

## Kinds of Eternity: Temporal Problematic and Historical Horizons

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### ABSTRACT

This hermeneutical exploration of the notion of eternity is committed to the premise that eternity is a temporal phenomenon. I show how notions of eternity express orientations within a field of phenomenological questions called temporal problematic.

Temporal problematic is a phenomenological way of raising questions about the unity of the future, the past and the present. Important misunderstandings of temporality spring from the commonsensical assumption that the unity of the future, past and present is *time*: that these three are "parts of time," have time-like order and undergo flux.

I show to the contrary how decisions about the phenomenological problem of the unity of future, past and present show up ahead of, and in the direction of their origin, even apart from a given system's account of flowing time. For such decisions to have nothing to do with flowing time is no impediment to their being *temporal*. Flowing time in the old speculation is not even an original phenomenon of time, much less of the temporal at the level of consequence here explored. In classical thought temporal decisions are best reconstructed from the notions of *eternity* they produce. I sketch three different kinds of eternity in order to illuminate the range and consequences of such fundamental temporal decisions.

Along the way, I focus on a shift between kinds of eternity in the late Platonic speculations of Plotinus and Augustine. There we are given access to the specifically Christian experience of temporality. In that connection I indicate how my construction of temporal problematic originates in and means to return to the temporal problematic of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Its key features, especially the temporal interpretation of human historical finitude as it bears on hermeneutics, have been appropriated with great penetration in recent work by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Yet Gadamer's exposition suffers from an important ambiguity concerning temporal "presence" which damages the discussion of historical horizons and would block my effort to thematize the projection of eternity in the horizon of the future in Augustine.

By supplementing Gadamer at this point, I make possible a hermeneutical appropriation of the kinds of eternity, centered in the Christian experience of a futural eternity which emerges in Augustine. Responding to Augustine, I conclude with some suggestions about temporal problematic and Christian trinitarian theology.

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The following hermeneutical exploration of the notion of eternity is committed to the premise that eternity is a temporal phenomenon. I shall show how notions of eternity express orientations with a field of phenomenological questions called "temporal problematic."

Put schematically, temporal problematic is a phenomenological way of raising questions about the unity of the future, the past and the present. Important misunderstandings prevail about temporality, springing from the commonsensical and quite reflexive assumption that the unity of the future, past and present is *time*: that these three are "parts of ~~time~~," that they have timelike order and undergo flux, that the relations among them follow from and depend on the account one gives of the time-dimension of being.

I hope to show to the contrary how decisions about the phenomenological problem of the unity of future, past and present show up ahead of and in the direction of their origin, even apart from a given system's account of flowing time. For such decisions to have nothing to do with flowing time is no impediment to their being *temporal*. Flowing time in the old speculation is not even an original phenomenon of time, much less of the temporal at the level of consequence we shall be exploring. In classical thought temporal decisions are best reconstructed from the notions of *eternity* they produce. I shall sketch three different kinds of eternity in order to illuminate the range and consequences of such fundamental, "temporological" decisions.

Along the way, I shall focus on a shift between kinds of eternity in the late Platonic speculations of Plotinus and Augustine. There we are given access to the hermeneutical-phenomenological question of the specifically Christian experience of temporality. In that connection I want to indicate how my construction of temporal problematic originates in and means to return to the temporal problematic of Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. The specific way in which his program opens avenues for hermeneutical Christian theology has not, I shall argue, yet been grasped, though the work of Hans-Georg

Gadamer, appropriately supplemented, moves in the right direction.

#### Preliminary Orientation to Temporal Problematic

In the interest of clarity, let me begin with some explanations that must necessarily be advanced dogmatically, and indeed in an orgy of negations.

Future/past/present are not parts of time but horizons of disclosure space. I say "disclosure space" here in order *not* to say "time," for many of us are all too eager to make them horizons opened across time, produced by a kind of being-in-time that has not merely location in time but relatedness across it. On this account looking ahead or anticipation horizons a "future," looking back or recollection horizons a "past," and the durative thickness of phenomenal actuality horizons a "present"--though it gets called a "specious" present in a fine testimony to the power of the modern representation of serial now-time to demote everything phenomenally original about temporality to the merely specious or epiphenomenal.

To treat future/past/present this way as stably extended horizons across time, as forms of temporal relatedness which accompany the subject of being-in-time as it advances from time-location to time-location, and are given content by its own finitely free acts of self-constitution, is undoubtedly a great advance over older physicalistic presuppositions. This way of talking, which approximates most people's notion of Heidegger's temporal interpretation of *Dasein* and can easily be translated into the prehension-language of process thought, may even be able to solve the kinds of conundrum about the twofold logic of order in time and the threefold logic of future/past/present that were raised by Bergson and McTaggart, and this would be very valuable.

But the whole pattern of thinking concedes a priority and givenness to serial, flowing time which is phenomenologically inside-out and short-circuits temporal problematic completely. The temporal horizons are indeed open to "ecstases," standings-out or -over. But

these are not ecstases across time, and the origin from which they emerge is not location in time. They are instead, to get somewhat ahead of ourselves, ecstases into the opening between manifestation and concealment, into the difference between beings and what it means to "be." Just to put a label on it, I call future/past/present horizons of disclosure space. In the openness so horizoned we may indeed meet up with time. More characteristically, as we shall see, we confront various kinds of eternity.

But before moving to the kinds of eternity, we need to draw and deny two implications of familiar ideas about future/past/present. In the first place, however much it improves matters to make these three be horizons across time instead of parts of time pure and simple, both positions meet a common pitfall: one attributes to future/past/present the defining characteristics of the underlying serial time, series itself, order. This is most easily seen in the entirely counter-phenomenal but nevertheless common impression that there are relations of "before and after" among future/past/present: that the present comes after the past, for example, and the future after the present; or alternately, that the future arises before the present, and the future and the present before the past. To this one must rejoin--particularly to those who in other respects do grasp the three as disclosure-horizons--that future/past/present are stable, permanent, mutually-implicated forms of temporal relationship. Among themselves they neither succeed, flow, nor take on order. It may be meaningful to trace an order in the entrance into the three horizons of some concrete time-determinate content, and to say things like "content x was first in the future, and thereupon in the present, and thereupon in the past." But it may be equally meaningful, and some ontologies require, that we say "content x was first of all available in the past, and thereupon it was constellated in the present, and thereupon it projects itself toward the future," an alternative that makes even the indirect association of future/past/present with timelike order a matter of

suspicion.

The second affliction that timelike order works on temporal problematic is more decisive and even more universal. Virtually no one doubts, nor can imagine how to doubt, that among what we usually list as past, present, future, the present is "in the middle," is somehow pivotal. Our contemporary discussion of temporal orientation is awash with distinctions among a present turned from the past toward the future, a present turned from the future toward the past, or (this is most advanced) a present that creatively unifies its future and its past. We concede without knowing how to question it that Being and Time ripen the fruit of their conspiracy in the present, in a present with past and future on either side of it and indeed initially *outside* of it, despite all our efforts to involve them "dynamically" in the constitution of presence.

In general, the failure of so many current efforts to portray the unity of future/past/present in a phenomenologically original and ontologically appropriate way arises from their premature reference outside the pure horizontal structure of the temporal disclosure space to the apparently "underlying" serial multiplicity of time. Temporally-conditioned disclosedness cannot have its unity fused together from externalities; its horizons are instead caught up in a mutual internality which can only partly be unfolded, and then with a resistance to separation which gives us schemas of two-on-one instead of threesomes. Or if it gives us a threesome, it is the three "rotations" of the two-on-one, the *perichōrēsis* of mutual interpenetrations that Christian theology sometimes uses to schematize the doctrine of divine trinity.

Before we can consider the problem of their unity, however, we must show how the different kinds of eternity illuminate the disclosure functions of each horizon in turn. In order to begin with the familiar, we turn first to Plotinus.



### The Temporal Problematic of Presence: Plotinus

I choose Plotinus because he is the most mature and in many ways the most accessible proponent of the Greek philosophical understanding of eternity. We are very familiar with the fact that this Greek understanding explains itself with talk about an elevated kind of "presence." Plotinus certainly gives us an example in the *Enneads*:

One sees eternity in seeing a life that abides in the same, and always has the all present to it, not now this, and then again that, but all things at once, and not now some things, and then again others, but a partless completion, as if they were all together in a point, and had not yet begun to go out and flow into lines; it is something which abides in the same in itself and does not change at all but is always in the present, because nothing of it has passed away, nor again is there anything to come into being, but that which it is, it is. (III, 7, 3:16-23, trans. Armstrong)

All our familiar notions about classical eternity are in this quote: a simultaneously total, partlessly completed sameness; the exclusion of any has been or will be; a present without change which, for that very reason, is the disclosure space of true Being (in Plotinus, the Platonic Ideas).

Yet there are unfamiliar elements in the text, and it is from pursuing them that insight into this conceptuality must come. On what grounds, we might ask with some impatience, does Plotinus call this apparently frozen, static presence "life"?! And what in the world is the force of the image that the unity of this presence is like a point; *not* the point-on-a-line we mean by the "now," colimiting two segments, but the point which is the origin for a radial outflow?

Plotinus, deeper examination will show, can call eternity "life" with complete equanimity, because in the tradition as he reads it *stasis* is not motionless and frozen but constantly accomplished (it is homeostasis), sameness is not a formal fact but a self-constituting activity, and the phenomenological origin of the reflection is not empty, hyper-conscious contemplation but the

active enjoyment of intellectual exploration.

Only if we properly rule out the misconception that eternity for the Greeks is abstractly static, formal and empty of life, can we begin properly to question Plotinus's use of a language of energetics and action to express timeless presence; and only then in turn can we decide in what sense this presence excludes the adventitious and what lapses.

Eternal life in Plotinus is the life of intellectual Mind (*Nous*). Consider the following statements he makes about it: "If Mind had no alteration at all, and if no kind of otherness woke it into life, it would not be activity." Some sentences later, "The beings would have no being if Mind were not in activity, an activity which is always other and other, like a wandering which wanders everywhere and yet wanders in itself, like Mind truly and naturally wandering in itself.... Mind is entirely itself; the wandering it has is an abiding one" (VI, 7, 13:11-12 and 28-34, my trans.). Here Plotinus most insistently affirms of eternal life what we would happily agree is required for life, but would have thought the "abidingness" and "self-sameness" of eternity excluded: alteration, otherness, genuine activity, indeed "wandering" (*planē*, as of the planets). Other passages amplify the point, celebrating the inexhaustable enjoyment with which Mind explores the infinite power of true being.

Still, such talk does not discourage him from equal insistence on simplicity and self-sameness and already-embraced totality: "Mind, as something moving, is moved of itself and in identity and always alike; not that the identity and unity are those of what is in parts, but rather they are total" (VI, 7, 13:5-6, my trans.).

Is the combination of both kinds of talk just nonsense--a partless totality full of inner difference, an abiding full of wandering, a selfhood full of otherness? Or is it phenomenologically founded talk, richly and immediately expressive of ecstatic-horizonal presence, rooted, we might say, in the philosopher's delight in presence-of-mind?

We can find some clues to these apparent paradoxes about eternity in the Neoplatonic understanding of time-- but only by keeping in mind that for the whole Platonic tradition, time is the image of eternity and never something susceptible to explanation "by itself," apart from eternity. Since our problem is to grasp what presence is in eternity, let us glance at what it is "in the image," in time.

Plotinus makes the present of time the *diastasis*, the standing-through or perdurance of life (III, 7, 11:42). Later Neoplatonists elaborate the notion. Simplicius, telling us what Iamblichus says on a point where Iamblichus is amplifying Plotinus, writes: "He wants not only the now to be in the present, but also the time in the interval between two limits" (Sambursky/Pines: 40). Here we can rejoice to recognize our concept of the "specious present," the span of time embraced by a single act. But the perspective in which Plotinus introduces the concept is an inversion of our own. We say "specious presence" of the interval between two limits because secretly we are sure that only the point-limits, the "nows," are ever genuinely present. Plotinus could also say "specious presence" of the present-in-time, but in his case this would not be because the genuine present lurks below it in the evasive "nows" of time, but because it rules above it, in the eternity time aspires to image.

The diastasis of life in time, which spans, horizons and unifies the fragmented multiplicity of sensible "nows," in so doing images eternity, which spans, horizons and unifies the coherent multiplicity of Mind and Being. That the present in time unifies a multiplicity is not at all what distinguishes it from eternal presence, as though the latter were a structureless simplicity. Time's very multiplicity is a degraded echo of intelligible being, whose manifoldness is a central doctrine in Plotinus.

There is much more worth saying about the philosophy of mind and the ontology involved here, but for our own purposes we can make do with a summation in which we



focus only on a schematic outline of Plotinus's temporal problematic of presence.

In Plotinus the notion of the present, thought of as spanning and unifying differentiations and in that sense as ecstatic, does not arise as a category of time, and yet is not so uniquely proper to eternity that it becomes an anomaly or paralogism when applied to time. Perplexingly, it seems to arise at a level of systematic reflection where the meanings of eternity and of time are both at stake. The center of interest seems less the separation between them than the conjunction and imaging through which Platonism mediates intelligible being and sensible becoming.

This mediating interest locates the choice of ecstatic-horizonal presence as the fundamental disclosure horizon in Plotinus's transcendental logic. From this choice there *follow* for Plotinus a vision of eternity and an orientation to sensible time. Bound together as imaged and paradigmatic presence, time and eternity determine what can be said to "be" and the meaning of Being for such entity.

This kind of choice of presence, which suppresses having been and futurity by way of antecedently incorporating them within the present so far as they pertain to the meaning of Being, does not arise as an orientation in time, but as a pure possibility of temporal problematic itself, from which the nature of eternity itself, and time by consequence, must each be construed.

#### The Temporal Problematic of Having Been: Myth

Let us now turn to the temporal problematic of the past, seeking both to clarify and to confirm our exposition of the problematic of presence.

When we assert, with Heidegger, that Greek metaphysics begins in the choice of a particular temporal horizon and continues as a systematic submission of Being and beings to its horizonal schema, the notion of "choice" involved is empty if alternatives are not possible in this realm. It has long seemed to me that an alternative to the metaphysics of presence is not only available but

in fact quite familiar, though because it remains "pre-ontological" we do not habitually think of it as harboring a metaphysics. I refer to what there is of a formal pattern of explanation in myth as Eliade and others have taught us to consider it--myth in its own archaic atmosphere, not yet brought into a hermeneutical circle with our starting point à la Ricoeur.

As an exercise in temporal problematic, I shall expound mythic temporal orientation as if it set out to be an explicit ontology. I shall do nothing more than reproduce the schematization of metaphysics just given from Plotinus, but with "having been" in place of "presence."

So then: we choose as our fundamental disclosure horizon the temporal condition of having been, of pastness. From this there will follow notions of eternity and time, of their interaction, and in that interaction, of what count as beings and what it means for them to "be."

In such a framework, that will be said to "be" which has been; its Being will be its having-been-ness. Eternity will be a transcendent having been, a "past which proves imperishable because of its eternally repeated rebirths" (Kerényi: 7). Eternity becomes a past that is never outstripped, which remains immediate in originality and power by compelling time to be its image: cyclic time, the time of "eternal return." The meaning of Being is again eternal, but that now means: having been *in illo tempore, en archēi*, "in the beginning." Entity embedded in time will participate in such transcendent having been by building up its own fragmentary and finite having been. Time for its part will both image and degrade eternal true having been--not according to a schema of presence where, like a line, it can be regarded both as a spanned unity and as fragmented serial order, but instead like a cycle, a phase-series, which both returns to itself every 360° (the imaging of eternity) and yet is less than itself on account of a continual detour through a future and a present that have not yet "been."

Further elaborations of this temporal-ontological framework are so familiar we need only glance at them: the archaic identification of immortality with memorability, i.e., with a status and repute that take one out of one's own finite past and make one part of the universal past, the legendary and finally mythical past. We recall Kierkegaard speaking of the "past that one enters only backwards" (80f.). What we need to notice for our purposes here is how the selection of "having been" as the fundamental temporal clue is not in the first instance an experience of time, but an experience which expresses itself first in an eternity of a certain kind. Time, and being in time, are understood in the image of, and as a bound consequence of, eternal true Being as eternal true Having Been.

The choice of temporal horizon once again reaches time only after expressing itself as eternity. Keeping this sequence in mind, we turn to temporal problematic in Augustine.

#### The Temporal Problematic of Futurity: Augustine

What do we find of a fundamental temporal-ontological choice in Augustine? More important, how on phenomenological-hermeneutical grounds should we look for such a thing? What should we expect from a futural eternity?

We know first of all--and this is a capital point--that we must not look for Augustine's orientation within temporal problematic by searching out immediately his interpretation of *time*. We cannot therefore go to Book XI of the *Confessions*, his treatise on time and eternity. The discussion of eternity there counterposes it to time in an essentially negative way, and more than that, I would argue that there as elsewhere Augustine shows us only his scholar's notion of eternity: eternity as eternal presence, reproduced as he learned it from Porphyry but without Plotinus's emphasis on the way eternal presence is activity and life. We cannot decide whether time and eternity have for Augustine a new temporal sense until we locate the point of his own genuine new beginning, and this is entirely submerged in his explicit and often

all-too-learned appropriation of the metaphysics of presence.

In 1921 lectures on "Augustine and Neoplatonism," Heidegger went to a better place in the *Confessions* than the treatise on time and eternity. He turned back to Book X, the philosophy of memory. From Otto Pöggeler's discussion of those lectures (38-45), however, it appears that Heidegger missed entirely the Christian novelty and temporal importance--in the sense of "temporal" he was to develop for *Being and Time*--of Augustine's notion of memory. This is not completely surprising, because the full consequences of that notion are only barely visible in *Confessions*. But by the completion twenty years later of the great speculative work *On the Trinity*, Augustine had evolved from his early theory of memory a full-fledged theory of the temporal structure of finite human inwardness and indeed, what we should have to call a "temporal interpretation of *Dasein*."

Whether Heidegger came to draw in a positive way from Augustine on the problem of temporality is a question worth raising, but not necessary to decide here. We must sketch for ourselves how Augustine's phenomenology of memory unfolded into something more general in the treatise *On the Trinity*, and we must show, in the relation memory is there given to eternity, how a decisive and revealing break has been made with Greek Neoplatonism over the temporal character of eternity.

Plotinus very precisely denies that there is memory in eternal life. He takes this up not merely for the "higher" hypostasis, Mind, but for that soul also, She of the All, our great sister, who in moving the heavens is always immediately in the presence of eternity and suffers no declination toward time (*Enneads*, IV, 4:6-8; cf. II, 1 and 2). Even for her, there is no memory then, though her life-span embraces all ages past. Still less is there memory in eternity for us, whose life-span is both trivial by comparison and in its special kind of finitude a degradation of our authentic being. There is just pure presence-of-mind, the immediate enjoyment of purpose, activity and power.

Augustine to the contrary expects memory in eternity, memory as it individuates more even than embodiment, giving us our biography shaded by its "memories of memories" (*Confessions*, X, 13). In serving this function, memory is bound up with a *futural* ecstasis. Augustine says, characteristically, "Then therefore [in eternity], we shall remember this past mortal life, and shall recall by memory once believing what we did not see; but that faith shall be reckoned in past and transacted things, not in those present and always continuing" (*De trinitate*, XIV, 2, 4, my trans.). We pass by for the moment the scholastic tagging of this eternity as the "present and always continuing," because we are raising the question of the temporal meaning of eternity from within the horizons of the existing soul, that is to say, *Dasein*-analytically, making a phenomenological beginning. What concerns us first is that the ecstatically projected memory of one's completed life involves a *futural* and therefore not an immediately present presence.

Now it is easy to grant from the text just cited that Augustine talks of eternal memory in the future tense, but it must seem puzzling to begin our consideration of the Augustinian experience of the future with memory at all, which plainly belongs to the past. The solution to this puzzle lies in the structure of Augustine's own temporal problematic.

In the half of the treatise *On the Trinity* that deals not directly with God but with man the image of God, Augustine has it that the true image of divine life in us, and therefore our own authentic Being, is the pure inward unity of *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *voluntas*: memory, understanding, will. In sharp contrast with later faculty-psychologies, he does not refer here to three "faculties of consciousness," directed outside of itself by a subject embedded in time. He is concerned only with inner relations, with the way in which as equal, self-referred and interpenetrating mental acts (retention, attention, intention), these three give the stable "form" of inwardness itself. For Augustine, memory, understanding and will, in their unity, are the



truth of inner life quite apart from the question whether that life is to be portrayed in time or in eternity.

The crucial thing for grasping the effects of a temporal choice of the future is the structure Augustine describes as the unity of inner life. (We take it as clear that the three acts refer respectively to having been, presence and futurity.) In the schema of unity he adopts, *voluntas*, will, is the unification of memory and understanding. What it means to "have a will" is to have one's understanding of the present situation cohere with the perspective of memory. Conversely, what it means to be irresolute, confused, without a will, is precisely to have a present without a past, or a past that one's present cannot stand up to. In purely temporal terms, the future is not a phenomenon immediately of itself, but of the past and the present in their unity. Therefore in principle, the way to look for the future is to look at how past and present are related, to consider the form of their unity.

With this in mind the text we cited reveals one more layer of its experience of the temporal future. The memory and the presence that Augustine projects as eternal have as their foundation an ecstatic disclosure of "this past mortal life," indeed precisely as "past and transacted." What Augustine sometimes calls the "fruition of faith," the eternal vision of God, is rooted in a having been in which human life becomes a phenomenon specifically in its mortality, its finitude, its individuation on the stage of history. In radical disagreement with contemporaneous pagan classicism, Augustine projects an "eternal aspect" for our finite lifetimes, our historical persons.

"We shall remember" is therefore spoken in an experience of the temporal future not despite but precisely because it is an ecstasis of having been, an anticipation of memory. The problem of conceiving eternity and time as they follow from this horizoning of disclosedness is formally much more complex than in the cases of past and present, because past and present are exactly what the future opens up.

I find only indirect contributions to such a conceptuality in Augustine, small breakthroughs held at bay by the overwhelming Neoplatonic architectonic of presence. Their common theme is the temporal finitude of human inwardness and its suitability to an imaging of divine life. Finitude for Augustine is no longer the merely negative determination of spiritual substance that it was for Plotinus's doctrine of human psychic life, for whom the cares of sensible time are a diversion and the soul's accommodation of them a fall from essence. That we only know as we remember, and only remember as we love, which are the "limitations" of the inner man in Augustine, are at the same time the conditions for receiving the image of divine trinity and being ordered to participation in it.

Because the trinitarian theological problem of the image of God is the context for my own effort, expanding on Augustine, to conceive futural eternity and time in its shadow, I postpone my suggestions to the final section below. Meantime, we must consider the subtheme our discussion has brought into the foreground, the problem of temporal finitude itself. The context for joining this issue is contemporary philosophical hermeneutics.

#### Temporal Finitude and Horizon in Hermeneutics

Eternities arise in the same fundamental deployment of thought that opens temporal horizons. They belong, to use Robert Sokolowski's happy phrase, to the "inside of time" (chap. 6). They are pure phenomena of temporal ecstasis, ideal temporally-conditioned disclosednesses.

Old tradition calls unities in time coordinated with them "images," to express their less perfect disclosedness. These are said to be "moving" because of their involvement with the externality and multiplicity of sensible succession in time.

Duration and order are two such moving images. Sometimes, as in Plato's *Timaeus*, it is to such temporal phenomena that the name "time" is applied, and not to the underlying sensible multiplicity. This gives the sense of the Platonic formula "time is the image of eternity

moving according to number" (37E). "Number" in this formula means the Pythagorean harmonic form, the synthesis of duration and order. It is the "count" of rhythmic cyclical unities, not the "measure" of a sensible magnitude.

It was Aristotle who made "time" be the name for that sensible magnitude, understood by analogy with space to support notions of location and distance, with respect to which we discriminate faster and slower in motions. Thereafter duration and order are no longer features of time, but intelligibilities adhering to the being that occupies time. Having today abandoned Aristotle's teleological theory of essence, which makes unities of being in time "enactments" (*energeiai*) of intelligible forms which are properly eternal, we still keep the notions of temporal unity and of time for which duration and order become abstract superimpositions on the underlying series of time-locations. No longer submerged in a transcending disclosedness, the flux of these locations is now the matrix of disclosedness, even of Being itself. The perfect name for this pattern of thought is not wanting: "process" philosophy.

Temporal problematic is born from a radical unwillingness to "build up" temporal unities from the pure multiplicity and externality of serial time, or to see anything essential about them in the fact that they are spread across distance in time or involved "dialectically" in its overcoming. The fundamental conflict between the temporal interpretation of the meaning of human historical being in Heidegger's *Being and Time* and process historicism is still not widely recognised, with profound damage to the Heidegger discussion.

An important exception is the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which appropriates with great penetration the projective account of understanding, the finitude of historical disclosure, and the foundational role of language in *Being and Time*. In Gadamer's notion of horizon-fusing, the classic hermeneutical problem of historical alienation and distance is resolved by redirection to the inside of time and its horizontal structure.

The alienation between interpreter and text is given its proper place in the finitude of all understanding, even self-understanding, and is no longer a target for the overcoming of finitude which was the aspiration of various nineteenth century methods of transposition, and especially of dialectic: "It seems to me that it is essential for taking finitude seriously as the basis of every experience of Being that such experience renounce all dialectical supplementation" (1976:172).

And yet the understanding of Gadamer's breakthrough, as well perhaps as its own exposition, has been impeded by what is at best an incompleteness in developing and at worst a complete short-circuiting of temporal problematic itself. Our purpose in the following brief supplementation of his account of horizon-fusing is to strengthen Gadamer's results, and through that to contribute to a proper appreciation of temporal problematic as Heidegger constructs it. This in turn will point us toward a hermeneutical appropriation of the kinds of eternity, and make room for a suggestion about temporal problematic and and Christian theology.

Horizon-fusing refers to the outcome Gadamer elicits from the hermeneutical circle, which is the formation from the initially distinct temporal horizons of interpreter and text of a deepened and shared horizon. A preliminary intention of his account is to combat the older hermeneutics of psychological transposition, whether Dilthey's version which thinks to take on the horizons of the text unencumbered by the interpreter's own horizons, or that of the countermovement for which only the interpreter's own horizons ever come into play. A deeper intention is confirmation and fructification of Heidegger's temporal interpretation of human finitude. "Heidegger was no longer concerned with conceiving of the essence of finitude as the limit at which our desire to be infinite founders. He sought instead to understand finitude positively as the real fundamental constitution of *Dasein*" (1976:125).

For Gadamer the separation of horizons at the outset of interpretation is not an empty gulf, but a moment of concealment in the life of traditions, a mode of the

efficacy of tradition itself. Distance that is genuinely historical is not outside the temporal disclosure space, but inside it as a constitutive moment. Hence the fused horizon accomplished by hermeneutical reflection does not bridge or suspend historical distance so much as bring it into play explicitly and give it its due. Analogues of historical otherness can equally well be found in the individual lifetime and its project of self-understanding. In neither case is the distance or otherness essentially a matter of separation by a length of time. It is an horizon-giving delimitation in the field of understanding and meaning, bound up with the possibility of language.

How is all this to be understood? One direction all too frequently followed is worth excluding. Common sense provides an image for horizon-fusing that blocks the whole problematic. As usual, it begins with a priority of serial time, represented by the directed line.

Let history be represented by a long line on the blackboard. Let two widely separated marks represent the locations of and temporal distance between interpreter and text. Then, with a compass set at a small radius and placed on each mark, introduce "horizons" ahead of and behind the two marks, taking the spans thus produced to model the "local" temporally horizoned disclosure spaces. In this model, horizon-fusing would be represented as a progressive expansion of the compass-setting used to describe the two horizons, continued to the extent that between the two points of origin the horizons would come to overlap. Finally both original points would be included in both horizons.

Such a model images everything Gadamer opposes. It makes the temporal horizons into "edges," negative limitations in the sense of accidental barriers to a larger inclusiveness. It turns the fusing of horizons into a first step toward an infinite, all-encompassing horizon in which distance becomes meaningless. In the concrete, it would turn the hermeneutical experience into the search for an exhaustive erudition concerning the external structure of traditions, reducing it to the most rudimentary form of historical positivism.



Were we forced to operate with the image of history as a line and the temporal horizons as encompassed time-spans, a better model of horizon-fusing could be contrived. Since for Gadamer the hermeneutical movement involving interpreter and text is not across externalities of time but into the inside of time, into the play of manifestation and concealment which is original temporality, we might represent a kind of folding of the time-line back upon itself which would bring the horizons of interpreter and text into superimposition, fusing horizons and horizoned into a material identity. This preserves the point that the fused horizons share a common finitude, though it obscures the preservation of distance.

But so maneuvered, the model now contradicts the very thing about the image of a line that seemed to suit it for representing history. For history, identified with time, was conceived commonsensically to be a multiplicity of locations, serially ordered and separated by external distances. If these distances can be folded out of the way, then at the very least our blackboard must be considered to model history in more dimensions than the one-dimensional order of the line. But in fact it misrepresents history as the context of temporal problematic from the ground up. We must apply a different conceptual imagination not only to the elasticity of historical distance, but more centrally, to the opening and the bounding of the temporal disclosure space itself, the inside of time.

For this Gadamer does not provide adequate resources. His discussion of the temporal horizons is flawed by an important ambiguity, one we can trace into Heidegger also--though he finally came to terms with it in the essay "Time and Being." The problem is actually an ambiguity only in English; in German it is an inadequate distinction among terms.

What for phenomenology is the relation between *Anwesen/das Anwesende/Anwesenheit*--presencing/the present/presence--and *Gegenwärtigen/die Gegenwart/Gegenwärtigkeit*--presencing/the present/presence?

Various expansions of the English equivalents into interpretive phrases and efforts to match in English the grammatical nuances which differentiate some of the German pairs have been used by translators, but no resolution of the difficulty at the level of temporal problematic itself has been attempted. Gadamer is so little embarrassed by the seeming excess of vocabulary that in addition to using one group for the other, from time to time he will throw in the Latinism *Präsenz* as if to mediate the squabble.

The matter is not one of nuances. *Gegenwart* is the present in the threesome future/past/present. It is one of the three equiprimordial horizons in which the existential structure of finite historical being is schematized (in Heidegger, *Dasein* is a projection which is thrown and which falls, an understanding predisposed and situated, a being which is ahead of as already in and alongside what appears for it: here falling, situation and being-alongside belong to the schema of the present). Taken together, these three bring about (*zeitigen*) the "clearing of Being." They co-horizon the openness in which truth and untruth are decided. They are the condition for the play of manifestation and concealment which is history.

*Anwesen* is the "event of Being" itself. It is "presencing," but in a sense to be determined just as much by the future and the past as by the horizontal present--indeed requiring to be determined by all three. *Anwesenheit* is the sway of an event of Being--for example, of that standing-forth of beings in metaphysics which lets be concealed what for metaphysics it means to "be." If this is to be called "presence," it must be taken to refer neither to the horizon of the present itself nor to any priority of the present over future or past, but to the total field in which an orientation to one horizon involves an orientation to all. In my judgment there is no way to avoid fatal ambiguity in saying "presence" for this fundamental subject of temporal interpretation. I find no help in Heidegger's resolution of the problem, in which *Anwesen* is made a "fourth dimension of time," alive

in the interplay among, and in fact originally giving the other three, future/past/present (1972:14ff). Instead I speak of the temporal disclosure space (akin to Heidegger's *Zeit-Raum*), and reserve "present" and "presence" entirely for the *Gegenwart*-family of expressions, for the single horizon among the three.

Against this background, consider the puzzles Gadamer leaves us in with his indefinite, or at least abridged talk of "horizon of the present": "it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project an historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present (*Horizont der Gegenwart*)" (1975:273). The statement is wholly ambiguous. If "horizon of the present" were meant here literally and precisely, it would reduce to the very elementary statement that no fully projected historical horizon consists simply of the horizon of the present; it includes also its own proper horizons of having been and advent, as Gadamer himself seems to observe concerning at least the past: "The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past" (1975:273). But in fact, neither quotation is meant in the way we have just taken them. In the first, he is referring to the subordinate moment in horizon-fusing which is the disjunction of interpreter and text, each in its own historical horizons. In the second, he means by "horizon of the present" not the structure of presence as against having-been-ness or futurity but the whole of the hermeneutical situation, the whole temporally-horizoned disclosedness of the interpreter's historicity. So whether in the second quote "the past" should be taken to refer to the temporally constitutive past of the interpreter, or to the time-distanced otherness of the text, seems impossible to judge.

I would argue that in general, when Gadamer and those who follow his lead speak of "the horizon of the present" they are referring to the temporal disclosure space as a whole, to the *Anwesen* that prevails in the historical situation. But in German they are saying *Gegenwart*. I respond that there is indeed a "*Horizont der Gegenwart*" for each of interpreter and text; but there are two sets of the equally constitutive horizons of past

and future as well. Hence the horizon that is reached in horizon-fusing, the completed horizon of effective-history which understanding seeks to enter, is not a simple temporal horizon but the space for the interplay of three.

In thematizing the separation of interpreter and text therefore, one must distinguish two horizons of the future, two horizons of the past, two horizons of the present. Then each of these pairs must be fused in an effort to reach a common disclosure space.

Here the discipline of temporal problematic comes into play, which we have said consists in resisting methodically inside-out postulations of priority for serial time and its quasi-spatial distances. We want to move *inside* that time, to join the "event of Being," which time embraces only in terms of certain external arrangements among beings themselves externalized from the space where they have their meaning.

So for example consider the temporal structure of an engagement with Augustine, focusing just on the partial problem of fusing the respective pasts. To the common sense for which the past is the content of a length of time, it might seem that here "fusion of the pasts" is already mostly attained, since from the dawn of history to 400 A. D. Augustine's past is the same as ours. Yet as soon as this is said one senses the fallacies. The "dawn of history" was something different and orders of magnitude nearer for Augustine than for us; and for us the new distance is not an extra 1600 years. At another level, Aristotle and Cicero and Plotinus constellate for Augustine a conceptual background thoroughly different from what they provide for us, even when we strip away more proximate influences. Here also, it does not advance us toward fusing these horizons to lay out their content on a time line, nor is it a start toward entering into Augustine's past to place him at his time-distance from our time.

But we are falling once again into an orgy of negations. The positive direction toward the inside of time must be pointed out, and something positive said about the strange "in" on the inside of time which is the pure

tri-horizonal temporal disclosure space. Let us return to the kinds of eternity and to the temporal problematic of futurity, left incomplete in the earlier discussion of Augustine.

### Kinds of Eternity and the Problem of God

What is the eternity of the future and why is it so hard to formulate?

We have portrayed the kinds of eternity as consequences of acts of temporal orientation in which a particular horizon is given formal priority in the fundamental ontology of an epoch. Eternity is an ideal or paradigm of the disclosure-condition which the chosen horizon imposes. We might say that eternal true being enters transcendently what historical existence enters ecstatically. Historical ecstasis is therefore the image of eternal transcending.

If historical ecstasis is not across time but into the event of Being, then all the less is eternity a unity across time. It is not the *simul totum* of time, finite or infinite, and it need not even "touch" all time. "Only prosaic common sense and the little man imagine that the great must endure forever, and equate this duration with eternity" (Heidegger, 1959:13). The eternity of having been, the "time of the beginning," lets mundane time slip out of contact with it on a regular basis, and must be contacted anew through ritual repetition and the unforgetting of myth. Eternal presence is grasped and relinquished by the soul in an experience of ecstasis and fall so familiar and characteristic that this, and not the experience of unwavering consciousness or of an unassailed persistence of things, must be accounted the origin of the philosophical interpretation of eternity in metaphysics. It was the Platonic idealization of the Soul of the All, through its association with the continuity and intelligibility of astronomical presentations, that led to the notion that eternal presence was equipotently related to each and every time. The cosmological context is not the essential one, however, despite its near-exclusive hold on later speculation.



Eternity lies in the same direction, away from the pure flux of time and its indefinite, indifferent multiplicity of "places," that hermeneutical thought follows in its effort to fuse genuinely historical horizons. Eternity is not less but more temporal than history, more conditioned by the horizontal future/past/present. Expressing this "more" with a somewhat misleading, apostrophized use of the word "infinite," Heidegger has said: "If God's eternity can be 'construed' philosophically, then it may be understood only as a more primordial temporality which is 'infinite.' Whether the way afforded by the *via negationis et eminentiae* is a possible one, remains to be seen" (1927:427, n. 1).

To be "infinitely temporal" would really mean being "infinitely finite." Remember that the "finitude" of temporally-conditioned disclosedness is not in length of time, but in the bound-by-each-other-ness of the three temporal horizons. There is no future except where a present is being bound up with its past. In the interplay of the horizons, disclosedness is never complete, the threshold between concealment and manifestation never pushed offstage. Temporal finitude in this sense is the necessary condition of life; it makes room for a "motion" that belongs to the "enigma of Being" (Heidegger, 1927: 393), not to the sensible processes of nature.

The notion that the eternal is the infinite stems in part from the tendency, reflected in our own introductory expositions of the kinds of eternity, for the projection of temporal transcendence to disengage a single horizon from the interplay of the three and give it uniqueness as well as priority in deciding the meaning of Being. Thus in metaphysics, one emphasizes that eternal true Being *is* present and is *not* past or future.

That Augustine overcomes this singling out, and experiences the future by way of an experience of past and present in their ecstatic unity, is the surest sign of his gaining the genuine temporal problematic of futurity or advent. It is precisely this rotation of the two-on-one schema of horizontal interpenetration that becomes thematic in Heidegger: "Futurally coming back to itself,

resoluteness brings itself by presencing into the situation. Having-been-ness arises from the future, in such a way that the future which has been (better, the having-been-ing future) releases from itself the present. This phenomenon, unitary in this way as having-been-ing/presencing advent, we designate as *temporality*" (1927:326). Only in view of this interior unity and coincidence of origin of past and present does temporal problematic put the future in the first place: "In enumerating the ecstases we have always named the future in the first place. This was done to show that the future has a priority in the ecstatical unity of primordial and authentic temporality, despite the fact that temporality does not first arise through an accumulation and sequence of the ecstases, but ever brings itself about (*sich zeitigt*) in their equiprimordiality.... The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (1927:329).

The eternity of the future, paradigm for the ecstasis "we shall remember," opens the very possibility of that interplay among temporal horizons which is historical "motion." It cannot therefore be another eternity than the eternal past or eternal present. It must belong to their unity and underlie their explicit discovery. It cannot be projected apart from the projection of the whole of that paradigmatic disclosedness of which human history is the image.

For Augustine that whole is the divine life revealed in its trinity. Precisely as required by temporal problematic, Augustine teaches that divine life and its image hold out to one another first in the horizon of the future. One recalls the priority he attributes to the Spirit in unveiling the image of God "in the soul," indwelling as love and as "gift of God" in the subjective genitive /1/. Spirit in man is the gift of the future of God. Augustine's temporal interpretation of the situation of God and the image of God bound together by revelation history achieves, in its memory/understanding/will account of inwardness, an explicit ecstatic-horizonal temporal ontology of human being ("*Dasein*" or "spiritual substance"). Does temporal interpretation reach the

doctrine of divine transcendent trinity also? Is the one life of Father, Son and Spirit the temporality of God, and their eternity the temporal perichoresis of the kinds of eternity?

If future/past/present are parts of time, such questions flirt with trinitarian modalism and have long since been answered negatively. If future/past/present are only psychological forms of the human time-span, such questions are anthropomorphic irreverence. But if future/past/present/ are an inward form of disclosure space, the inside of both time and eternity, then such questions becomes interesting and, especially in regard to Augustine's treatise *On the Trinity*, hermeneutically fruitful.

There are always three kinds of eternity. Genuine temporal motion is always possible, even in divine timelessness and in human time.

## NOTE

/1/            *De trinitate*, XV, 19, 36. The complete discussion occupies 17, 27 through 19, 38. It should be read in systematic context: XIV, 12, 15 through 19, 26 states the outcome of the search for the image of God which begins in Book VIII.

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