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The Space of Time. A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions x to xii. Supplements to the Study of Time 6. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xv + 358 pp.
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Augustine on time is one of the great topics in philosophy. *Confessions* x to xii is its *locus classicus*. Some of the greatest thinkers cut their teeth on it, Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Ricoeur. Their names hardly need mentioning. They all feature in this highly erudite and enthusiastically written account. David van Dusen subjects them and the whole tradition of Augustinian thought to a critical review and proposes an entirely new approach throwing in some new discoveries in the process. He departs, as the title indicates, from Augustine's concept of time in *Confessions* x to xii as *distentio animi*. He translates this phrase as "dilation of the soul" and observes (pp. 314-19) that it cannot be found exactly like this in Augustine, but is collated from a passage in *Confessions* xi.26.33, where it is more a question than a definition: Time, *tempus* (Greek χρόνος), thus Augustine observes in this passage, is dilation, *distentio*, yes. But of what? Of the soul itself? He would not be surprised, Augustine concludes.

We must not be misled here, van Dusen argues, as most interpreters in history have been, by the term *animus*. This term, and consequently the concept of time itself, must not be understood in a metaphysical or phenomenological, but, and this is at the heart of this study, in a physical sense. It is influenced, as van Dusen demonstrates, and this is one of his discoveries, by Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and some other texts relating Epicurean doctrine, for example passages put in the mouth of the Epicurean Velleius in Cicero's *De natura deorum*. It is from these Epicurean insights, he concludes, that Augustine embarks on his analysis of the way in which time is sensually perceived in relation to the physical world, not only by human beings, but also by animals.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters. Following some introductory remarks, chapters 1-3 deal with preliminary questions: previous interpretations of the relevant passages, especially *Confessions* xi, the genre of the *Confessions*, and Lucretius as a possible source. Chapter 4 discusses the distribution of Augustine's concern with time across *Confessions*, his distinction between time and times, and his initial attempts to determine the "power" (*vis*) and nature of time. Chapter 5 approaches the definition of time as dilation. It proposes to understand *distentio animi* as dilation of the senses and thereby concludes the introductory Part I of the study.

Chapters 6-9 comprise the first main part of the thesis (Part II). This is focused on *Confessions* xii and the fundamental distinction of time and eternity. Chapters 10-13 (Part III) focus on *Confessions* xi and time as a matter of

the senses, the flesh, and the physical presence of ensouled animals (including humans) in their space-time world. A brief, final, “envoi”, four appendices (on Plotinus, Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus and Augustine [1], the Paris condemnations of 1277 [2], and on Pierre Gassendi [3] and Thomas Hobbes [4]), a relatively brief select bibliography and an integrated index of names and subjects conclude the volume.

Whether in content, presentation or style, this is a bold and original, albeit in some respects also eccentric and idiosyncratic study. Readers will come across many words for which they won’t find entries in the *OED*, and van Dusen’s love for creating new expressions may not in every case be deemed entirely fortuitous. For example, he has an irresistible urge to translate Latin superlatives using the prefix “hyper”, and so we find in this book words like “hyper-common”, “hyper-intellectual”, “hyper-heavenly”, “hyper-minimal”, and many more. There is also a tendency to “protest too much” and to make personal pleas, which could distract from the very real achievement this book represents both in scholarly and in philosophical terms. Van Dusen distances himself from almost the entire previous reception. All modern interpretations, he argues, have been influenced by the medieval scholastic distinction between Augustine’s concept of time in *Confessions* as metaphysical and Aristotle’s as physical. He classes these interpretations variously as subjectivist, intellectualist, disjunctivist, Neoplatonist and diversionist (“theologist”). The scholastic distinction, however, he infers, is wrong. A comparison with ancient time concepts, he argues, shows that Augustine’s concept is not metaphysical but most closely resembles that of Epicurus, who defines time as an incorporeal phantasm accompanying physical motions and sensual affections (p. 62).

Like Lucretius (e. g. *rer. nat.* III.670-678) Augustine conceives of the human soul as created and mortal (p. 91-95). The fact that Lucretius’ understanding of creation is fundamentally different from Augustine’s is not immediately relevant here. The point is that as an innerworldly phenomenon the human soul has no part in eternity. It is not pre-existent. Its temporality is entirely determined by its physicality. Its perfection is therefore at the same time its end, its consummation is its consumption (p. 313). The latter phrase is taken from a poem by the young Wilfred Owen dating from 1911.

Van Dusen repeatedly points out that no one before him has ever drawn these links between Lucretius’ and Augustine’s time concepts, or argued that Augustine’s time concept in *Confessions* XI is essentially Lucretian. He is right. Although Lucretian influence has been observed in Augustine before, its extent and depth in *Confessions* have never been studied in this intensity, nor has the case been made for the Lucretian character of Augustine’s time concept in *Confessions*; which is not surprising; for in its exclusivity this case seems

quite untenable, and it points to the limitations of this study, which must also not be overlooked.

One of these limitations becomes visible in chapter 3, which contains a discussion about the literary genre of the *Confessions*. Van Dusen needs such a literary-critical *excursus* in his otherwise philosophical study because he wants to demonstrate the links between Augustine and some of his philosophical sources, especially Cicero, Epicurus and Lucretius. And indeed van Dusen succeeds in demonstrating these links in some impressive detail. Nevertheless, overall his literary-critical discussion tends to be inadequate and not quite at the level of current scholarship. Asserting, for example, that the *Confessions* is not “a philosophical treatise” he is then unable to say what it actually is. Nor does he define what he means by “philosophical treatise”, or even by “philosophy”. For example, he dismisses *exercitatio animi*—indeed a very Epicurean practice—as a diversionist “theologistic genre” (p. 55). The Biblical dimension of the work is largely ignored, its Platonism played down. The Manichaean background is misunderstood. If the materialistic Manichaeans asked Lucretian questions “only in a parasitic sense” (p. 82), then the “hyper-parasite” would be none other than Augustine himself. According to his own account it was in his attempt to free himself from the teachings of Mani that one of the alternatives he dabbled in was Epicureanism. But realistically, as many studies have shown in recent decades, when using Epicurean-like descriptions of the soul’s interaction with the sensual world, his most interested audience would have been not so much latter-day Lucretians, but his former brethren in the Church of Mani.

Crucially, however, Augustine’s time concept in *Confessions* is neither Lucretian nor Manichaean. His treatment of time as creation is diametrically opposed to both. Lucretius’ use of the word “creation” is derivative (van Dusen: “derisive”; see *rer. nat.* 1.66g: . . . *e nilo fient quaecumque creantur* . . . ; p. 83 n. 103). He does not believe that anything can emerge from nothing. Like many modern cosmologists he thinks of the universe as creation but without a creator. For Augustine, in contrast, the notion of a creator is not some theologistic diversion but built into the logic of the whole. And it is, as students of Augustine’s whole work well know, not a comforting notion at all. It does, first of all, include the phenomenological and metaphysical dimensions, which is why van Dusen is not entirely right to dismiss the relevant approaches. Lucretius’ concept on its own is not sustainable within an Augustinian framework. To say that time is nothing but an aspect of the form of the physical universe is tautological. Of course, time-space is time-space. This alone does not constitute sensuality. *Animus* presupposes at least some degree of transcendent life-power, with some degree of self-reflection and with metaphysical roots.

Thus one can ask how Augustine uses aspects of the Lucretian notion of time. But it would probably go too far to suggest that his concept of time *is* Lucretian.

But back one final time to the discomfiting notion of God in this scenario: It is quite correct that as a former Manichaean materialist and dabbler in Epicureanism Augustine takes the material constitution of reality much more seriously than, for example, Neoplatonists of a more Alexandrian persuasion. Van Dusen has clearly demonstrated this for the concept of time in *Confessions*. His study represents an achievement in that regard that deserves praise and recognition. But his findings do also raise some interesting further questions regarding other aspects of Augustine's thought. Temporality, for example, is creational for Augustine, but mortality is not. What is the precise relationship between time and death when death, even physical death, is an outcome of original sin? Then, Augustine is far from settling for the kind of fatalism which he blames on the Manichaeans, or for an Epicurean-style physical determinism. Instead he postulates an omnipotent transcendent God who takes on a role that nevertheless seems very similar to either in that he predestines the ultimate outcomes of individual human lives throughout and beyond their self-inflicted mortal existence. Some of them he allows to participate in his eternal life, others he allows to descend into a second, yet more appalling, death: damnation. Indeed, by combining Platonist and materialist elements Augustine even develops ideas according to which aspects of the material world are retained in a spiritual afterlife in which, for example, those predestined to eternal life in heaven enjoy quasi-physical pleasures, while those condemned to eternal damnation in hell suffer everlasting quasi-physical pain.

But these latter thoughts go way beyond the scope of van Dusen's study, which is once more here recommended as a fine new study on Augustine's concept of time in *Confessions*, which should be heeded by all who take an interest in the philosophical study of time.

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