

Andrea Nightingale. *Once Out of Nature: Augustine on Time and the Body*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xiv + 244 pp. ISBN 9780226585758 (cloth). \$39 (cloth). \$17.05 (kindle).

Andrea Nightingale is Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at Stanford University. Most of her published writing to date has been on Greek literary and philosophical materials (Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, Epicurus, and so on), though she also has interests in, and has written on, modern and post-modern ecological philosophy. So far as I can tell, she published nothing on Augustine until 2007; this is her first book-length study on the topic.

Once Out of Nature's title is taken from W. B. Yeats' poem, 'Sailing to Byzantium.' The relevant lines are: "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing, / But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling / ..." In Yeats, the phrase "once out of nature" indicates what death brings about and begins a consideration of what the resurrected body will be like: unearthly, timeless, impassible, beautiful, uncannily different from the fleshly bodies we know now. To be resurrected, for Yeats, means exactly to move out of nature, away from the death and violence and desire and time and change characteristic of that realm. Yeats contrasts the "monuments of unaging intellect" that are the concern of the immortal singing soul with the sensual music that belongs to the world of mortality. The latter is "no country for old men" exactly because it is sunk in nature, deaf to eternal melody.

Nightingale presents Augustine as thinking along the same lines. His depictions and analyses of the heavenly and paradisiacal bodies of human beings, and of the modes of their existence in time, are, as she renders and frames them, pictures not of humans but of transhumans, beings who no longer have any of the properties that belong to humans *stricto sensu*. She concentrates on two aspects of Augustine's transhumans: their extraction from the food-chain in virtue of their resurrection as bodies without need or desire for material nourishment; and their loss of psychic extension and bodily decay in time. These are the things that make them transhuman, humans unrecognizably remade. Humans are, as Nightingale dramatically puts Augustine's view, "extraterrestrials who have 'fallen' on a land where they do not belong" (p. 3). Nightingale's exposition assimilates Augustine's eschatologically-inflected hope for such a transhuman existence to the technologically-founded hope for a radical (genetic, surgical, cultural) remaking of the human advocated by transhumanists now.

Most of the book is exegetical: Nightingale is concerned to establish, with care and close attention to his texts, what Augustine thinks about the bodies and

times of paradisial and heavenly humans. But there is also a normative thread: she doesn't like what he says, and, especially by the end of her book, it is clear enough why. I'll address each aspect of *Once Out of Nature*, necessarily too briefly, in what follows.

First, the formalities of the work.

The book contains five chapters, framed by a lengthy introduction and epilogue. There is also an appendix, in which Augustine's treatment of the Pauline *caro/corpus* distinction is set forth. A broad range of Augustinian texts is treated, with the greatest weight given to material from *Confessiones*, *De civitate dei*, *De trinitate*, *De continentia*, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, *De musica*, *De bono coniugali*, *De utilitate ieiunii*, *De genesi contra manichaeos*, and *De genesi ad litteram* -- though at least twenty other texts are quoted from or referred to less frequently. She makes some use also of sermons and letters. In no case is Nightingale interested in these texts as such, however; instead, she mines them for material on the topics that interest her. All the texts she quotes are given in English, in her own (lucid and accurate and lively) translations; and for many of them the Latin is provided, either in-text or in footnotes. Those footnotes, together with the bibliography, also show a wide acquaintance with contemporary and classical interpretations of Augustine, mostly in English, but also in French and German. She is not interested, however, in providing anything like a systematic review of what other scholars have written on the topics she treats: she uses secondary sources in the service of her own argument, and not as sources of interest in their own right. And, as is typical for the University of Chicago Press, the book is a delight to hold and read: I detected almost no misprints (though one of the few was hilariously striking: 'overweaning' for 'overweening,' p. 76), and in every other way the book is in form a model of what an academic monograph should be.

Second, the exegesis.

Chapter One deals with transhumans in paradise and in heaven -- with, that is to say, what Augustine has to say about Eve and Adam, and about those resurrected for eternal life. Paradisial and heavenly transhumans are alike in that they dwell in a psychic present and do not age: their consciousness is not distended in time, which is to say that their psychic time is always now, even if, in the case of the saints in heaven, that now is also memory-inflected. Eve and Adam ate and could have had procreative sex, in Augustine's view. Nightingale quotes and gives full analysis to the material from *De civitate dei* and the late incomplete work against Julian on these matters, and she emphasizes that paradisial eating and sex are very different from their earthly correlates, mostly in being separated from desire and satisfaction. Adam and Eve approach transhuman status in this regard, but do not finally arrive at it. That arrival is

reserved to the inhabitants of heaven, who do not eat at all, and who certainly do not procreate or have sex. They are completely extracted from the food-chain, the chain of violence and rending and death. Nightingale is lyrical and accurate in depicting Augustine's visceral horror at the nature of this food-chain, and shows that this horror is among the causes of his relentless emphasis on the separation of the resurrected body from it. She writes often that Augustine's positions on these matters amount to a rejection of our earthly life.

There are certainly some exegetical payoffs to Nightingale's approach. She is plausible, for instance, on the reasons why Augustine writes that the *membra et viscera* of the resurrected body will be visible to all eyes in heaven (the resurrected body will be transparent), even though they no longer have the functions they had here below. "This vision," she writes, "reminds them [sc. the saints] that they have escaped from earthly bodies, and their former place on the food chain" (p. 49). The evidence of the viscera to the eyes serves the same kind of function, on this view, as does the presence of scars on the resurrected bodies of the martyrs: it is a trace, a *vestigium*, of a mode of being now left decisively behind.

In Chapter Two, Nightingale treats Augustine's understanding of time and temporality. She usefully connects his much-discussed analysis of the *distentio animi*, which she places under the rubric 'psychic time', with his depictions of the passage of time evident in such things as the aging body and the motions of non-human creatures. These she includes under the rubric 'earthly time', and argues that Augustine's understanding of temporality necessarily includes both psychic and earthly time, and that both must be overcome if transhumanity is to be fully realized. That explains why the saints (and, proleptically, Eve and Adam) must be free not only from the distention in time produced by such things as memory and expectation, but also from the subjection to time produced by mutability. Her analysis of the subtle differences among *distentio*, *extentio*, and *intentio* in Augustine's thought is especially well done: by way of it she shows that the chronic double (earthly, psychic) temporality of fallen existence must be completely overcome (gathered in) when the resurrection occurs; and this requires extraction from all animate matter -- everything material -- other than that of the resurrected human body. Anything less would not sufficiently overcome the mutability of earthly time; and this, Nightingale suggests, is why the paradisaical garden, full of non-human animate matter, is replaced for Augustine by the heavenly city, geometric, eternal, and inanimate.

In the third chapter, "The Unsituated Self," Nightingale applies the analyses of the first two to the question of what, in Augustine's view, his self is, and where it is to be found. She is quite right to say that his pressing sense that it cannot fully be found here below is intimate with his frequent and agonized

depictions of his own dissolution in time's flow, and in his relations to the mutabilities of non-human creatures. "As a doubly temporalized being," she writes, "Augustine can never coincide with himself" (p. 131) -- this is a refrain repeated with slight variations perhaps too many times in the book. She is right, too, to say that these discontinuities and opacities and lacks in self-coincidence can only be resolved in the resurrection. But there is a difficulty in the exposition here, I think. Nightingale begins by contrasting, rightly, Augustine's positive evaluation of the body's flesh with Plato's negative one: for Augustine, the flesh, rightly constituted, is an eternal friend, never to be left behind, and the idea of a fleshless human person is an incoherent one. But by the end of the chapter, the difference between Augustine and Plato has come to seem less. The resurrected body as Augustine depicts it in Nightingale's exposition is scarcely a body at all: it has no *pondus*, and carries, therefore, nothing with it. But this is not quite right. The fundamental constraint on Augustine's thought about the resurrected flesh of humans is attention to the flesh of the resurrected and ascended Christ, and while it is true that he has not much to say about this, he does have a good deal to say about the presence of that flesh in the eucharist. Nightingale's somewhat truncated depiction of human resurrected flesh would have benefited from attention to what Augustine thought about the presence of Christ's ascended flesh in the eucharist.

Chapter Four treats the homologies in Augustine's thought between fleshly human bodies and books. Both, Nightingale thinks, are sites for the interface between matter and meaning; and, especially in the *Confessiones*, a kind of autohagiography, as she rightly calls it, Augustine makes his own body available for consideration in the body of a book: "His bodily *corpus* becomes a veritable spectacle in his literary corpus" (p. 148), which is nicely put -- there are considerable stylistic pleasures in this book. The material in this chapter, while interesting enough in its own right (Nightingale is in considerable part dependent on the work of Brian Stock for what she writes here), has rather the feel of an independent piece of work shoehorned into a book whose theme it only partly fits.

In the last substantive chapter, the fifth, Nightingale turns to Augustine's writing about the relics of the martyrs, and about the Christian mortification of the living body by ascetical practice. On the former, Nightingale argues that Augustine's growing willingness over the course of his life to treat the relics as holy and miracle-working assimilates them to the perfected bodies of those resurrected for heaven. The body-parts of the martyrs here below are already fully exempt from the food chain, and, in at least some cases (so Augustine thought), are also exempt from the processes of decay that belong to the world's temporality. This is what we shall all be like when we are resurrected into eternal life, and that is why we should treat these relics with great respect and reverence. Once again, it would have been useful to contrast what Augustine advocates

with respect to treatment of the martyrs' body-parts, and what he advocates with respect to treatment of the material elements of the eucharist. Doing that would show that bodies do not, in Augustine's thought, have a single mode of presence in heaven, and that Nightingale's depiction of the heavenly body is therefore in some ways too simple.

This is an important book written in an engaging style and with a thought-provoking thesis. It is certainly right that Augustine's resurrected bodies are as different from the ones we have now as are the genetically-modified bodies that some contemporary transhumanists urge on us, and in that sense the rhetoric Nightingale deploys has useful application. But there is something shared by Nightingale and today's transhumanists that Augustine would have rejected, and that is the view that what is real and natural about humans can be found solely by attending to what we are like now, which is time-bound, death-bound, fragmented, unstable, bloodily implicated in the food-chain. The contemporary transhumanist sees this, doesn't like it, and advocates fixing it; Nightingale, on the whole, sees it, does like it, and advocates living with it. But both think that what they see is the human. For Augustine, the human is scarcely visible here below. He thinks, in contrast to both Nightingale and the transhumanists, that what we are now is deeply damaged simulacrum of what we should have been and may be: we live in a devastated world disordered by a primordial cataclysm, and we are ourselves profoundly hurt by that cataclysm. What we need to do is the best we can to heal the damage. Augustine's depictions of paradisaical and heavenly humans are there to help us see what is wrong with us and what might be done about it. Nightingale's assimilation of Augustine to today's transhumanists, therefore, is in part misleading: they seek progress; he seeks healing; she likes things as they are.

I wrote at the beginning of this review that Nightingale doesn't like what she calls Augustine's transhumanism, and I must end by expressing my puzzlement at and dislike of the reasons she has, and gives, for not liking it. She is, unlike Augustine, at ease with the food-chain. Indeed, she likes it. In her epilogue, she quotes Melville on the business of killing and eating, which he calls "a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties" (p. 198). The quotation is from *Moby-Dick*, and it occurs as part of a depiction of sharks bloodily consuming a whale-corpse from below, while men, "valiant butchers over the deck-table," do the same from above. Nightingale relishes the rhetoric, but in the end rejects the outrage -- itself Augustinian -- that fuels it. For her, the bloody food-chain is, if anything, an occasion for celebration. It shows, she thinks, the interindebtedness (her term) that all species share with one another, and that, for her, is to be celebrated, not lamented. Her last interlocutor in the epilogue, Karel Čapek, a Czech writer of the 1920s and 1930s, writes lyrically of gardens, and, as Nightingale puts it, is happy to conjugate *humus* and *humanus* (a nice conceit) and thus to affirm our deep connection with all the living -- worms, and plants,

and other animals. This is a move to the pastoral, as the celebration of the garden nearly always is; it is also a nostalgic and deliberate turn of the gaze away from the field of blood and toward an exsanguinated Eden where the worst that can happen is the gardener's back-ache and calluses and eventual burial in soft, rich loam, there to nourish the worms that have in turn nourished the garden. What Nightingale exhibits here is a refusal to lament the bloody and violent death that surrounds us, and in which we live and move and have our being. This refusal of lament is a refusal of the most essentially human response to a devastated world such as the one we actually inhabit -- and there is no tincture of lament in Nightingale. But to say that, I suppose, is just to say that my intuitions on these matters are profoundly Augustinian, while Nightingale's are profoundly pagan. And I doubt that there are any arguments that will or should convince her that Augustine is right in his outrage at death and blood and violence and torture, and in his conviction that their presence is clear evidence of some profound wrongness in the world. She and he occupy, in this matter, worlds differently constituted.

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