The idea of God's omni-attention appears more explicitly in *De Civitate Dei*: “It is not that there is any difference in God's knowledge according as it is produced by things not yet in existence, by things now or by things that are no more. Unlike us, He does not look ahead to the future, see the present before him, and look back to the past. Rather he sees events in another way, far and profoundly different from any experience that is familiar to our minds. For he does not variably turn his attention from one thing to another. No, there is no

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ideal of human devotion—though, as is argued below, Christian authors disagreed on whether or not such undistracted attention was within the power of human beings; Augustine in particular argued that it was not. But the ideal nevertheless remains crucial and, in comparison to it, acts of everyday attending are defined both as flawed acts and instructive experiences. The experience of turning to and focusing on one thing rather than another and the accompanying sense of being abstracted away from all things by being absorbed in a single object—this is the fundamental experience that allows us to imagine the devotional ideal of attending to God without distraction, but it is also a reminder that the undistracted turn to God is not a similarly available experience. That is, the spiritual notion of attention implies a hierarchy in which God’s own attention is the model; the ideal human attention to God is an imitation of this model; and actual acts and experiences of attending are fallen vestiges of the ideal of attending to God.

The modern notion of attention as a faculty of the human mind both replaces this spiritual ideal and retains many of its features. First and foremost, while our notion of attention is supposed to be a neutral, descriptive concept, it is in fact laden with more or less explicit ethical implications, or what William James called “spiritual judgments.” The first definition that the *OED* offers claims that attention is the “direction of the mind” but qualifies this definition by adding the adjective “earnest.” Similarly, public discourses of attention virtually always rely on a dichotomy between a desirable ideal of paying attention and an unfavorable notion of being distracted—usually without a clear explanation of how attending to something is different from being distracted from something else in the first place. It is important to see how and why such ethical implications are inherited from a former spiritual ideal of devotional attention. But while such continuities between the spiritual and the psychological concepts of attention are relatively easy to identify, the differences are