


Essay

Aesthetics, Music, and Meaning-Making

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Abstract: The paper discusses the connection between rhythm and meaning based on Augustine's *De musica*. This central topic is illuminated by the analysis of other particular aesthetic concepts that one can find in Augustine (such as *sentience* and *desire*, in its many Latin variations), as well as in reference to modern aesthetics. The result is the emergence of a relationship between aesthetics and the making of meaning in a *co-creative* operation between the divine and the human based upon an understanding of rhythm.

Keywords: Augustine; rhythm; harmony; sentience; *ratio*

What I wish to present in this essay is a development of ideas found in Augustine's early treatise *De musica*, a treatise devoted to the nature and operation of rhythm. Working with, through and beyond Augustine, I will explore the connections he makes between rhythm and meaning that are developed theologically later (in Book VI of the treatise and then in his late work, *De trinitate*). It is the shift from the created to the uncreated, and how that is registered by or accommodated to our human nature as it has evolved that is foremost in what I am examining. What emerges is the relationship between aesthetics and the making of meaning in a co-creative¹ operation between the divine and the human based upon an understanding of rhythm.

The turn to the primordially of rhythm is well documented in postmodern philosophy (Henry Lefebvre, Gilles Deleuze, Philip Lacoue-Labarthe, Julia Kristeva and, more recently, Giorgio Agamben, have each explored this terrain). It is well documented also in ancient sacred literatures. It has resurfaced as a significant theological category in the wake of a new translation and evaluation of the work of the German Catholic theologian, Erich Przywara (Przywara 2014), the publication of Raimon Panikkar's Gifford Lectures, *The Rhythm of Being* (Panikkar 2010), Michael Fishbane's *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Fishbane 2008) and Alexandra Eikelboom's *Rhythm: A Theological Category* (Eikelboom 2018). But I begin this present analysis with remarks from the Italian novelist and literary critic, Roberto Calasso. In his 2000 Weidenfield lectures at Oxford (published as *Literature and the Gods* in 2001), Roberto Calasso asks a fundamental question: what is literature? In associating it with divinity, and tracing in the earlier lectures the appeal to the gods in early Romanticism through to Nietzsche and Mallarmé, he attempts to get beyond language well used and ordered in a particular literary form, to an underlying power and operation from which our very capacity to symbolize emerges and to which our syllables both express and inform. He takes this exploration back to one of the earliest of languages, Sanskrit, observing that *aksara* (which can be translated as an 'imperishable

¹ On "created co-creation," see (Hefner 1993). For a more Christological reading of co-creativity, see (De Chardin 1964). My own reading of co-creation is much more in line with Chardin's (as I believe Augustine's is also). Maintaining the Christological focus is essential for avoiding a notion of "created co-creation" that too quickly assimilates divine creativity into human creativity—and forgets not only the infinitely qualitative difference between the divine and the human, but also how that infinite difference is rendered abyssal by sin. The Christological (and redemptive focus) stalls any conflation between "humanity's biocultural and eschatological futures" (Roberts 2015).

entity' or a 'syllabic sound', a phoneme) "is the irreducible vibration that precedes meaning, composes meaning, but is not absorbed into it (Calasso 2001)."

Calasso's attention to the primordality of 'vibration' accords with one of the words Augustine frequently uses with respect to the theological relationship between creation and the divine: '*consonantia*'. Vibration at the origin of literature and consonance at the origin of theology opens a way not only to understanding the relationship between literature and theology, but it also enables us to understand a profound operation that is both aesthetic and theological in an encounter with what is meaningful. It recognizes human beings as tuning forks or viola strings—registering the meaningful as pneumatic and psychosomatic accordance with the rhythms of creation and relation and uncreated-yet-creative grace.

I'll begin with an account of sentience and desire as they attend to and embody any number of rhythms; then discuss the relationship between movement and reason, and explain why Augustine (despite translators) does not use the word 'harmony'; and conclude with the consequences of this analysis for a theological approach to not meaning as such but what is meaningful. I'll also explain why the conceptual abstraction of 'meaning' is not as helpful, theologically, as the adverbial and adjectival use of 'meaningful'.

1. Sentience and Desire

In Ancient Greek, αἴσθησις is 'sensation' or 'perception', so what we are treating here in the relationship between rhythmic vibration, aesthetics, and meaning is sentience itself and how we creatively *make* sense of it. Nothing can be meaningful to us without sentience and sentience is many-layered. As human agents, we are consciously governed not by what we sense—the manifold of this would overwhelm us—but rather by what we attend to in what we sense. Our bodies are continually extending into the world around us, both passively receiving what is given and actively reaching out—for light, for air, for warmth, for food, etc. Mental awareness is limited; consciousness of what is most well-lit in the frontal cortex in these myriad exchanges, relays, feeding, and feedback systems. Much is taken in that which is not processed, while nevertheless impressing itself upon us and triggering responses that are autonomic and unconscious. But we 'attend' to somethings rather than others, and in the selectiveness of that attentiveness we accord value and significance. What is valued and significant can vary in intensity depending upon circumstance; vary in relevance to those circumstances. That doesn't mean that the making of meaning is arbitrary because everything is in flux and we construct what regularities there might be and build our lives around and upon them. Neither does it mean that the meaningful is all relative to the embodied intelligence *making* the sense (and so fall foul to some version of the anthropic principle²). It means that we *make* sense as some consonance emerges between *how* we process the world internally and *what* our experience of the world gives us. Some relationship between sonance and resonance, rhythm and vibration, establishes the meaningful. 'Con-sonance' is to 'sound *together*'. The meaning made isn't simply 'out there' as some outlying entity nor our mental construction.

In fact, meaning is not an object at all. It lies in what Kierkegaard, describing truth, called "an approximation-process" (Kierkegaard 1941) issuing from every relationship made and encountered; every connection and association given, responded to and surrendered. The sentient world becomes meaningful in and through the threads of these concordant relations.

There is a question about that 'attending to'. We can intellectually attend to and abstract from and move towards various orders of representation. But beneath that mindful focusing and forensic sifting

² There are 'weak' and 'strong' versions of the anthropic principle which explicitly addresses the correspondence between the human mind and the order we see in the world. The basic question is whether the order is out there and external or that, through adaptation, human beings have evolved to perceive order. If the order is in the universe itself, then a question arises about whether this order is indicative of a divine 'design' or a self-organization principle inherent to matter itself. See (Barrow and Tipler 1986).

much must remain inchoate. That is, registered at the level of the somatic and affective. The selection of what we attend to we might understand as an act of will, but the realm I'm trying to explore between sentience and meaning, sonance and consonance, is prior to self in any defined determinations of an ego. We might call this an operation of a proto-self, for there is agency, but not a definitive agent as such (Damasio 2000). The body has its own autonomic regulations beneath consciousness. It makes selections that we process much further downstream. There are levels of memory too which function involuntarily; body memory, genetic and epigenetic memory handed down to us as a species. There are levels of affect that operate through neurotransmissions, endocrinal discharges, and ionized-chemical catalysts through which moods are stirred and atmospheres are intuited. The intuited is felt rather than thought; felt valences that activate connections to low representational states. The shift here is between the instinctive and visceral and what the poet John Keats, in describing the poetic imagination, called "half-knowledge" (Gittings 1970); the lunar subconscious world out of which dreaming and imagining emerge. Our attentiveness and responsiveness is not a determination of any hard-core self; any conceptions of the self are arrived at, and change over time and under the pressure of different circumstances. Our conceptions of self (often narrativized) emerge through these deeper and unconscious determinations that attend to what is salient in the environments we encounter³. Attentiveness, not conscious willing, drives the aesthetic process.

For Augustine—remarkably in agreement with contemporary neuroscience—attentiveness is driven by desire. The word he uses and often gets translated as 'will' is *voluntas*, but '*voluntas*' is a wanting and a wishing that ultimately has no object other than God (who is not an object). Desire attaches itself to any number of objects in the world; but for Augustine, beyond physical needs like hunger and thirst, these objects are all displacements: things we think we desire when we are desiring. In this way, desire acquires many faces depending upon what it attaches itself to. It gains many names. In *Confessions*, desire circulates through a number of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (*voleo* and *voluntatis*, *amo* and *amicitia*, *fornicatio* and *adultero*, *affectione* and *affectus*, *petendus*, *optatio*, *cupio*, and *cupiditas*, *voluptatis*, *diligio*, *delectione*, and *dulcissimus*, *libido* and *stuprum*, and *incundus*).

Recent cognitive scientists exploring emotional life observe that emotions of whatever kind heighten awareness and signify the need to attend to something even prior to appraisal. Emotions initiate the appraising. This attentiveness that emotions alert us have been termed "relevance detectors" and they have an "action tendency" (Phelps 2006; Frijda 2008). But Augustine's anthropology is theological, and so underwritten by a sense that meaning is not just made in and through all our interactions with the created world. Meaning is always given in, through, and beyond that world—making creation and our engagement with it *meaningful*. There is, then, ultimately something missing in what we encounter in our mundane environments. And we are aware it is missing, so we are nomadic creatures propelled beyond ourselves by a sense that we are incomplete; that the *meaningful* intimates a meaning that eludes us. Hence, we are governed by a longing to "know even as we are known"—as St. Paul puts it in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* (I Cor.13.12).

³ Evolutionary psychologists would view such 'salience' in terms of pleasure and pain, biological reward and biological defense against threat. For an evolutionary psychologist's approach to aesthetics, see (Chatterjee 2014). Despite the neurological insights in how art (mainly painting) interacts with the various operations of the brain, it is difficult to avoid the sense that such 'appreciation' reduces the aesthetic to evolutionary functionalism.

A teleonomy informs what Augustine considers basic to consonance, and that is movement⁴. I say teleonomy rather than teleology⁵. There is, of course, a teleology of desire in Augustine: he accepts theologically that, being made in the image of God, human beings are intrinsically created in such a way that they find themselves, their human meaning, in Christ who *is* the image and likeness of God. But the teleonomy structures physiological and psychological (inseparable aspects of being human for Augustine) movement as the *anima* (soul or mind) is both animated and animates. The directedness of this organic structuring that forms the human person and governs the shape of individual biographies is, in itself, blind. The human person cannot grasp their own destiny just as they cannot grasp the providential care of God. They are caught up in a directedness that sometimes may be illuminated for them, by God, but otherwise is a following and discipleship of utter trust and dependency. Of course, a human person can determine a direction and a purpose for themselves, and *forge* their own destinies. But, for Augustine, this would be an act of *libido dominandi* and is sinful insofar as it fails to listen well and be obedient to the true and meaningful movement and rhythms working within and upon them. The verbs to hear and to obey are closely associated in the Biblical languages. Such a determinative *forging* would constitute a life of dissonance. It would therefore lack meaning. It would draw itself back towards the nothingness from which creation emerged, the formlessness over which the Spirit *moved*. It is the Spirit (of life) that animates and ensouls. The Latin word Augustine frequently uses for these ego-imposed determinations is *inanis* (what is deprived of meaning, formless, futile). The word is used in the Latin Bible for that which existed prior to creation when “*terra autem erat inanis et vacua*” (Gen.1.1). All aesthetic activity is related to making sense of what is sensed.

2. Movement and Reason

Desire, then, for Augustine, is more like ‘life-principle’, what Spinoza called *conatus* and Kant the “feeling of life.” Translated outside the field of the philosophers and transposed into evolutionary psychology, we might find parallels here with Panksepp’s ‘seeking’ instinct (Panksepp 1998) and Berridge’s ‘wanting’ instinct⁶. It operates compulsively at a bioenergetic level (need for food and water; the needs of the metabolism), a physiological and affective level, a psychological and spiritual level, and a sociological and political level. It is that which ‘moves’, and in *De musica* Augustine will not distinguish between any metaphorical, analogical, or kinetic differences in such movement. Emotion and movement are both *motus* in Latin. To move is to feel (in both its sensory and affective registers); to feel forwards in accordance with a basic hedonic (pleasure/pain) scale. Movement is a groping in which the meaningful gets composed; it installs a directedness towards what will become meaningful. As we move or are moved, we *make* sense because we are projected into a world that enfolds us and are required by our proprioceptive senses to orient ourselves *in relation to*. There can be no engagement with the world without this corporeal and sensory orientation. That becomes the basis, not just for self-awareness (without which there can be no experience of what is being experienced), but an evaluation (not necessarily intellectual or aesthetic, it could be instinctual) of what relations are salient, and what relations the body in its orientation simply ignores. What is salient may be, at first, those relations that are most beneficial or rewarding (pleasurable). Meaning-making is beneficial because it composes us at cognitive and physiological levels; the more our environment challenges

⁴ On the primordially of movement and its association with life, see Book I of Augustine’s *De musica* and, more recently (without a number of references to Aristotle but not to Augustine), (Sheets-Johnstone 2011).

⁵ ‘Teleonomy’ is the recognition in evolutionary biology that organisms develop in accord with a certain directedness and purpose, even though overall evolution itself is random and accident-driven. Terrence W. Deacon succinctly sums up both what is meant by the term and the question it poses to biology: “natural selection is indeed a thoroughly non-teleological process. Yet the specific organic properties which this account ignores, and on which it depends, are inextricably bound up with teleological concepts, such as adaptation, function, information, and so forth” (Deacon 2012). Teleonomy is, therefore, some form of “unguided ‘design’” (p. 124). All teleonomy involves movement through time, contingent circumstance, and complex forms of circular causality—there would be no “adaptation, function, information, and so forth” otherwise.

⁶ (Berridge 1996). For a review of both Panksepp and Berridge on instinctive drives, see (Ellis and Solms 2017).

our sense to make our experience of it meaningful, the more we become anxious. So, what is salient can also include those relations that are unfamiliar and evoke curiosity and the need to understand. Movement projects us then into dissonances and consonances triggering, at the neurological level (prior to will-lit cognition, but feeding into it), comparisons, contrasts, integrations, and competitions.

Movement primes expectations in the *making* of sense. If it encounters the familiar, it also encounters the surprising. So, movement discovers. But it is not what is discovered that is most important. What is most important is the discovering, because it is that which lies the forging of new relations. Movement is dynamic, which means knowledge of the world is always temporary, always open to reassessment and recalibration. And the knowledge is not composed at the level of cognition and reason (*ratio*), but more primordially where what is inner and instinctive encounters what is intuited through the movement outwards. So, we have three states here: the instinctive and ‘hard-wired’ internal response, the propulsion outwards, and the intuited relation between the internal and the external. Both instincts and propulsion are felt conditions—*e-motions*. The meaningful *made* in and as the relations is always incomplete and so always searching for greater understanding; though a certain resolution between the dissonances and the consonances is afforded in the emergence of patterns and regularities in which the inner and the outer animate each other. Such patterning and regulation are intimations of the rhythmic written in creation, for Augustine. Hence Book VI of *De musica* bears the rhythm of prosodic meter discussed in the other five books towards a theology of creation and a cosmology. Creation hums and vibrates and human beings are enfolded in such concordance, resonating with it. I will say more about reasoning (*ratio*) later, but at this point I will observe that, throughout *De musica*, Augustine plays with the Latin *ratio* as both reason and proportionality (the Greek *analogia*), and proportionality is the measure of and in movement.

The relations between inner and outer that emerge in movement are not always predictable; the new ones arrive as the unexpected. Learning, understanding, and artistic fabrications all issue from an exchange of energies between the internal and the external: the feeding, consumption, and propulsion that movement installs in all living things. The cycles of these exchanges, which correlate the various internal rhythms of the organism with the external rhythms of the environment, compose the creativity (and expenditure) involved in meaning-making. There is no necessity here in the forging of these relations; no determinism. The meaningful emerges in and through the animations over formlessness. Theologically speaking, meaning-making is an *imitatio* of creation *ex nihilo*; and ultimately, for Augustine, an *imitatio Christi* through whom creation came to be. As creatures who also create—where creation can be aesthetic production, technological advancement, or craftsmanship—our ‘creations’ are of a secondary, derivative order⁷. For creatures, the continual and dynamic emergence of the meaningful as propelled by movement itself is always striving towards a vanishing point—where expectation comes to rest. So, theologically read, something eschatological adheres to all animation as animation impels expectation. Something eschatological adheres also to all our ‘creations’ even the most disturbing and apocalyptic⁸.

⁷ J.R. Tolkien understood this activity as “sub-creation.” See his essay (Tolkien 2008).

⁸ This eschatology can be more or less expressive. Broadly speaking, because technology serves not just the pragmatics of the present situation, but its own future advancement then the scientific imagination dreams of either dystopias or utopias. It draws material for either of these scenarios from what is at hand in the culture, drawing significantly on religious materials. The techno-dreams informing AI, for example, rehearse all the traditional repertoire of what was once considered angelic intelligence and corporeality. Craftsmanship, too, works with a notion of perfection just as any art form aspires to express a purity of communication in and through the medium it works with. Poetry employs rhythm, images, syntax, and the musical inherent in shaping any word to apprehend more than can be comprehended (to echo Shakespeare).

3. Avoiding Harmony: The Theological Difference

It is here we might think through three central threads in Augustine's analysis in *De musica*⁹, each of which is not without theological corollaries. The first is *the difference* movement installs. The second is that play in Latin on the term *ratio*. The third is why, despite several English translators, Augustine examination of the play of rhythms in which human living and responding is situated with respect to the operations of the divine avoids the term 'harmony'.

De musica opens with the teacher instructing his student in how to listen to a fundamental difference. The fundamental difference he has in mind, and which is constitutive of movement, is in the slack and stress beats within poetry. They start with the simplest rhythmic movements, in prosody called 'feet' (*podus*) of the dactyl (stress/slack) and the iambic (slack/stress). There is, and poets, composers, and dancers have all pointed to this, a genuine association between ambulation and rhythm: *podus* is an anatomical foot as much as a term in prosody. I'm not sure the term 'metaphor' holds here; the first provides the condition for the second. And in a further transformation, the composition of the movement in the *podus* becomes numerical: the movement from 1 to 2. Again, the association here between metrics and mathematics is found in Latin. Music "is the science of mensurating well (*scientia bene modulandi*)," Augustine writes¹⁰. The translation 'mensurating' is awkward, but *modulari* is the measurement of the change in rhythm, and in all things created (by God and Fabricated by humankind), Augustine writes, "measure must be observed"¹¹. This idea is then developed into music, for music "is the science of moving well. But that is because whatever moves and keeps harmoniously the measuring of times and intervals can already be said to move well"¹². That "keeps harmoniously" is "*numerosae servatis*"—meaning "observing numbers" or "serving rhythm"¹³. I will say more about the translation and use of 'harmony' later. For now, the point is: the anatomy of ambulation subscribes to a rhythm that is both mathematical and metrical: pure number is the basis of rhythm, for Augustine. Creation dances and all our movement moves within and participates in that *choresis*.

Over the next five books of *De musica*, the teacher takes the student from two-beat syllabic feet to highly complex metrical forms found in Latin poets from Vergil to Pindar to Horace, but with each level of complexity building upon the move from 1 to 2. This is the basis of all 'order' within creation and among created entities; the order of movement and temporality as such; the order that guarantees the meaningful. Much later in *De trinitate*, Augustine reflects, theologically, on this relation because 1 and 2 make 3¹⁴. This gets translated into the movement of the Father to the Son as second person of the Trinity, to the Holy Spirit that governs the unity of 1 and 2. Scholars will often refer to this as Augustine's number mysticism, but 'mysticism' is too loose and enigmatic a term. To call earthly life in its cosmological context 'creative' is to subscribe to its existence as meaningful and ordered, rather than a blind throw of the evolutionary dice—where 'evolution' embraces the origins and development of the observable universe. The 'destructive' belongs to what is evil and has no ontological substance. It is *inanis*. What Augustine is exploring is the nature of the ordering that opens the requirement to *make sense* that emerges from terrestrial movement, and all the rhythms of and in relations to such movement. He explores, that is, our total dependency upon the more primordial rhythm of Trinitarian life: a dependency in which the contingencies of creation rest within and upon that which is eternal and uncreated. And Augustine does this in *De musica* not by starting from any creedal assertion or divine revelation, but by starting from our listening to the world, and training the student, through

⁹ The translation *On Music* is taken from (Augustine 2014). The Latin text is via Thesaurus Musicarum Latinarum project of Indiana University <http://boethius.music.indiana.edu/tml/3rd-5th/>.

¹⁰ *De musica*, p. 172/2.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 173/3.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 175/3.

¹³ Whatever the relationship between rhythm, number, and meter, *numeros* as translating the Greek *rythmos* and *eurythmia* is central to Cicero's *Orator* as a necessary characteristic of prose. See (Hutchinson 2018) on 'Rhythmic Prose in Greek Imperial Literature'.

¹⁴ (Hill 1991). For the Latin text, see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html>.

getting him to clap or thump out the beats, to feel and participate in the rhythmic. To participate in the rhythmic is the basis of *making sense*, which, as I said, is the basis for the human activities of technological advancement, aesthetic production, and craftsmanship.

So much for an examination of “observing numbers” or “serving rhythm,” but there is a word in that description of music that is even more fundamental (from a theological perspective) than “*numerosae servatis*.” For whatever moves does not just measure and subscribe to time, it engages “intervals” (“*atque intervallorum*”) ¹⁵. You have to shape and sound the word *intervallum* to get at something Augustine finds here. It’s onomatopoeic. He is suspicious of vision as a sense because the orders of imagery and the operation of the imagination it invokes can be deceptive, theologically: the divine is not to be seen. We walk with that which is, at its most subtle level, unseen. The imagination can mislead and become *phantasia* ¹⁶. The auditory and the tactile he trusts more; they root both his physiology and psychology, and in the mouth-shaping that words require (he still belonged to a deeply oral culture) and by the breathings that give expression to those words the internal meets the external. *Intervallum*, as a word that is heard, begins with a short, stressed vowel and descends from there to an open, sonorous ‘u’ that’s muted with the ‘m’. It gives itself sonically and rhythmically to silence. And it is the silent, unseen and unheard, nature of the interval that Augustine reflects upon ¹⁷.

For Augustine, the Arabic 0 was not available as a mathematical order, so the dactylic and the iambic both register the movement from 1 to 2, and yet constitute a single foot. The movement from 1 to 2 both elides and requires an interval; but an interval traversed. The interval is a silence that points in two antithetical ways to Augustine: both to the ‘nothing’ out of which creation emerges and the continual present in which God alone dwells. The interval is a place where paradox is felt as the tension between ‘emptiness’ and ‘plentitude’; an absence registered in the created order of things and the eternal presence of God. It is a space of distention that Augustine will develop later (in the *Confessions*, for example) into an account of time. Movement is inseparable from his thinking about time; our temporal condition as it is always open to contingent differences.

Why is this interval so important theologically? Because it opens the rhythms of creation in which living bodies are continually seeking some equilibrium between the internal and the external, biologically and mentally, to a divine rhythm as felt, not understood; groped at not grasped. And, in my analysis, this is where we encounter revelation—though not in any unmediated, unnuanced understanding of that term. For, throughout the Hebrew and the Christian Bible, one rhythm predominates to describe relations between the divine and human: the up/down, the down/up (similar in structure to the iambic and dactylic meters in prosody). It is most emphatic in Christological reflections: the incarnation/resurrection; the assumption/Pentecost. St. Paul frequently makes reference to this rhythm: notably in what is called the *Carmen Christi* of *Philippians* 2 and *Ephesians* 4. Here we have the twinning of *kenosis/pleroma* (emptying/filling), *anabasis/katabasis* (ascent/descent). Measured temporally and historically, these are two moments of a single wave function. Measured eternally, the two moments are one. That is, in the triune nature of God there is no up or down, but rather a perichoresis of persons in an endless reciprocal exchange of love. This perichoresis is what Dante figures as interlocked rings in the final canto of his *Commedia*. This divine rhythm constitutes what Augustine will call the *ordo amoris*, the order or rule of love that governs all things “in heaven and upon the earth.” It is a hidden and transcendent *ordo*, though it is accommodated in some fitting

¹⁵ Augustine attention to “intervals of time [*temporalia intervalla*]” play an important theological role in *De trinitate*. He uses the term to distinguish the difference between human beings subject to contingency and God with whom “there are no intervals of time” (*op. cit.*, p. 430). Theologically this means, for him, that the whole of Trinity is involved in creation, incarnation, and redemption and there can be no thinking of ‘first born’ with respect to the Son and the Father outside of the human appeal to metaphor.

¹⁶ In *De trinitate*, Augustine is much more positive about the creative powers of the imagination.

¹⁷ In music, of course, the ‘interval’ can be given a certain signature. The composer Arvo Pärt extends the intervals until the point when, sometimes (in *Tabula Rasa*, for example), we are not sure the music will ever emerge again from the interval.

manner to the created order because creation is in some sense *in God*. In God and through God all things came to be.

The ‘interval’ registers the tension of this eternal rhythm in time: hence, only paradoxes can define it. The ‘interval’ is what the human (the mammal?) brain cannot compute because the brain, in its pursuit of coherence, cannot consciously apprehend gaps¹⁸. It evolved as an organ that *makes* sense by ignoring and forgetting through the operation of attending to what is salient¹⁹. In the ongoing search for an equilibrium between the internal organism and its external environment, sense is made meaningful, and a coherent world-picture created, by conditioned pattern recognition, learnt responses, and the predictions of what to expect that these functions afford. This equilibrium between internal and external rhythms would all come under “*numerosa servatis*,” for Augustine. The way of religious faith is a walking with the invisible—the not seen or heard or touched or smelt or tasted. The way of life, the modes of behavior, formed in engaging with what is given in the ‘interval’ points beyond evolution. It is not antithetical to it; we fittingly evolved as creatures through it. But while love might be reduced to a reproductive strategy for survival of the species, neither faith nor hope (both existential investments in the unseen and both with affective correlations) seems to me simply responses to evolutionary demands. Of course, this is not to say that faith and hope are not instinctive correlatives of our seeking and wanting, and subsequently developed into more sophisticated behaviors as we acquire the “social brain”²⁰. But both faith and hope are modified, and impact behavior differently, when there is no visible direct object to which they are related or can be related. This needs considerably more development because, at the instinctive level, there are no specific objects sought (according to Panksepp).

We hopefully can now appreciate why Augustine does not use the term *harmonia* despite English-speaking translators²¹. The Pythagoreans, and later the Stoics, developed ‘harmony’ cosmologically. It expressed the primordial unity of part to whole. It could not treat dissonance as anything other than disturbance and, therefore, wrong; something to be overcome. But *intervallum* emphasizes that creation began and unfolded through separations, and the premiere separation establishes a rhythmic order beyond the created order²²; a separation in which the Uncreated Creator is announced in the invisibility of Triune presence. Between the divine and the created, there can, then, only be *con-sonantia* (sounding together) or *con-gruentia* (meeting with—from *con* [with] and *ruere* [to fall]). That is, where the measures and movements of creation and all forms of human creativity engage with, and participate in, its Creator. Here, by faith (for this is a matter of entrusting to that which is not there as such), *ratio* (as reason) finds its higher and consummating proportionality in Christ as Logos—the divine *ratio* written into the created orders.

4. Conclusions

The effect of these operations, with respect to Augustine, meaning, and aesthetic activity, is that while we are continually *making* sense, the meaning of this sense is deferred. As he writes in *De civitati dei*, human beings have to make judgments and, simultaneously, have to declare an ignorance

¹⁸ Ellis and Solms, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30: “the brain is essentially an organ of *prediction* . . . what appears to be sensory perceptions are actually the brain’s constructions of a representation of reality on the basis of what it expects to be there . . . The mind creates an ongoing picture of the world on the basis of its expectations.”

¹⁹ The essential nature of human forgetting, that Augustine reflected upon in *Confessions*, is erased in notions of AI and all those fantasies of downloading the human mind onto a computer. Interestingly, in Jonathan Nolan’s *Westworld*, the ‘hosts’ begin their evolution and adaptation through reverie and remembering.

²⁰ The social brain hypothesis is central to the Oxford anthropologist Robin Dunbar. See (Dunbar 2009).

²¹ It is true he uses what might be understood as a synonym, *Concordia*, but, as with *congruentia* and *consonantia*, it is the suffix that is important here—the relation ‘with’. *Harmonia* dissolves the relational as a part within the whole, whereas the suffix ‘con’ establishes difference, distinction and relation.

²² The first rhythm of the created order established with the separation of darkness and light, night and day (Gen.1.4). “Everything that God creates, including human existence, is determined by this polarity . . . The separation of light and darkness sets in motion this rhythmic polarity which will always belong to creation. Time take precedence over space in P’s presentation of creation; creation does not begin with the division of space, but with the division of night and day as the basis of time” (Westermann 1994). Subsequently, with the creation over six days, God’s Word writes time into creation; time is intrinsic to the gift of life and therefore good.

until the Day of Judgment. Meaning is no grand design in which we are all housed. So what remains is the meaningful, the pursuit of meaning as it dynamically unfolds through time and our aesthetic expressivity. The meaningful and aesthetic are continually emerging. But to the extent that human beings are being formed and informed with respect to their relationship with God, and what I sometimes call (for shorthand) the ‘kenotic rhythm’—whereby all human judgments bear an epistemological humility—then judgments (even the aesthetic judgements made in human creativity) are, by intention, faithful. There is a consonance.

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