

Timelessness and the Now

The messianic religions that came to dominate this lived life of late antiquity made *waiting* central to their sense of temporality, as we have seen. As the poets of erotics have always known, there is certain headiness in the combination of fervour and deferral. Waiting, however, structures the sense of the present – the now – with a question of its value, its temporariness. ‘Who would deny that the present has no duration?’, asked Augustine. In the nineteenth century, William James tried to answer this anxiety about the duration and thus evaluation of the ‘nowness’ of the now with an empirical, experimentally tested answer: ‘the practically cognized present is no knife-edge’, he concluded, ‘but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched and from which we look in two directions into time’.¹ It was possible to count in seconds, and then in fractions of seconds, a human experience of now, a breadth measured ‘from one hundredth of a second to twelve seconds’.² James was engaging with a host of neurological scientists who were exploring the space between sensation and its mental recognition; but this was also part of a moral argument, with deep roots back to Plato and Augustine in particular, about ‘momentary pleasure’ in contrast with a timeless ideal.³ Must waiting inevitably and always turn the now into empty time? Can ‘the now’ be reinvested with value?

Modernity – or, to be precise, the self-proclamation of modernity – has indeed repeatedly tried to rediscover the now, the ‘tyranny of the moment’.⁴ The self-help gurus who currently encourage their readers to ‘live in the moment’, are a pale echo of a passionate movement, for which

¹ James (1890) I: 609. ² Zemka (2011) 209.

³ See Zemka (2011) building on Dames (2007). Daston and Galison (2007) is a crucial overview here.

⁴ Hartog (2011) 217.

William James is an iconic scientific authority. D. H. Lawrence provides a characteristically (over-)heated statement of principle:

Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don't give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now.⁵

For Lawrence, the moment, the Now – the capital letter marks the intensity of his striving for a general point here – is full of potential: it is still and seething, burning and cold, and it is what gives burgeoning life ('the quick') to speed, conflict, alteration, and this is in contrast to eternity and infinity which are unmoving, in all senses, without emotion, without transition: 'the moment that remains and blows up the continuum'.⁶ Lawrence rejects what is 'fixed, set, static'. The religiosity of this incantatory rhetoric is evident, not just in the 'incarnate moment' – the use of incarnate rather than embodied, say, is a pointed rejection of the Christian dismay at the fleshliness of life – but also in the very opposition of eternity and infinity to the immediate present, again redrawn to dismiss the standard Christian tenet of focusing on eternal life as the goal. Lawrence establishes the Now as the rejoinder to such idealism:

The ideal – what is the ideal? A figment. An abstraction. A static abstraction, abstracted from life. It is a figment of the before or the after. It is a crystalized aspiration, or crystalized remembrance: crystalized, set, finished. It is a thing set apart, in the great storehouse of eternity, the storehouse of finished things.⁷

The ideal is something invented for a time before or a time after – rather than the Now. In language that recalls Augustine's topography of memory, the ideal exists only as hope or as a 'crystalized remembrance . . . in the great storehouse of eternity'. Unlike the presentness of the now, the ideal is always lost in a past or future. So much for Plato.

It may be something of a surprise that in this paean to the Now, despite his familiar turn to raw and bloody nature (and, in his final poetry, even to the gods of Olympus), Lawrence echoes most intently Walter Pater, an 'illusiv[e], inscrutable, mistakable self' of a writer,⁸ and, in particular, Pater's

⁵ Lawrence (1994) 616. This passage is discussed in Dillon (2007). ⁶ Nowotny (1994) 152.

⁷ Lawrence (1994) 618.

⁸ Hext (2013) 184. On Lawrence and Ruskin, see Landow (1985). On Pater and classics, see Martindale, Evangelista and Prettejohn eds. (2017), and especially Porter's chapter in it.

infamous final section of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. (Lawrence railed at the ‘deadly Victorians’, but read Pater and Ruskin avidly.) In these paragraphs, Pater lauds the ‘exquisite intervals’ of physical life, ‘the moment’ of joy. He revels in the sensuality of his body’s sensations and the flow of thought and feeling. Each of these sensations, he recognizes, is ‘limited by time’, ‘a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it’. These vanishing moments are what make the self a shifting, changing, sensible being: ‘It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves.’ Pater offers a profoundly challenging image of the unstable subject, like Penelope at the loom, weaving and unweaving a self, a ‘continual vanishing away’, without even the closure of the *Odyssey*’s narrative. How, then, to live?

How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.⁹

To many of his readers, especially those from a normative Christian commitment, Pater seemed here to be scandalously proposing an amoral life that privileged sensation over duty, ethics, or even a career: the moment without consequence. Pater, deeply upset by the reaction, censored the paragraphs from the second edition, thus ensuring their continuing celebrity and influence, especially in modernism’s search for epiphanic ‘moments of being’.¹⁰ He still has Marius, his hero in *Marius the Epicurean*, declare that ‘the little point of the moment alone really is’.¹¹ No stranger bedfellows than Lawrence and Pater, but both reveal not merely how time is moralized, especially in a capitalist system where time is money, but also, and more specifically, how the conceptualization of the here and now becomes an ethics of existence – how to live one’s life with an eye on the passing of time.¹² Not merely: can the now be fully enjoyed without a sense of consequence, as Pater was accused of promoting? But also: can the now be comprehended *without* the idealism of eternity?

⁹ Pater (1910) 235–6.

¹⁰ The phrase is Virginia Woolf’s (Woolf (1939/1986) 70). See Zemka (2011) for its context, and a fine history of the momentary.

¹¹ Pater (1900) 143.

¹² On capitalism’s moralization of time, see from a large bibliography Thompson (1967); Schivelbusch (1986); Chakrabarty (2000) 47–113; Jameson (2003); Zemka (2011).

Pater, ‘the patriarch of aestheticism’s epiphanic figures’,¹³ is important to Lawrence, but we could add Kierkegaard, whose modernity George Pattison defines as ‘the culture of those whose horizons are completely filled by “the-time-that-now-is”, the momentary, the shock of the new’,¹⁴ or Nietzsche (in some moods) – ‘He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past, who cannot stand balanced like a goddess of victory without growing dizzy and afraid, will never know what happiness is’,¹⁵ and others, back to Schleiermacher, a font as so often: ‘it is an infinity of past and future that we wish to see in the moment (*Augenblick*) of utterance’.¹⁶ We shall recall this visual language of epiphanic ecstasy when we turn in chapter 10 to the sudden, the momentary, the rupture in time, and its religious instantiation in the leap of faith.

Pater’s *joy* in the now, however, was anticipated with a symmetrical *anguish* in Thomas De Quincey. For De Quincey, who read Augustine’s *Confessions*, of course, before writing his *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, the intensity of ‘the now’ led down into the pits of despair. To ask how long the now lasts, De Quincey reflects, leads to an inescapable paradox, a paradox outlined most vividly in Augustine’s *Confessions*. De Quincey uses the image of the *klepsydra*, the ancient water-clock, to try to capture the passing of time, and imagines a drop of water squeezing through the funnel: ‘You see, therefore, how narrow, how incalculably narrow, is the true and actual present.’¹⁷ It is barely there, but that it passes away. ‘Yet,’ he adds, ‘even this approximation to the truth is *infinitely* false.’ The solitary drop which represents the present can itself be broken into tinier and tinier droplets. ‘Therefore the present, which only man possesses, offers less capacity for his footing than the slenderest film that ever spider twisted from her womb.’ The idea of the present, all we have, is no basis to ground the self: our footing is slipping above the abyss of time. Thus, concludes De Quincey, turning, as ever, his misery into stunning phrases, ‘All is finite in the present; and even that finite is infinite in its velocity of flight towards death.’ For De Quincey, to seek the finite present is to end up in the infinity of its divisibility, and to view such instability as a sign of the rapid human journey towards the end of death. Infinity and eternity are not as easily escaped as Lawrence’s exclamations insist. The paradox of ‘the now’ for De Quincey, following Augustine, is that it must and cannot be inhabited. The contrast with Pascal here is particularly striking: for Pascal too ‘the present is the only time that is truly our own’; the past

¹³ Zemka (2011) 220. ¹⁴ Pattison (2002) 19. ¹⁵ Nietzsche (1997) 62.

¹⁶ Schleiermacher (1998) 23. ¹⁷ De Quincey (1998) 159.

and future are beyond our control. But Pascal concludes from this that we ought to live ‘according to the will of God’ and seek ‘repose’.¹⁸ For De Quincey in this *Suspiria de profundis*, ‘Sighs from the Depths’, the trauma of reflecting on time’s Now leads not to the wild joy of Lawrence or the ecstasy of Pater, nor to ‘repose’, but to melancholia and the horrors of his deepest, most lasting memories – and a recognition of how slender the films that support the self are.¹⁹

For Martin Heidegger, the positivity of Lawrence or Pater and the negativity of De Quincey about the experience of the now are equally the regrettable heirs of Aristotle, whether any of them read Aristotle or not.

Ever since Aristotle all discussions of the concept of time have clung *in principle* to the Aristotelian definitions . . . Time is what is ‘counted’, that is to say, it is what is expressed and what we have in view, even if unthematically, when the *travelling* pointer (or the shadow) is made present. When one makes present that which is moved in its movement, one says ‘now here, now here and so on’. The ‘nows’ are what get counted. And these show themselves in every ‘now’ as ‘nows’ which will ‘forthwith be no-longer-now’ and nows which have ‘just been not-yet-now’. The world-time which is ‘sighted’ in this manner in the use of clocks, we call the ‘*now-time*’ [*Jetzt-Zeit*].²⁰

Now is a moment, and time – ‘now-time’ – is made up of a series of nows that can be quantified. Heidegger wants to find another way to understand time and being, another way of being in the world, without such service to clock-time, its travelling hands or sundial shadows.²¹ For him – and you can hear the cry of Lawrence behind this – ‘Temporality ensnares itself in the Present, which, in making present says pre-eminently, “Now!”, “Now!”.’

For psychologists, philosophers and poets what it means to cry out ‘Now! Now!’ – can the now last? Can the now be invested with meaning? Is the now the only place of meaning? What is ‘being in the world?’ – has become, then, a defining question of modernity, the now of our time. To be modern is to be self-conscious about the nowness of the now – and thus needs such explication, brief though it is, as the place from where this discussion takes shape. The discipline of anthropology, however, has given another, critical, painful perspective on what we might thus call the ethics of the present tense – which demands of us a further level of scholarly self-consciousness.

¹⁸ Pascal (1963) 270, given a context by Prendergast (2019) 141–2. ¹⁹ See de Maniquis (1985).

²⁰ Heidegger (1962) 473–4; a much-discussed passage; for our purposes, see Kennedy (2013) 139–52.

²¹ For a stimulating attempt to escape the now, based on a wonderfully lucid explanation of its difficulty, see Garcia (2014) 177–88.

Johannes Fabian's agenda-setting book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* offers a pointedly different, politicized analysis of the use and abuse of 'the now', which will lead us back slowly into the texts of antiquity. Written in the 1980s at the height of a crisis of self-criticism that characterized the anthropology of these years, Fabian's attack on ethnography trenchantly exposes its 'moral complicity', 'ideological and even epistemological',²² with a distanced objectification and thus exploitation of other communities. Specifically, and with bravura rhetoric, Fabian anatomizes the tradition of the 'ethnographic present', the depiction in the present tense of the culture of Others. He calls this language 'the denial of coevalness'.²³ The Other does not inhabit the same 'now' as the observers. The ethnographic present tense is used 'for the purposes of distancing those who are observed from the Time of the observers'.²⁴ Such discourse establishes the temporality of the West in a privileged position with regard to the 'primitive', 'savage', 'ritualized', 'ancient', 'unchanging' time of Others. In this way, 'the anthropology of Time becomes the politics of Time', a strategy of colonizing self-definition in a historical period of political decolonization.²⁵ In the period of such modern political dominance, which is the era of anthropology too, imperialism requires 'Time to accommodate the schemes of one-way history: progress, development, modernity ... In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*.'²⁶

Like other critiques from this era, Fabian's analysis is set in a history of approaches to time in anthropology.²⁷ Two main lines of this history can be articulated (with many interstitial positions and differences of detail between the dozens of significant theoretical expositions). The beginnings of anthropology, first of all, are closely intertwined with stadial and then evolutionary historical theories that argued that all human societies develop according to the same schema, beginning in savagery and gradually achieving the heights of civilization, represented by the Western imperial powers. The discovery of communities of 'undeveloped' peoples allowed a vision of the childhood of all human culture, and also justified attempts to raise their levels of civilization through missionary work and imperial improvement. A lack of coevalness is integral to such theorizing, and to the politics with which it is enmeshed: the tribes of anthropological enquiry simply did not inhabit the same moment in the time-scheme of human

²² Fabian (1983) 96. ²³ Fabian (1983) 31. ²⁴ Fabian (1983) 26.

²⁵ Fabian (1983) 51. For critiques of Fabian's periodization of secular modernity, see the introduction to Davis (2008), Harstrup (1990) and, generally, the stimulating Chakrabarty (2000).

²⁶ Fabian (1983) 144. ²⁷ Gell (1992).

development as the anthropologists. It is also fascinating that many of the founders of the discipline of anthropology turn out to have stridently evangelical parents, as Tim Larsen has detailed, and the consequent interface between eschatological religious commitments, secularized history, and personal intergenerational strife creates an extraordinarily complex environment for research.²⁸ This history of the discipline inscribes the different time of its objects of research at its core.

Secondly, Durkheim's sociology of time – the analysis of 'the time common to the group, a social time'²⁹ – is foundational for a long history of anthropological projects that record how different societies have their own sense of time, from Gurvitch, Zerubavel, Schutz, Geertz to Lévi-Strauss, Leach and so on.³⁰ (It has often been noted that the English translation of Durkheim appeared the same year as Einstein's seminal papers (1915), though without noting the irony that synchronicity was the very problem.) Modernity's time-discipline, where the factory's 'machinery requires the kind of mentality that concentrates on the present and can dispense with memory and straying imagination' makes industrial society an alienated example of its own theorizing.³¹ For Fabian, both functionalism and structuralism 'put on ice the problem of Time', because both involve 'a freezing of the time frame'.³² As Lévi-Strauss states, his aim is to reveal 'a system that is synchronically intelligible',³³ a system, for example, that wilfully represses the different times in which different versions of mythic narratives take shape, as classicists have often complained about his analysis of the Oedipus myth. Lévi-Strauss generalized about 'cold' and 'hot' societies, where 'cold' societies did not possess the complex sense of historical change and self-consciousness about history that distinguished the societies from which anthropologists came. Even Clifford Geertz, in his celebrated discussion of time in Bali, described an intersubjective sense of time that allowed social interactions to take place 'in a motionless present'.³⁴ For Fabian, the theoretical turn in anthropology towards synchronicity, with its concomitant dismissal of history, distorts the necessary analysis of 'social time'. In fieldwork, anthropologists engage in dialogic interaction with other communities and participate in their now; but in writing ethnography, the 'you' becomes a 'they', and this

²⁸ Larsen (2014). ²⁹ Durkheim (1915) 11.

³⁰ Gell (1992) has been particularly influential in writing this history; see also Adam (1990); Nowotny (1992). The references are to Gurvitch (1961); Schutz (1962); Geertz (1973); Lévi-Strauss (1963); Leach (1961); Zerubavel (1981).

³¹ Quotation from Horkheimer (1994) 22; 'Time-discipline' is taken from Thompson (1967).

³² Fabian (1983) 20. ³³ Lévi-Strauss (1963) 216. ³⁴ Geertz (1973) 404.

'specific cognitive stance towards its object' creates for these other societies another time.³⁵ The ethnographic present, for Fabian, is a grammatical process of objectification.

Now, Herodotus' history has been regularly enlisted as a precursor, even a founder of anthropology since the first reflections of the discipline on its own development. About the same time as Fabian also rehearses this unreflective genealogical cliché, François Hartog and James Redfield, directly in engagement with the discipline of anthropology, and in Redfield's case, his father's contribution to the field, were demonstrating the complex, self-aware and world-building constructions of the other in Herodotus, the sophistication of which discredits the more naive and patronizing appropriations of Herodotus as the father of anthropology (as well as of history and lies).³⁶ Herodotus' present tense is fundamental to his rhetoric. On the one hand, his description of Egypt, say, takes place in a timeless present, for all that it recognizes the profound difference between the time-scales of Greece and Egypt.³⁷ Greece and Persia are countries with histories of change: change of constitutions and the shifting fortunes of grandeur and humiliation are structuring principles of the history for these protagonists. But the opening four books, with their descriptions of other communities, are primarily constructed through the observer's eye as a synchronic picture, as if Herodotus was looking as a scientist at the unchanging objects of natural history.³⁸ On the other hand, Herodotus repeatedly uses *legetai*, 'it is said' (and other such phrases) to mobilize the various stories that make up the swirl of events or the comprehension of a phenomenon. Rumours, lies, theories from different sources or eras are all viewed as making up the event, or the framing of a phenomenon. The present is where such stories come together; the present is formed in and by the circulation of such historically layered but now contemporary narratives. Herodotus' grammar performs the effects of the past on the present.

The plupast – the time before the past of the war, which remains the explicit subject of the history – is manipulated in multiple ways both by the characters who speak in Herodotus, and by the narrator's account of things, to construct persuasive normative paradigms;³⁹ the future, too, is a brooding element in the history's rhetoric of exemplarity, as imperial Athens emerges as the potential subject of a warning tale of excess and

³⁵ Fabian (1983) 86. ³⁶ Hartog (1988); Redfield (1985). ³⁷ Vasunia (2001) 133–5.

³⁸ Thomas (2000); more generally, Daston and Galison (2007).

³⁹ Grethlein and Krebs eds. (2012); Baragwanath and de Bakker eds. (2012); Rood, Atack and Phillips (2020) 119–43.

collapse.⁴⁰ But Herodotus' utilization of the present tense shows how what has often been criticized as his indiscriminate repetition of unsubstantiated or simply false anecdotes or observations is a strategic element in his mapping of the cultural forces he sees as necessary to understand the war, now.

If the present tense marks Herodotus' performance as a scientific observer, the present tense also marks the scene of performance in Homer – to go right back to the beginnings, again – through the moment of apostrophe or invocation. That Homer's heroes live in a past lost to now is explicit: 'ten men of today could not lift the rock that Hector lifted with ease'. We should recall how the failure of memorialization is troped by the washing away of walls by the waves, much as Achilles' singing of the *klea andrōn* foreshadows the epic's own promise of eternal glory. When Homer invokes the Muse at the beginning of each epic, 'sing, Muse', and even more strikingly when he addresses the divinity in a hymn, 'Come here, appear ...' – and all the Homeric Hymns have such ritual apostrophes – he inhabits his own scene of performance, of course, but more importantly he invokes the god into presence. The hymn welcomes the god into the sacred space of performance and bids farewell at its close. This performed 'control over absence and presence'⁴¹ images the scene of epiphany. Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite most vividly dramatizes such epiphany in the stunning counter-address of the poet-lover by the goddess – 'Who, Sappho, is wronging you?' – an exchange of names to match the dangerous exchange of roles promised in the poem's narrative of desire ('if she flees, she soon will chase'). The hymnic invocation, however, also projects the circle of an audience, participants in the ritual moment. This projection of an audience – a community sharing in the ritual – is fundamental also to Pindar's poetics of praise, which, ever aware of the dangers of the victor's success, is careful with the boundaries of a community's welcome of the hero's return.⁴² This sense of bringing the addressed hero into the community of the performance may also help us appreciate the strange moments when in the epic narratives of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* Homer apostrophizes his heroes in the second person. Menelaus and Patroclus in the *Iliad* and Eumaeus in the *Odyssey* are addressed by name. For Patroclus in particular this invocation occurs when he appears to be at mortal risk and the poet, like Achilles, reaches out in sympathy and care towards him in the second person.⁴³ Such structures of sympathy seem harder

⁴⁰ Redfield (1985); Raafaub (1987); Moles (1996); Fowler (2003); Buxton (2012).

⁴¹ Bergren (1982) 90. ⁴² Kurke (1991).

⁴³ Bergren (1982); Block (1982); Allen-Hornblower (n.d.); Klooster (2013).

to maintain for Eumaeus or Menelaus even. But in all cases, the second-person address pulls the narration into the scene of the present performance, and projects, as it were, a ritual circle of shared song in which the hero is present, like the epiphanic god of cult. The ‘as it were’ is crucial here. The desire for presence in both lyric and epic poetry is mediated by the poet’s projection. Future performances, like the past of the *klea andrōn*, already haunt the here and now. It is hard simply to live in the present.

Or to appreciate fully what the apparently self-evident claim to live in the now means. From Homer to Heidegger, as we might say, to insist on ‘the now’ turns out to be an ideologically fraught moment of self-positioning. Against the now of performance, the now of the scientific gaze, the now of the moment of battle glory, the now of immediate sensation, and, worst, the now of momentary pleasure, Christian thinkers, looking back to Plato, strive to create a different sense of the present, turned towards a timeless ideal (as Lawrence knew well and so resented). Perhaps now we can begin to see more clearly what the ‘now’ of waiting demands of us, in its requirement to turn ourselves towards a future; to make the performance of the now such a turning, such a conversion.

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The present time, ‘which only we have’, may nonetheless not be the time we wish to live in. In Hesiod’s hard world, the five ages of man move from the golden age to the iron age, which is ours. ‘Would that I had been born earlier or later’, laments Hesiod (*W&D* 175), since in today’s world ‘men never rest from work and sorrow during the day, and being destroyed at night’ (176–8). And it will get worse before it is over. Humans will be born grey, intergenerational strife and disrespect will be rampant, legal and moral order will collapse, justice will be no more than force, and the wicked will harm the good (179–200). ‘There will be no defence against evil’ (201). The horror of the present is not mitigated by the thought of the future or the lost glory of another, better time. ‘Better’, indeed, ‘not to have been born’, as Greek wisdom depressingly repeats.

Plato’s response to what he saw as this instability of the mundane world – physical, moral, epistemological – is to turn away from it towards the timeless eternity of the Forms. In the *Timaeus*, a dialogue which had a deep and long-lasting influence on the development of Neo-Platonism and the reception of Platonic idealism by Jewish and Christian writers⁴⁴ –

⁴⁴ Reydamas-Schils ed. (2003); Runia (1986). Proclus’ commentary on *Timaeus* is one of the most significant contributions to fifth-century thinking on time.

indeed it is ‘the most seminal philosophical or scientific text to emerge from the whole of antiquity’⁴⁵ – Timaeus begins his account of the genesis of the world with a founding distinction between, on the one hand, what is ‘ever being’, ‘continually existent’, (*to on aei*, 27c–d), ‘has no coming into being’ (*genesis*), and, on the other, what is ‘coming into being’ (*gignomenon*) but is ‘never existent’ (*oudepote on*). That which is existent is always the same and is apprehended by the mind; but that which comes to be and is destroyed (*gignomenon kai apollumenon*) is perceived by the unreasoning senses: it is not ‘really existent’, *ontōs on*, its material existence is not reality. It is a hierarchical opposition. When a creator wishes to make something, continues Timaeus, if he looks at a model (*paradeigma*) which is in a state of sameness (*to kata taūta echon*), the outcome will be fine (*kalon*); if he looks at something which has come into being and thus uses a created model, the created object will not be fine. So, is the universe, which, as it is made, must be an image (*eikōn*) of something, created according to a generated or a self-same, ungenerated model? The arguments they use to broach such a question, he adds with gentle irony, must be like the objects themselves, ‘stable, firm’ – unchanging in time.

So, how did God – the Demiurge – create the cosmos? The universe is conceived by the mind of God as a living creature with a soul; a single, unified, perfected animal (*zōon*). Timaeus spends many paragraphs showing that the universe must be single, and that it must be perfected (*teleon*), to which he adds ‘unageing’ (*agērōn*, 33a) and ‘without sickness’ (*anoson*), adjectives traditionally applied to divinities. Timaeus takes even more paragraphs of dense mathematical exegesis explaining how God created a third form of being, a mixture of indivisible being and divisible being in order to allow for the ordered movement of the cosmos.⁴⁶ It is his far from easy conclusion that is crucial here, however (37c–d):

When the Father that engendered it, recognized it in motion and alive, an object of joy to the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his happiness decided to complete it all the more like its model. Now, the nature of the ideal being was everlasting (*aiōnios*), but to bestow this quality in its fullness upon a living thing was impossible. But he resolved to have a moving image of eternity (*aiōnos*), and when he set in order the heavens, he made this image eternal (*aiōnion*) but moving according to number, while eternity (*aiōnos*) itself is stable in unity; and this image we have named time (*chronon*).

It is, first of all, evident how such language attracted later Jewish and Christian thinkers. This is an account of genesis with a Father who

⁴⁵ Sedley (2007) 96. ⁴⁶ Lloyd (1968).

engendered (*gennēsas*) the universe, who rejoiced at his creation (as in Genesis, ‘he saw it was good’, *kalon*), and who brings order to chaos (the starting point of Genesis). Plato, alone of Greek philosophers, it seems, does not take for granted the impossibility of *creatio ex nihilo*, the requirement of Jewish and Christian narratives of creation. Philo, and later Christian writers too, take up the idea of the creator using a model, an archetype, or an image in mind, to create the world. Justin Martyr is programmatic in claiming the *Timaeus* as a proof that Plato was following a Mosaic cosmology.⁴⁷ The problem Plato faces, however, is how to have a physical, moving universe, if it is to be an image of a stable, unmoving ideal. He mediates this tension by invoking order and number, an eternal, regular movement. This he gives the name Time. Time, for Plato, requires such motion; there is no time before the heavens with their regular moving parts come into being. ‘It is only when the regular motion of the heavenly bodies comes into being that time exists’.⁴⁸ Alongside the creation of the heavens, were created the divisions of time: days, nights, months, years, which the heavenly bodies demarcate. Aristotle, in turn and in response, as we saw, goes on to define time as ‘the number of motion with regard to the before and after’, but not before, as we have seen, he wonders whether time exists, which Plato’s birth story takes for granted (29a–b);⁴⁹ and, against Plato, Aristotle will go on to argue that time has no beginning: it is eternal, infinite. In the *Timaeus*, however – and it is a profoundly disconcerting claim – Plato’s story of the genesis of the universe is the story of the birth of Time (*chronou genesis*, 39e).

It is disconcerting not least because if there was the motion of disorder before the creation of the heavenly bodies, as *Timaeus* allows, how can there *not* have been time, in this before? How can motion be conceived without time? David Sedley, who here follows Gregory Vlastos – both deeply uncomfortable with the very idea of the ‘birth of time’ – argues that for Plato before the creation of heaven there is actually a sort of unmeasured, chaotic time.⁵⁰ This is a ‘compromise’ (Vlastos’ term) that cannot quite remove its own inconsistencies. Such a ‘before’ is ‘disorderly but not altogether’: ‘it is not utterly disordered change. Wholly devoid of form it would be, on Platonic standards, wholly devoid of Being; i.e. nothing at all. But obviously it is not that. It is something.’⁵¹ Thus, concludes Vlastos, the birth of measured time ‘is not the contrary of timeless eternity, but an approximation to it’: it has come to be but is now regular and eternal. The

⁴⁷ *First Apology* 60. ⁴⁸ Vlastos (1939) 75. ⁴⁹ Annas (1975) 97. ⁵⁰ Sedley (2007) 95–132.

⁵¹ Vlastos (1939) 76.

work philosophers have to undertake to find a precarious coherence to Plato's thinking here is telling. Plato, indeed, immediately indicates the continuing difficulty of finding expression for his understanding of this timeless eternity. 'Was' and 'will be', he underlines, are unconsciously but wrongly applied to eternal being (*aidios ousia*). Only *esti*, 'it is' or 'it exists' is properly applicable to being. Only the present tense . . . The language we use of time cannot capture the nature of timeless being, Plato writes, but he quickly and ironically cuts short the discussion: now might not be the *kairos*, the right time, for clarifying such matters (38b). As Augustine too will find, the everyday language of time is a barrier to the comprehension of time.

Nonetheless, this is the very language Timaeus immediately uses. The model (*paradeigma*) is existent for all time (*panta aiōna*); the universe, its copy, has come into being (*gegonos*) and is (*on*) and will be (*esomenon*) for all time (*ton panta chronon*). (The asymmetry of the world coming into being but being eternal – no passing away, as the Stoics demanded – seemed impossible to the point of craziness to many later philosophical writers.) Plato concludes firmly, however: 'such was God's thinking with regard to the birth of time (*genesis chronou*), so that time should be born (*chronos gennēthēi*), with the result that the sun, moon, stars and planets were set in the sky in regular circulation.' That was what was required for the collaborative construction of Time (*sunapoergazesthai chronon*). The creation of the universe and the creation of time are coterminous; the existence of the so-called heavenly bodies in the heavens gives us regulated time, for all time. Plato's commitment to the stable, permanent, timeless model cannot do without time, and thus the possibility of change, which is nonetheless controlled by the regularity and order of number as embodied in the motion of the sun and moon and stars, now eternally in place.

Timaeus offers the grandest scale of Plato's idealism and its turn to timelessness as a constant and stable present. The theory of Forms supposes that any example of a table is recognizable as a table because it partakes of an abstract, unchanging, timeless model of a table, its Form (*eidos*). The *Timaeus* itself continues into a supremely complex argument about the nature of materiality and space, and the connection between Mind and Necessity; but its difficult, strained discussion of the 'birth of Time', with its repeated striving for eternity, underlines the degree to which the timeless present is integral to Plato's idealism. The universe itself is created according to a timeless model; so too are the mundane realities of the everyday. To contemplate the Good itself – one ideal that Socrates, at a party, imagines, before he is interrupted by the very physical presence of

the drunken Alcibiades – is to turn away from this material world with its instabilities and to focus on what is truly stable and truly real: to find what is the timeless.

Cicero, central to the mediation of Greek philosophy to Roman culture, seems to respond directly to these passages of the *Timaeus*. In his *On the Nature of the Gods*, his Epicurean speaker, Velleius, engages with the problem of the time before the creation of the heavenly bodies, and the intervention of divinity, which, for Plato and for the Stoics, is the necessary creative change for measured time to come into being. He writes in direct criticism of Plato (1.21):

For if there was no world, it does not follow that there were no centuries (*saecla*). By ‘centuries’ here I don’t mean the ones made up by the number of days and nights (*dierum noctiumque numero*) as a result of the annual orbits (*annuis cursibus*). These, I concede, could not have been produced without the world’s rotation (*conversione*). But there has existed a certain eternity from an infinite time past (*ab infinito tempore*), which no bounding of times (*circumscriptio temporum*) measured, but in its extent (*spatio*) it can be understood what sort of thing it has been, because it is not even thinkable that there existed a time (*tempus*) at which time (*tempus*) was not.

Velleius, the speaker, admits that without the heavenly bodies there would be no measured time, no regulation, no order. But, he argues, there must still have been unmeasured time before this creation (as Sedley and Vlastos argued was the implication of Plato’s argument for the birth of time in the *Timaeus*) – though the language of *saecla*, however redefined, makes it hard not to hear a trace of measurement. Eternity is a time without bounds, without delimitation (*conscriptio*) which has infinite extension into the past. We can understand what sort of thing this eternity is, its extent, because, Velleius’ argument runs, it is impossible even to conceive of a time when time does not exist. Velleius does not simply assert the necessity of the infinity of time as an Epicurean principle, but insists – tautologically? – that the attempt to imagine unmeasured, formless time is not possible because it is not possible for human consciousness (*cogitatio*) to imagine a lack of time. Humans cannot get out of time, even in the imagination. We can try, haltingly or intently, to imagine infinity or eternity or God’s being beyond and outside time, but we cannot in our minds inhabit no time.

Lucretius has no truck with Plato’s longing to escape materiality. His is a resolutely material universe, grounded in his reading and promoting of

Epicurus' atomistic understanding of nature. Time in this vision, Lucretius asserts directly, does not exist in itself (1.459):

tempus item per se non est, sed rebus ab ipsis
consequitur sensus, transactum quid sit in aevo,
tum quae res instat, quid porro deinde sequatur.
nec per se quemquam tempus sentire fatendumst
semotum ab rerum motu placidaque quiete.

Even Time in and of itself does not exist, but from events themselves
Sense follows what happened in the past;
Then what event is insistent, what then after follows.
No person, it must be agreed, senses time in and of itself,
Separate from the movement and the calm resting of things.

Time, although it is not a quality like colour or size, does not exist except when human sense perception recognizes it through events that have happened, are happening or are anticipated; it is an accident produced by the impression of movement or lack of movement of things. It would be hard to construct a view more trenchantly opposed to the notion of Providence.

Lucretius' language here strains against itself, as with so many discussions of time. *Aevum* 'age', 'era', might be thought to imply that time does stretch backwards in a significant way. Lucretius continues, however, immediately to worry away at this idea of the past, as if a counter-argument might attempt to use the self-evidence that some things did happen before now as a proof of the necessity of time itself (1.464–71):

denique Tyndariden raptam belloque subactas
Triugenas gentis cum dicunt esse, videndumst
ne forte haec per se cogant nos esse fateri,
quando ea saecula hominum, quorum haec eventa fuerunt,
irrevocabilis abstulerit iam praeterita aetas.
namque aliud terris, aliud regionibus ipsis
eventum dici poterit quodcumque erit actum.

Next, when people say that Tyndareus' daughter was kidnapped,
Or the Trojan peoples were beaten, we must take care
They do not force us to say that these things exist in and of themselves,
When those generations of men, whose accidental properties these were,
Have now been stolen away by the irrevocable passage of time.
For whatever will have taken place will be able to be called an accident,
In one case, of the earth, in another case, of particular regions.

These are difficult lines to follow.⁵² It does not seem that Lucretius is arguing that only the present exists ('presentism'), as some philosophers have essayed.⁵³ Rather, he is suggesting that when people retort, 'Helen was taken', 'the Trojan war took place', it does not require him to say that such events existed in and of themselves (*per se*) – and thus agree that this is an argument that time exists in and of itself. He can say – and simply does – that 'time' – now *aetas*, 'age' – has passed, and, in the most traditional of language, it cannot be summoned back (*irrevocabilis*), and the generations (*saecla*, another term for time) have been lost. There were 'accidents', *eventa* in the past, as there will be in the future. For 'whatever will have taken place, will be able to be called an "accident"'. That is, it is a category error to think that events in the past, just because we say they 'exist', have a different status from the 'accidents' in the present or future. The infinitive *esse* also plays with the grammatical necessity in Latin that to say 'it has happened', *actum est*, will use *est* 'it exists': it is hard in Latin to use the past and not assert its existence. All events are *eventa*, 'accidents', the coming together of atoms in movement and in rest.⁵⁴ So, although Lucretius uses *aetas*, *aevum*, *saecla*, *quando*, the past tense, none of these expressions imply for him the existence of time *per se*. Discussing events from the past – stating 'Helen was taken' – is no evidence that time in and of itself exists.

Time, especially *vetustas*, 'old age', and other words which 'manifest[] time's continuing power',⁵⁵ indeed recur throughout Lucretius' depiction of the materiality of things precisely as an agent of change. So, in Book 5 'time' (*aetas*) is said to 'change the nature of the whole world, and one condition after another must overtake everything, nor does any thing remain the same as itself: everything changes place, nature changes everything and compels it to turn' (528–30). Where Plato had demanded that the only real truth must be firm and remain the same and be unmoving, Lucretius describes reality itself, the nature of things, as necessarily in a constant state of transition and alteration. Even time itself seems open to such transformative swerving. So Lucretius writes of how precious metals shift in value (5.1276), *sic volvenda aetas commutat tempora rerum*. It can be translated 'Thus rolling age changes the seasons of things', which makes the verse a truism at best (the dictionary gives only Lucretius as a source for the meaning 'seasons' for *tempora*); it has a more unsettling and

⁵² See Warren (2006); Zinn (2016) for discussion and bibliography.

⁵³ Warren (2006) and Zinn (2016); also Berns (1976). ⁵⁴ On *eventa*, see Wardy (1988) 117–21.

⁵⁵ Thomas and Witschel (1992) 143.

transformative force, however: what is changed is ‘the circumstances of things’, even ‘the crises of things’ – how things inhabit time is changed by the very passage of time. And time’s passage is infinite, unceasing: ‘Nothing which is in a mortal body, because of the infinity of time (*ex infinito tempore*), could still now have had the ability to deny the powerful strength of immense age (*aevum*).’ The infinity of time and immensity of age are set here against even the sea and the heavens and the sun, no less open to violent destruction and the reordering of matter (*Civ. Dei* 20.25). (An end that is no surprise to Jews or Christians: ‘The heavens are the work of Thy hands: they shall perish’ (Ps. 102), though the causality and anticipation of destruction are quite different.) Where Plato saw an image of eternity and order in the natural world, an ensouled creation of a beneficent Demiurge, Lucretius splinters this vision, this language, the expressivity of language, into clashing and crashing and swerving *stoicheia*, elemental particles, on the move.

The atoms themselves cannot be destroyed, however: matter remains. The eternity of matter is at the deepest level of difficulty for later orthodox Christian readers of Lucretius. If matter itself cannot come to be or pass away, what then of God’s creation or the end of the world? Synesius, bishop of Cyrene, and a fully-fledged philosopher, especially of the Platonic school, before and, to a degree still debated, also after his conversion and immediate appointment as bishop, was quite clear that philosophy was not easily refuted here.⁵⁶ Nothing could convince him that creation could be made out of nothing (*nihil ex nihilo*) or that matter would pass away, even though such a position stood against the founding principles of Christian theology. Synesius’ unorthodox stance reveals a precise tension between normative Christianity and its appropriation of Greek and Latin wisdom, and especially Epicurean physics with all its implications for theology. In Lucretius, then, it is not immaterial Forms but matter itself that is timeless.

Neither Plato nor Lucretius would have you fear death, for the very different reasons of the immortality of the soul for Plato, and the dissolution of the body back into insensate matter for Lucretius. Yet both seek to find the timeless, the everlasting, against which to view the instability of the here and now. For both writers, how to live, and how to face death as an ethical question of living, are issues shaped by what is determined to transcend time’s vagaries. So, to be in the now, does it require the timeless?

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⁵⁶ Bregman (1982).

The geographical and political ambition of empires is enacted at the level of temporality, too. The topographical and the chronological are easily overlapped from the beginning. When Xerxes in Herodotus declares (7.3) ‘we shall extend the Persian territory as far as God’s heaven reaches; the sun will then shine on no land beyond our borders’, he inaugurates the rhetorical tradition of lauding the ‘empire on which the sun never sets’ – the boast, first made popular in the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V, that one’s territory is so extensive that it is always daytime somewhere in it. The imposition of a single time of empire redefines the lives of its subjects. Imperial time reconstructs not just the daily lives of the empire’s inhabitants, but also their sense of history, the past and the future.

The Seleucid empire of the second century BCE, according to Paul Kosmin’s superb analysis, has a claim to have invented imperial time, and thus to be ‘the first truly historical state’.⁵⁷ It achieves this status for Kosmin because it constructed the first numerical system of ordering years, rather than using regnal titles to mark eras, as is usual in the region. It structured ‘the kingdom’s visibility and institutional practices around a continuous, irreversible, and predictable accumulation of years’⁵⁸ (and, Reinhart Koselleck reminds us, a sequence of years, human order, always indicates an ‘historically and philosophically impregnated experience of time’).⁵⁹ Although the centralized power of an empire such as the Seleucids was always mediated through continuing local authorities, and was flexibly attuned to regional variation, its fiscal control was more standardized. ‘The arrangement of fiscal life into an annually serialized grid established an orderly geometry of imperial time at the heart of the city’s public life, a locus of maximal temporal conformity and rationalization that idealized and euphemized the messiness of the greater societal pattern’.⁶⁰ The imperial temporal regime reorganizes the timing of administrative processes and thus reshapes the social life of its citizens under administration.

Empires also need to narrativize their own rule across time. Unlike the birth of time in Plato, or the creation as told in Genesis – or, for that matter, unlike the claims of nationalism to a timeless, continuous and unbroken national character – empires come into being in a year one, and there is a pre-story to be told (305 BCE, in our calendar, is year one for the Seleucid kingdom). There is also always a projection of the future. As J. M. Coetzee, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, evocatively writes: ‘One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how

⁵⁷ Kosmin (2018) 76. ⁵⁸ Kosmin (2018) 76. ⁵⁹ Koselleck (2002) 149. ⁶⁰ Kosmin (2018) 59.

to prolong its era'.⁶¹ The *Aeneid* may have promised *imperium sine fine*, 'empire without end', and Horace may have imaged the everlasting life of his poetry through 'for as long as the priest ascends the Capitoline Hill', but Polybius and other historians encouraged the darker picture that Coetzee draws: 'by night [empire] feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation'. Polybius himself, an eye-witness to the event, was there when Scipio, the Roman general, looked down over the city of Carthage as it was being destroyed by his troops.⁶² Scipio, with tears in his eyes, quoted Hector from Homer's *Iliad*, 'A day will come when holy Troy will fall, and Priam and his people'.⁶³ Polybius who had been tutor to Scipio, asked him what he meant by the quotation, and Scipio, who had been musing on the fall of the empires of Assyria, Media, Persia and Alexander's Macedon – 'whose brilliance had been so recent' – freely admitted he was thinking of Rome itself, and its inevitable fall. The scene has a deeply layered sense of the transience of empires. 'He sees the fate of Rome in Carthage and Troy is the model for both'⁶⁴ – with the added *exempla* of the other empires of the eastern Mediterranean. Polybius' *History* is prompted by his wonder at the rapid rise of Rome; he offers as one cause the flexible stability of the Roman constitution. But he not only anticipates a general reversal of fortune as a pattern of existence (Herodotus, too, of course, sees such a turn in the lives of kingdoms), but also sees the time of empire as necessarily 'the time before the end'.⁶⁵ Rome's triumph must of a necessity prefigure its fall. The duration of empire is no more than the deferral of an inevitable end.

Julia Hell has wonderfully mapped how the fall of Rome, including its anticipation at the acme of its triumph by Scipio, became a repeated model for empires to discuss their own impending history. 'Romans invented the very concept of *imperial ruins*' and became the privileged example of such necessity.⁶⁶ In her richly evidenced and sophisticatedly argued book, Hell takes us from Charles V (on whose empire the sun never set) marching in celebration along the roads of Italy flanked by statues proclaiming him to be Scipio, through to the proclamations of the Third Reich (along with its authoritative philosophers, Heidegger and Schmidt). 'Obsessed with the

⁶¹ Coetzee (1980) 133. His title is taken from Cavafy. ⁶² Dio. Sic. 32.24.

⁶³ *Il.* 4.164–5 (Agamemnon); *Il.* 6.448–9 (Hector) – once by each side.

⁶⁴ Feeney (2007) 55. See also Rood (2007) 181; Wiater (2016), especially 257–8 for other scenes of tears over victory.

⁶⁵ Hell (2019) 44. ⁶⁶ Hell (2019) 87.

problematic of duration and ruination',⁶⁷ Hitler's team used the model of Rome to fortify their empire, militarily, ideologically, symbolically. 'Hitler alone', wrote Simone Weil prophetically in the midst of the war and his military success, 'has understood correctly how to imitate Rome'.⁶⁸ The imagination of modern empires is haunted by Roman nightmares – not just its fall but also the inevitably failing attempts to maintain its security, made physical in the ruins across the landscape of the now. If the anthropologist's gaze is articulated in the present tense of objectification, empire is always self-aware of its own future perfect – of what its ruins will declare it to have been. Thus Macaulay in 1840, great historian of the British imperial project, famously imagines a Maori sketching the ruins of St Paul's from a ruined arch of London Bridge – a colonized barbarian now calmly, *civilizedly*, observing the ruins of the former imperial power.⁶⁹

Yet the subjects of empire do not need to wait for their oppressors' ruination to write back against imperial control of time and history. Much of the evidence Paul Kosmin utilizes to demonstrate the Seleucid kingdom's regulation of chronology comes from resistance to it, and a good deal of that is from Jewish groups. The festival of Chanukah, now part of the Jewish calendar, is inaugurated as a memorial of the armed resistance against the Seleucid regulation of Jewish ritual life. The book of Daniel is paradigmatic in that by prophetically framing the here and now as an age that is one of a series of empires past and to come, it constructs a symbolic historiography that stands aggressively against the chronological reach of the Seleucid rule (as Kosmin analyses in great detail). Daniel is 'an interrogation of political change, Hellenistic imperial rule and the nature of meaning and justice in history', with 'an overriding concern with the periodization of history and the temporal location within it of the Seleucid kingdom'.⁷⁰ Daniel's polemic is to redraft the place of the Seleucid empire in time. Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud's intense focus on the regulation of daily time, especially the Sabbath, the dating of festivals, and even the broadest ideas of chronology, aims to construct a counter-world of self-enclosed time, counter to the dominant cultures of Persia, Greece and Rome in which the rabbis were living. As Sacha Stern has argued,⁷¹ Jewish groups in Judaea/Palestine and in the diaspora, as an act of cultural resistance, continued to maintain their lunar calendar even and especially when the Roman empire made the Julian calendar the standard of imperial

⁶⁷ Hell (2019) 309. ⁶⁸ Weil (1962) [1940] 101.

⁶⁹ See Dingley (2000); Skilton (2007), with further bibliography – and for a contrast with Thucydides, see Rood (2016).

⁷⁰ Kosmin (2018) 139, 140. ⁷¹ Stern (2001) 157–75.

rule for their subjects; and, what is more, Stern shows that through late antiquity there was a conscious, concerted effort by the rabbis to regularize the previously flexible and empirical calendrical systems, in which different communities celebrated festivals on different days:⁷² ‘The gradual fixation of the Palestinian rabbinic calendar was thus the result of an attempt to unify and standardize the calendar of the rabbinic communities of Palestine and Babylonia’,⁷³ as a function of the disintegration of society after the destruction of the Temple and the gradual development of rabbinical authority over the subsequent centuries.⁷⁴ The calendar becomes a way of regulating the community and setting it apart from the surrounding society. In a remarkable act of writing from below, the rabbis even superimposed Jewish history on Roman time. Thus, the origin of the Roman festival of Kalends, the first day, is found in Adam, the first man. Adam was terrified when the days first shortened; he quotes the Psalms to express his fear of encroaching darkness; but when he realizes that light returns, he exclaims, ‘*kalon dies*’, ‘Good is the day’, a mixture of Greek (*kalon* = good) and Latin (*dies* = day). In this rabbinical time Adam can use the Psalms, Greek and Latin – and the result is an appropriation of the Roman calendar to a Jewish narrative through aetiology and etymology.⁷⁵ ‘The Jews wrote more about their calendars . . . than just about anyone else in the ancient world until the late Roman period’,⁷⁶ when Easter started to become a major issue for Christian chronographers.⁷⁷ This is not an intellectual idiosyncrasy of a marginal group but a continuing politics of community through telling time.

What, then, happens if the resistant group becomes the power in place? Will Macaulay’s Maori also have sketched an anticipation of his own people’s future ruin? Augustine’s *City of God* is written after Rome has been sacked by the barbarians in 410 and also after Rome has become a Christian city, and broaches, therefore, precisely these issues.⁷⁸ The *City of God* begins as an explanation of how it is possible that Rome could have

⁷² Including the ‘marginal and dissident’ 364-day calendar in the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran (Stern (2012) 359–79, quotation 362; Ben-Dov (2008)); the use of time to mark ‘inter- and intracommunal difference’ (228) by Jews is the central thesis of the fine work of Gribetz (2020).

⁷³ Stern (2012) 335. For the continuation of pagan festivals in the Christian empire, and attempts to stop them, see the pungent account of MacMullen (1997) 32–72, and from the Jewish perspective Gribetz (2020) 55–91.

⁷⁴ Heszer (1997); Schwartz (2001); Goodman (2000).

⁷⁵ *Y. Avodah Zarah* 39c, excellently discussed by Gribetz (2020) 55–91; see also Schäfer (1996).

⁷⁶ Stern (2012) 331. ⁷⁷ Mosshammer (2008).

⁷⁸ Wetzel ed. (2012) is an excellent introduction with bibliography to a huge field of study. General background in Kahlos (2007).

been sacked by the Visigoths – nuns raped, churches desecrated. With a battery of arguments, Augustine rejects the pagan response that the sack has been a demonstration that the Christian God could not protect his own pious ones. This immediate defence opens into a 22-book contrast between the city of heaven and the city on earth, which constitutes no less than a systematic theological engagement with the prospect of world history through a reading of scripture, with a vision of the end of days as the justification and culmination of the whole narrative. What, then, is the historical now for Augustine?

Augustine responds to Paul's insistent, intense waiting for the Second Coming by quoting the repeated paradox of St John's Gospel, *erchetai hōra kai nun estin* (4.23, 5.25), 'the hour is coming and now is here', *venit hora et nunc est*. The existence of the now is always and necessarily marked by what is to come. This sense that the now is to be experienced through the future is explained through a full-scale chronological scheme across the history of the world. As the world was created in seven days (and that 'as' is a sign of the typological strategy of reading), so the world's time is organized into seven ages. The first runs from Adam to the Flood; the second from the Flood to Abraham (these both have ten generations). The span from Abraham to Jesus has three periods each of fourteen generations, as the genealogy from the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew calculates – Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian captivity, the captivity to Jesus. We are now thus living in the sixth day. How long is this day? Augustine answers that 'It cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it has been said, "It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power".' But he also says, following the book of Revelation, that it will last a thousand years. The kingdom of the Saints will last a thousand years, he asserts, and this is *now* (20.9). (It is debatable whether the final three and a half years of persecution by the Devil which herald the end are included or not (20.14).) After this sixth day closes, then we shall be in the seventh day, the Sabbath, when 'God will cause us to rest in Him', *in se ipso Deo faciet requiescere*. This seventh day will not end with an evening but with an eighth day, an eternal day when the body as well as the soul will find eternal rest, a day when 'we will rest and see, and see and love, and love and praise' (a beautifully simple promise after so much detailed theological analysis). Augustine summarizes: *Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine*, 'Behold, this is what will be in the end without end.' The end will be endless. Time will become timeless. That is what it means to inhabit 'the kingdom without end'. The fall of Rome becomes finally the story of the everlasting kingdom.

To get to this conclusion Augustine has had to work hard. In Book 11, he has reprised his argument from the *Confessions* that time, which requires motion, has a beginning, in contrast to eternity which is motionless. In Book 12, he argues with pagan historians about chronology, denying that the thousands of years of human history in pagan accounts can be a true figure. Similarly, and at even greater length in Book 12, he earnestly strives to refute claims of any circularity for time. He has already demonstrated that time has a beginning, of course, but now – with a nice reference to the poetry of the Psalms that ‘the sinner walks in circles’ – he argues against any notion that times repeat or return. His final salvo that ‘the eternal life of the saints completely refutes any idea of the circularity of time’ will convince only the faithful.

Seneca, the Roman philosopher whose Stoicism was felt to be so close to the austerity of Christian commitment that letters between himself and St Paul were creatively imagined, sums up perfectly the pervasiveness of the language Augustine is striving to redraft. He expresses the temporality of human life precisely in terms of a set of concentric circles (*Ep.* 12.6–7):

Tota aetas partibus constat et orbis habet circumductos maiores minoribus: est aliquis qui omnis complectatur et cingat – hic pertinet a natali ad diem extremum; est alter qui annos adulescentiae excludit; est qui totam pueritiam ambitu suo adstringit; est deinde per se annus in se omnia continens tempora, quorum multiplicatione uita componitur; mensis artiore praecingitur circulo; angustissimum habet dies gyrum, sed et hic ab initio ad exitum uenit, ab ortu ad occasum.

Our span of life is divided into parts; it consists of large circles enclosing smaller. One circle embraces and bounds the rest; it reaches from birth to the last day of existence. The next circle limits the period of our young manhood. The third confines all of childhood in its circumference. Again, there is, in a class by itself, the year; it contains within itself all the divisions of time by the multiplication of which we get the total of life. The month is bounded by a narrower ring. The smallest circle of all is the day; but even a day has its beginning and its ending, its sunrise and its sunset.

This system of analogous circles will be reprised throughout later literature in Greek and Latin, as the ‘circling years’ of Homeric diction are rearticulated into a broader discourse of temporality. In these books, then, Augustine sets himself explicitly and most intently against the philosophers of the Greco-Roman tradition, as he has against the historians and other learned traditions. The comprehensive vision of the *City of God* explains the universe against the authoritative discourses of antiquity. Including Christian theologians: not

only does he refute Origen on the circularity of time, but he discusses in Book 15 the different lengths of time that the Hebrew manuscripts and Greek translations have for the ages of the figures who lived before the flood. These detailed arguments about aspects of time throughout the *City of God* are all subordinate, however, to the overarching problem of how to conceive of the now of the earthly city in relation to the final timelessness of the heavenly city. Can and should Christian Rome be different from other empires that come and go? An individual's life and ethics are judged by accession to or rejection from eternal life among the *sancti* – what, then, of a kingdom?

In Book 20, Augustine analyses scripture's depictions and prophecies of the 'end of days', including the prophecies of Daniel with their promise of the collapse of kingdoms. In this discussion, Augustine frankly admits that he is uncertain whether Paul refers to the Roman empire in his warnings of the destruction of evil, but, he says, it is 'not absurd' to assume some of his prophecies allude to it (a very cautious approach). In Book 21 he describes the end for the wicked; in Book 22, he outlines the end for the saved. The eternal punishment of the damned is contrasted to the eternal life of the *sancti*. In these final three books, the end, Augustine is concerned with the eternal city of God at the end of days; in the previous books, Augustine has traced the presence of the city of God in earthly guises. In contrast with his own earlier views of *tempora Christiana*, or, say, Prudentius' typically triumphant *vicimus: exultare libet*, 'We have won: we can rejoice', or even of Ambrose's or Origen's views that the unification of the empire under Augustus was providentially designed to enable the Gospel to be spread more easily, Rome, for Augustine, is not the earthly representative of the city of God, an *imperium Christianum*. Rather, the heavenly city can only be at best a *peregrina* on earth (19.17) and even in this earthly *peregrina* city of Rome its citizens are *peregrini*, 'foreigners', 'sojourners' or 'pilgrims' – not just incapable of being full citizens, belonging to this city, but also both inhabiting the now (sojourners) and on a journey (pilgrims) to a greater sanctification.⁷⁹ The church at its best is a community of these *peregrini* on earth, living together in peace or striving to do so. For Augustine, however, a Christian empire can only ever be a precarious regime, in a time before the end. Yet unlike other empires' nightmares of dissolution, it is this end of destruction that Augustine positively seeks, to

⁷⁹ Vocabulary back to Tertullian at least: *De cor.* 13: '*peregrinus mundi huius et civis civitatis supernae*', you are 'a foreigner of this world, a citizen of a higher state' – where it is also linked to the idea of the *saeculum*. See Vessey, Pollmann and Fitzgerald eds. (1999); McLynn (1999), (2009).

discover the endless peace that will follow it. This anticipated, perfected, desired end, for him, is history's story, time's narrative.

Aristotle declared that tragedy was more profound than history because tragedy expressed *to eikos*, what is likely, probable, natural, whereas history only told what had actually happened. Historians, ever since and even before, have looked to find the general laws of *to anthrōpinon* in contradiction of Aristotle's dictum. For Augustine, however, there is only one history, which is both what has happened and what must happen: that is the logic of providence. Or as Augustine writes in *De vera religione* (7.13): 'the essence of Christianity is the history and prophecy of the temporal dispensation of divine providence for the salvation of the human race which must be reformed and healed into eternal life'. Augustine's is a narrative that seeks its end in timelessness, a contradiction of the condition of narration. Simply to live in the now is not a possibility: to say *nun esti*, 'it is now', is already to have said *erchetai hora*, 'the hour is coming'. The promise of timelessness haunts the now: the time which the Christian inhabits is between an already and a not yet.

We began with God's time and Augustine's project of imagining divine timelessness, and moved through Christian attempts to rewrite the flow of time both as a constant truth of the present through typology, and as experiencing the past in the present in the vision of pilgrimage, through the exploration of what 'at the same time' means, to (now) Augustine's all-embracing history, a single passionately assertive story that seeks to end in the ideal timelessness of the eternal kingdom. Christian temporality. Yet timelessness can only remain an impossible projection for human striving and failing. The unimaginable imagined, barely, hopefully, as an end. The question Augustine places on the agenda of this book, then, is to wonder about the consequences of such a self-placement in historical time. What does it mean to live thus in this regime of a still unending time between the already and the not yet? How is the now to be experienced if your eyes are turned always towards the promise of timelessness?