more of the action is completed, expectation grows shorter and memory longer, until all of the expectation is used up and the whole, completed action has passed into memory. And what is true of the whole song is true of each of its verses and of every one of its syllables. It is true of a longer action, of which perhaps the song is a small part. It is true of a whole human life, whose parts are all of a person's actions. It is true of the whole age of the sons of men, whose parts are all human lives.

## 8. The City of God

### Book 19

3. *Which of the Three Sects that Seek the Supreme Good of Man Does Varro, Following the Doctrine of the Old Academy (on the Authority of Antiochus), Define as Worthy of Choice?*

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Which, then, of these three is true and to be pursued he sets out to prove in the following manner. First, since philosophy seeks the supreme good not of a tree, or of a beast, or of God, but of man, he thinks that we must put the question what man himself is. He concludes that in man's nature there are two things, body and soul; and of these two he has no doubt at all that the soul is the better and by far more excellent. But is the soul alone the man, and is the body to him as the horse to the horseman? For the horseman is not a man and a horse, but only a man, and is called a horseman because he bears a certain relation in respect to a horse. Or is the body alone the man, bearing some re-