



# GTU

## Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology

The Journal of the Graduate Theological Union

**Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology**

**Volume 2, Issue 1**

ISSN 2380-7458

---

### **Augustine's Rhetoric of an Inner Self: A Converted Narcissus, Memory, and Nostalgia for the Sublime**

Author(s): Shin Young Park

Source: *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 69-88.

Published By: Graduate Theological Union © 2016

Online article published on: February 28, 2018

---

#### ***Copyright Notice:***

This file and its contents is copyright of the Graduate Theological Union © 2015. All rights reserved. Your use of the Archives of the Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology (BJRT) indicates your acceptance of the BJRT's policy regarding use of its resources, as discussed below.

Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited with the following exceptions:

- You may download and print to a local hard disk this entire article for your personal and non-commercial use only.
- You may quote short sections of this article in other publications with the proper citations and attributions.
- Permission has been obtained from the Journal's management for exceptions to redistribution or reproduction. A written and signed letter from the Journal must be secured expressing this permission.

To obtain permissions for exceptions, or to contact the Journal regarding any questions regarding further use of this article, please e-mail the managing editor at [bjrt@ses.gtu.edu](mailto:bjrt@ses.gtu.edu)

The Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology aims to offer its scholarly contributions free to the community in furtherance of the Graduate Theological Union's scholarly mission.

## **Augustine's Rhetoric of an Inner Self:**

*A Converted Narcissus, Memory, and Nostalgia for the Sublime*

**Shin Young Park**

*Graduate Theological Union  
Berkeley, California, U.S.A.*

**ABSTRACT:** The degree of Plotinian influence on Augustine's development of inner self in *Confessions* is controversial. While Phillip Cary pinpoints how Augustine lays out the unprecedented angle of the inner self by combining both biblical and philosophical tradition, Pauliina Remes argues that Augustine's Neoplatonism is deeper than what Cary observes by suggesting the close link between Augustine and Plotinus. The paper specifically focuses on Plotinus' interpretation of Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Homer's *Odyssey* in *Enneads* for they provide an interesting view for grasping the Augustinian idea of the self. Drawing on these two magna opera by Plotinus and Augustine, I attempt to show that in spite of implicit Neoplatonic influences, Augustine's inner self is not ultimately identical with the Plotinian self due to their different understanding of the condition of the true homecoming of the self.

*Published in:* BJRT, vol. 2, no. 1 © Graduate Theological Union, 2016

Along with the Bible, reading Plotinus shaped Augustine's idea of the inner self; especially in *Confessions*, we are given a glimpse of the Augustinian inwardness rooted in the Plotinian inward turn.<sup>1</sup> Although the degree of Plotinus's influence on Augustine's development of his inner self

---

<sup>1</sup> Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28. Cary claims that the inner self is an Augustine invention.

is arguable, the Neoplatonic influence itself is implicit.<sup>2</sup> Even in Augustine's reading of the Bible in *Confessions*, we can see how he transforms the Plotinian picture of the self based on his Christian understanding.<sup>3</sup>

My interest in Plotinus lies specifically in his interpretation of Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Homer's *Odyssey* in *Enneads*, as allegories in the former of the soul's failure to gaze inward due to being trapped in corporeal matters, the shadow of true Beauty, and in the latter of the soul's return back to its source of being, the One. Plotinian self-inquiry alluding to the error of Narcissus and the odyssey of the soul provides an interesting perspective for grasping Augustine's inner man.

Drawing on these two magna opera by Plotinus and Augustine, I attempt to show that Augustine's inner self is a converted Narcissus, which is an Augustinian alternative to the Plotinian Narcissus for the soul finally succeeds in turning inward and reaching the transcendent. Here, however, I would also argue that the Augustinian inner self (a converted Narcissus) is not ultimately identical to the Plotinian self (Odysseus) because of its different understanding of the condition of the homecoming of the soul to the sublime.

My consideration begins by examining the failure of the Augustinian ascent in comparison with the Plotinian interpretation of the myth of Narcissus in *Enneads* in order to identify the narcissistic error, which prevents the soul from achieving its goal of perceiving the true self. Next, my focus will be on how Plotinus's allegorical interpretation of *Odysseus* as an example demonstrating the inward journey of the soul can be applied to the Augustinian inward turn. Finally, I call attention to the nature of the sublime, which takes places in the homecoming of the soul, by comparing and contrasting Plotinus's and Augustine's concepts of

---

<sup>2</sup> Pauliina Remes, "Inwardness and Infinity of Selfhood: From Plotinus to Augustine," in *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, ed. Pauliina Remes and Juha Sihvola (London: Springer, 2008), 55. Remes argues that the Neoplatonic influence on Augustine's development of the inner self is deeper than Cary believes.

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Clark, *Augustine: The Confessions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74.

the sublime. By doing so, I aim to understand how Augustine's inner self is ultimately different from the Plotinian self, despite their similarities.

### **Narcissistic Errors and Shadowy Forgetfulness**

The scene in which the beautiful Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection in the waters of a spring is at the core of the Narcissus myth, although the story has been retold in various versions.<sup>4</sup> For Plotinus, Narcissus allegorically represents the failure of the ascent of the soul, which is “a symbol of the poverty and wretchedness of those human beings who never go beyond the beauty of the body, who are *sunk in the dark depths hostile to Intellect*.”<sup>5</sup> The narcissistic error in Plotinus, however, lies not in the original reflection process because the primary reflection process is necessary for creation,<sup>6</sup> but in the reflection that clings to the bodily beauty:

Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream and disappeared) then *this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths where intellect has*

---

<sup>4</sup> Lieve Spaas, ed., *Echoes of Narcissus* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10; my italics.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 108: “what! If there were no matter would nothing subsist?—No more than reflection can exist without a mirror or similar surface; if the nature of something is to exist through something else, that thing no longer can occur if the other ceases to be. Now such is the nature of the image: it is that which exists in another thing (*Enn.* 1.1.12).” Also see, Maggie Kilgour, “‘Thy Perfect Image Viewing’: Poetic Creation and Ovid’s Narcissus in *Paradise Lost*,” *Studies in Philosophy* 102 (Summer 2005): 309. In her analysis of *Paradise Lost*, which rewrites Ovid’s tale of Narcissus, Kilgour cogently claims that God’s work of creation, as depicted by Milton, could be considered narcissistic. She argues that Milton draws on the tradition that regards God and Christ as “celestial narcissists” who reciprocally admire and create God’s own image.

*no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and there. (Enn. 1.6.8)*<sup>7</sup>

Arguing that bodily beauty is a seductive illusion, Plotinus warns that those captivated by their beautiful body will, like Narcissus, descend to “the dark depths,” associating with the shadows in Hades. Patricia Cox Miller observes that the Plotinian Narcissus pictures the error of misdirected sight as “a form of attention that fixates and fragments the soul into a congeries of its own grasping desires.”<sup>8</sup> The tragic story of the Narcissus myth is, thus, taken as a cautionary tale in Plotinus in which the soul mistakes the sensory world for intelligible realities.

The woeful characteristics that Plotinus often connects to human physicality are due to the “moving and flowing” nature of the body in contrast to the soul, which is in a “stable condition” (*Enn.* 4.3.26). Plotinus sees that the soul’s “fellowship (*koinonia*)” with the body is “displeasing” because the body fills the soul with negative emotions such as “despair and grief” and prevents the memory from reminding the soul of the Intellect, to whom the soul truly belongs (*Enn.* 4.3.26; 4.4.2). Plotinus portrays the origin of memory as follows:

From our discussion, then, it seems that memory begins in heaven, when the soul has already left the higher regions. Now if the soul has arrived in heaven from down here and stays there, it is in no way surprising if it remembers many things here below of the sort we have mentioned, and recognizes many souls from among those it knew previously. (*Enn.* 4.4.5)

There is no possession of memory in the intelligible world, for the Intellect is the timeless realities as a principle of the unification between the soul and the Intellect (*Enn.* 4.4.1.14–15). The memory of the soul thus begins when the soul starts its journey by remembering what it has thought or

---

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols., Loeb Series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988); my italics. *Enneads* (*Enn.*) is cited hereafter in the text by volume, treatise, and chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, “Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity,” in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, ed. David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow and Steven Weitzman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 18.

seen when the soul was yet “undescended” into the world and the body (*Enn.* 4.3.25.32; 4.3.25.32–33).<sup>9</sup> Plotinus demonstrates the nature of the soul and its interiority by saying, “Part of the embodied soul never descends but remains always in the intelligible realm” (*Enn.* 4.8.8.1–6).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, memory reminds the soul of the fact that some part of it still stays in the Intellect and illuminates the path of its return, which is the path of becoming the true self, the whole soul.

However, the erotic obsession of the soul with material things allows “the world of sense-perception” to take control, which causes the soul to forget the fact that “the body belongs to it [the soul],” not vice versa (*Enn.* 4.8.2.23–27).<sup>11</sup> As Max Andreoli argues, “The hero’s concentration on himself destroys Echo<sup>12</sup> and in turn Narcissus himself”; the soul caught by corporeal matters becomes lost of its memories and forgets to return to the source of its being, therefore losing the true knowledge of the self.<sup>13</sup>

I argue that the narcissistic error that fails the soul’s inward turn in Plotinus is manifested in Augustine in *Confessions* in that Augustine’s self forgot his interior divine life with God and remained in the exterior world. Although Augustine portrays the world as beautiful and good, for it is the creation of God,<sup>14</sup> he also warns that no one should take pleasure in

---

<sup>9</sup> Dmitri Nikulin, ed., *Memory: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 83.

<sup>10</sup> For Plotinus, see *Enn.* 4.8.8.1–6, and for a discussion, see Dominic O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 102–3.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, “Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity,” 18.

<sup>12</sup> Spaas, *Echoes of Narcissus*, 1-2; Spaas provide a brief introduction of Echo in Narcissus story by taking Ovid’s version. In the Ovid’s tale of Narcissus, the nymph Echo was one of those who fell in love with Narcissus’s beauty, but she could no longer use her voice, except in senseless repetitions of another’s shout: a punishment inflicted by Hera. One day, when Narcissus went out to net stags, Echo followed him through the forest, trying to address him, but unable to speak. When Echo was about to embrace Narcissus, he ran away by saying, ‘I will die before I offer myself to you’. Echo repeated what Narcissus just spoke. Echo, therefore spent the rest of her life in lonely glens and pined away until only her voice remained. However, when Narcissus fell in love with the beauty of his own reflection, he also echoed the manner in which Echo did earlier on by wasting away with love for himself.

<sup>13</sup> Spaas, *Echoes of Narcissus*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181 (10.4.6); “See, heaven and earth exist, they cry aloud that they are made, for they suffer change and variation. . . . You, Lord who are beautiful, made them for they are beautiful. You are good, for they are good.” *Confessions* is cited hereafter in the text as *Conf.* followed by the book and section number.

bodily beauty, for the beauty of creation is the mortal part of a great whole. Humans cannot grasp “God’s large and perfect design” by enjoying it.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Augustine says, “Praise what is created, and love the Creator. Do not long to dwell in the building, but dwell in the Builder.”<sup>16</sup> In *Confessions*, Augustine recounts a time when he was seized by earthly beauty:

And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were within me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you. (*Conf.* 10.27.38)

Jean-Luc Marion points out the source of the worldly temptation of humans in Augustine as follows: “The temptation comes from the *libido sciendi* (desire to know), or the concupiscence of knowing for the sake of knowing, [and] operates first as seeing for the sake of seeing with the eyes (*Conf.* X, 35, 54–58).”<sup>17</sup> Sight, which represents all other senses, is portrayed negatively in Augustine when it becomes a temptation that attracts one’s interiority to the exterior self.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that Plotinus is also the chief influence on Augustine’s concept of memory.<sup>19</sup> As discussed earlier, for Plotinus memory connects the embodied soul with its homeland, the origin of the self. For Augustine, “The mind is this very memory” and “It is I who am that remembers, myself, I who am mind” (*Conf.* 10.14.21; 16.25). My memory is, therefore, identified with who I am, as “here is where all we think is gathered and kept” (*Conf.* 10.8.12).<sup>20</sup> Andrea Nightingale observes

---

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 12.4 (Nightingale’s translation), cited in Andrea Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 141.15 (Nightingale’s translation) cited in Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature*, 6: *Lauda tu fabricam, et ama fabricatorem; et noli amare habitare in fabrica, sed habita in fabricatore.*

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 157.

<sup>18</sup> Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 243.

<sup>19</sup> Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45.

<sup>20</sup> Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 69.

that in Augustine the dispersion of memory is a sign of the perversion that causes forgetfulness.<sup>21</sup>

Forgetfulness in Augustine should be understood within the two layers of the nature of memory, for memory refers to remembering not only what one has forgotten but also the fact of forgetting itself: “I am certain that I remember forgetfulness itself, and yet forgetfulness destroys what we remember” (*Conf.* 10.16.25). Based on the nature of memory, we can see that forgetfulness implies both forgetting the realities that should be remembered and forgetting the forgetfulness itself.

Augustine quotes the passage from Genesis that refers to the place where Adam and Eve will be exiled from paradise: “I have become to myself ‘a land of difficulty over which I toil and sweat’ [Genesis 3:17] (*Conf.* X. 16. 25).” As Marion argues, this citation is regarded as referring allegorically to “an interior exile” in the Augustinian context.<sup>22</sup> In my exile, I become outside of myself and have lost my *memoria*, which is the most intimate part of myself; therefore, it is a place where I am not myself. Thus, in my forgetfulness outside myself, “I do not comprehend myself, I have no present to myself,” and therefore, “I forgot *myself*.”<sup>23</sup> The tragedy of Narcissus, who failed to know who he truly is, takes place in Augustine’s *Confessions*.

### **Plotinus’s Odysseus and Augustine’s Memory of the Inner Man**

Given the warning about remaining outside of the soul, I now turn my gaze back to the concept of inwardness in both Plotinus and Augustine. Plotinus exhorts us to leave behind the material world by quoting from Homer; “Let us fly to our dear country” (*Enn.* 1.6.8); “Let this experience [of the memory] belong to the soul!” (*Enn.* 4.3.26). For Plotinus, this country is nothing other than the deepest level of the self, and it can be reached by turning inward.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



Often I have woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect. (*Enn.* 4.8.1–9)

According to Thomas Taylor, the phrase “let us fly to our dear country” occurs nine times in the *Odyssey* and is now considered by scholars to be referring to Odysseus’s inner journey in Plotinus’s *Enneads*.<sup>25</sup>

But how shall we find the way? What method can we devise? How can one see the “inconceivable beauty” which stays within in the holy sanctuary and does not come out where the profane may see it? Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; *we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image*. . . What then is our way of escape, and how are we to find it? We shall put out to sea, as Odysseus did, from the witch Circe or Calypso—as the poet says (I think with a hidden meaning)—and was not content to stay though he had delights of the eyes and lived among much beauty of sense. (*Enn.* 1.6.8; my italics)

As Ezra Pound notes, Plotinus interprets Odysseus as an example of the soul descending to the world and making a journey through the corporeal world without forgetting its homeland, the source of its being. Unlike Narcissus, Odysseus realizes that all sensible beauty is merely a reflection of true Beauty, and thus he is able to overcome all temptations and difficulties, “the delusions of the present life, and the enchantments of this material house,” successfully making his way back to his homeland.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Taylor, *Select Works of Plotinus*, ed. G. R. S. Mead (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), 155.

<sup>26</sup> P. Th. M. G. Liebrechts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 136.

In *Confessions 10*, Augustine depicts the effort of the soul's self-inquiry as it looks into its memory with a cautious awareness of earthly temptations. For him, memory is more than just storage, for it actively imposes order upon a chaotic collection of memories continuously brought into the mind by the images and the impressions formed from the world.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the self strives to avoid slipping away into forgetfulness and distraction in Augustine's search for the true self.<sup>28</sup> With his recognition of the woeful nature of physical sight, Augustine closes his physical eyes and opens his spiritual eyes instead in order to see what the creation is ultimately pointing at:

I asked the sea, the deeps, the living creatures that creep, and they responded: 'We are not your God, *look beyond us*. . . . I asked heaven, sun, moon and stars; they said: 'Nor are we the God whom you seek.' And I said [this] to all these things in my external environment. . . . Then *I turned toward myself*. (*Conf.* 10.6.9) (my italics)

Thus, Augustine finally takes his turn inward and moves toward the inner self, who always knows by whom he was created (*Conf.* 10.6.9).

Here is the specific passage from *Enneads* to which Augustine alludes in the two texts from *Confessions* that follow below:

*Our country from which we came is there, our Father is there.* How shall we travel to it, where is our escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use. (*Enn.* 1.6.8; my emphasis)

The younger son in your Gospel did not look for horses or carriages or ships; he did not fly on any visible wing, nor did he travel along the way by moving his legs when he went to live in a far country and prodigally dissipated what you, his gentle father, had given him on setting out (Luke

---

<sup>27</sup> Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 90–91.

<sup>28</sup> Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature*, 67.

15:11–32), showing yourself even gentler on his return as a bankrupt. To live there in lustful passion is to live in darkness and to be far from your face. (*Conf.* 1.18.28)

I was deeply disturbed in spirit, angry with indignation and distress that I was not entering into my pact and covenant with you, my God, when all my bones (Ps. 34:10) were crying out that I should enter into it and were exalting it to heaven with praises. But to reach that destination one does not use ships or chariots or feet. (*Conf.* 8.8.19)

The above Plotinian passage from *Enneads* refers to Odysseus's return to his homeland to show that all the worldly mediums and physical senses must be given up at the very beginning of the interior journey in order to succeed in arriving at the true origin of the self. In the second quote from *Confessions*, Augustine interweaves an image from Homer's *Odyssey* in Plotinus with the parable of the prodigal son in order to interiorize the prodigal son's odyssey, showing that a person's departure from God (home) and his/her residence in the darkness of the bodily realm (distant country) are components of the spiritual journey of the self.<sup>29</sup> The third passage continues echoing Plotinus to demonstrate that this is not a journey for the "feet," for the journey cannot be taken with worldly transportation methods. As Phillip Cary says, the journey "begins by leaving behind the spatial world of bodies altogether and entering into the non-spatial realm of our own selves."<sup>30</sup>

Claiming that "great is the power of memory, an awe-inspiring mystery, my God, a power of profound and infinite multiplicity. And this is mind, this is myself." (*Conf.* 10.17.26), Augustine shows that the self passes through all the memories and finally reaches the true self with God; "I will therefore rise above that natural capacity in a step by step ascent to him who made me. I come to the fields and vast palaces of memory" (*Conf.* 10.8.12).

---

<sup>29</sup> Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 37.

## **A Converted Narcissus and the Sublime**

So far, I have examined how deeply Plotinus influenced Augustine's development of his concept of the inner self. Now I raise my last question concerning whether the Augustinian self can be replaced with the Plotinian Odysseus. My answer would be negative, for they have a different condition in their arrival at the transcendent.

Pierre Hadot presents the Plotinian ascendance of the self in which the narcissistic errors are corrected:

The Intellect, for Plotinus, is nothing other than the thinking of the All. It is precisely in reaching this level that the "narcissistic" soul will be perfectly given up.... "To see one's own beauty" does not mean: to see a beauty that pleases "me" because it is "my self," but to see in my "self," that is to say, thanks to my conversion toward interiority, the Beauty that is nothing other than the All in its noetic necessity. Arriving at these transcendent levels, the human "self" no longer knows if it is a "self."<sup>31</sup>

At the summit of the ascent, the self experiences transformation from shadowy vision to total vision, "the All" (*Enn.* 6.5.12). For Plotinus, the soul's experience of the transcendent is taken as an experience of the soul becoming Other, that is, of being united with the One.<sup>32</sup> That is why the soul no longer knows if it is a self, for it experiences ecstatic self-expansion beyond itself by becoming identical with the One, God.

Here, Plotinus offers an analogy to a sculptor and his statue, which helps us to have a better understanding of the condition of the soul in its union with the One:

Go back inside yourself and look: if you do not see yourself as beautiful, then do as a sculptor does with a statue he wants to make beautiful: he chisels away one part, and levels off another, makes one spot smooth and another clear, until he shows forth a beautiful face on the statue. Like him remove what is superfluous, straighten what is crooked, clean up what

---

<sup>31</sup> Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, 14.

is dark and make it bright, and never stop sculpting your own statue, until the godlike splendor of virtue shines forth to you. . . . If you have become this and seen it, and become pure and alone with yourself, with nothing but pure light, not measured by dimensions, or bounded by sharp into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; *if you see that this is what you have become, then you have become vision*. Be confident in yourself: you have already ascended here and now, and no longer need someone to show you the way. Open your eyes and see. This alone is the eye that sees the immense Beauty. (*Enn.* 1.6.9; my italics)

When the soul sculpts its own statue, “It does not aestheticize or eroticize itself, but goes through a purification” by removing what is superfluous and extraneous; therefore, there is nothing extraneous mixed with the self and it thus becomes the genuine self. As “our head strikes the heavens” and arrives at the transcendent sphere, all the illusionary visions vanish, revealing a “self” that is essentially divine (*Enn.* 4.3.12).<sup>33</sup> Here, we see that the Plotinian self experiences a different kind of “forgetfulness” on the way toward the transcendent:

The more it presses on towards the heights the more it will forget, unless perhaps all its life, even here below, has been such that its memories are only of higher things; since here below too it is best to be detached from human concerns, and so necessarily from human memories. (*Enn.* 4.3.32.17)

Unlike forgetfulness in the previous section, which is caused by the narcissistic error of being obsessed with worldly things, forgetfulness here is due to the intelligible realities at the highest level for they replace the human memories below as the soul goes up to them. The soul finally transcends itself in ecstasy, stepping outside the ordinary:

---

<sup>33</sup> Miller, “Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity,” 20.

It [the One] is therefore, *truly ineffable*: for whatever you say about it, you will always be speaking of a “something.” But “beyond all things and beyond the supreme majesty of Intellect” is the only one of all the way of speaking of it which is true.” (*Enn.* 5.3.13)

In the condition of Plotinian ecstasy touched by the transcendent, the self, according to Rappe, is “infinitely expansive”<sup>34</sup> and is a “self glorified, full of intelligible light—but rather itself pure light—weightless, floating free, having become—rather being—a god.” (*Enn.* 6.9.9.57–58)<sup>35</sup>

Like Plotinus, the Augustinian self also reaches God, who transcends all the memories that the soul has passed through:

I will transcend even this my power, which is called memory. I will rise beyond it to move towards you, sweet light. What are you saying to me? Here I am climbing up through my mind towards you who are constant above me. I will pass beyond even that power of mind which is called memory. (*Conf.* 10.18.26)

Here, the soul enters into ecstasy when it arrives at the transcendent; the self is seized by “great astonishment” and “a stupor” [*Multa mihi super hoc oboritur admiration, stupor apprehendit me*] (*Conf.* 10.8.15); “And you gave me a shock to the weakness of my sight by the strong radiance of your rays, and I trembled with love and awe” (*Conf.* 7.10.16).<sup>36</sup>

This can be considered the Plotinian and the Augustinian self in ecstasy, which is the “infinitely expansive” state of the self brought by awe and astonishment, or in other words the *sublime* (*hypsos*).<sup>37</sup> In everyday

---

<sup>34</sup> Sara Rappe, “Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the Enneads,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 266, 270.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, “Shifting Selves,” 20.

<sup>36</sup> Here, the passage echoes Plotinus in *Enn.* 1.6.7.12–19: “That alone, simple, single and pure from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is cause of life and mind and being. If anyone sees it, what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight! The man who has not seen it may desire it as good, but he who has seen it glories in its beauty and is full of wonder and delight, enduring a shock which causes no hurt.”

<sup>37</sup> See M.A. Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 48–49, cited in Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 42; M.A. Screech offers the etymological sketch of the term *Ekstasis* in Greek culture; “In classical Greek *ekstasis* means a

language, the term *sublime* refers to “a kind of transcendence.”<sup>38</sup> The term *hypsos* is not directly used in *Enneads*, but the concept of transcendence, *ekstasis* (“to be or stand outside oneself”), has a prominent role in describing the effect of *hypsos* in general.<sup>39</sup>

When dealing with the concept of the sublime among the ancient philosophers, Longinus’s concept of sublimity is the best place to start, for his use of the term in his magnum opus *On the Sublime* is the origin of the term and is generally regarded as the standard notion of “the sublime in antiquity.”<sup>40</sup> James Porter provides a clear and brief summary of the Longinian sublime that helps us understand its complex nature:

The Longinian sublime is two parts nature and three parts art (8.1), and it is consistently themed by nature, though it is safer to say that whenever Longinus thinks of nature he conceives of it as *hyper-nature*—as something that is *megalophuês* (grand nature) and *huperphuês* (extraordinary in nature)—which is to say, as sublimely nature. “Hypsos . . . tears everything up like a thunderbolt,” he says in his initial definition of the sublime, retrieving an old commonplace associated with Pericles (1:4; *Ar. Arch.* 530–531; *Plut. Per.* 8.2–3; *Cic. Or.* 29). Thereafter, the natural sublime is woven directly into Longinus’ view of sublimity. His description of the art of language is an ongoing flirtation with the language of nature in its most extreme forms: its light flashes and blinds (12.4; 34.4), its fires rage and burn (12.4), its torrents flood (12.5) . . . it resembles life and living that are ecstatically alive (30.1).<sup>41</sup>

---

displacement or a casting down of a thing from its normal place or state. From this literal meaning it took on the sense of a form of acute distraction, brought on by a strong emotion such as terror or astonishment. Under the influence of such an ecstasy a man or woman might be vouchsafed visions from God or the gods. The verb *existemi-* to put something out of its place- similarly acquired the meaning of “to astonish” or “to amaze.”

<sup>38</sup> Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4. Also see page 1: Doran defines the sublime as “meaning ‘loftiness,’ ‘height,’ or ‘elevation’ and typically associated with notions of ecstasy, grandeur, terror, awe, astonishment, wonder, and admiration.”

<sup>39</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> James Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 51. Also see Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 8; Doran argues that “the discourse of the sublime has its origins in a first- or third-century Greek fragment entitled *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), attributed to ‘Longinus.’”

<sup>41</sup> James I. Porter, “The Sublime,” in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 397.

Thus, in the Longinian sublime, we see the sudden effect of the universe that, in its vastness and greatness, exceeds the human capacity for thought.<sup>42</sup>

The Plotinian and Augustinian sublime are, however, different from Longinus in that, for them, the sublime is evoked within the self. As discussed earlier, Plotinus and Augustine understood nature as an illusionary image of the true reality. In the passage alluding to Odysseus in *Enneads*, we see that when starting the interior journey back to the homeland, the soul must “shut its physical eyes” in order to keep its sight inward, away from the corporeal matters (*Enn.* 1.6.8). A passage in *Confessions* also reveals that, unlike in Longinus, in Augustine the sublime nature is not considered as the maker of the sublime.

People are moved to wonder by mountain peaks, by vast waves of sea, by broad waterfalls on rivers, by the all-embracing extent of the ocean, by the revolutions of the stars. *But in themselves they are uninterested.* (*Conf.* 10.8.12; my italics)

Since the sublime nature is not taken seriously, we do not expect that a sudden natural event like the thunderbolt in Longinus is considered as the cause of the sublime effect in Plotinus and Augustine either; rather, we see nostalgia for the sublime, because the soul in both Plotinus and Augustine is longing for the sublime moment that it experienced before its descent.

The term *abyss* [Lat. *abyssus*] also occurs in *Confessions*, however, it is not used in the same way as in Longinus. While Longinus views *abysses* as one of the makers of the sublime, marked by “extraordinary heights and depths,”<sup>43</sup> *abyss* in Augustine in *Confessions* demonstrates the *pre-memoria* condition before the creation.

---

<sup>42</sup> James I. Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity*, 53.



[I]t was not such as we see and touch it today, for it was invisible and not composed; it was an *abyss* [*abyssus*]. . . . This abyss, now of visible waters, has even in its depths a light of its own, which is somehow visible to fish and to living creatures creeping along its bottom. (*Conf.* 12.8.8)

According to Péguy, “Whence the paradoxical consequence that if we are talking about the earth of creation, but of a creation *born and without memory*,”<sup>44</sup> the abyss does not have the form that we see in nature today. Therefore, *abyss* in Augustine is not the sublime nature we experience today, nor the anti-sublime, but another kind of condition before memory begins.

How then should the sublime in Augustine and Plotinus be defined in contrast to Longinus? I would call the Longinian sublime a *secular awe*. Doran argues that although Longinus employs religious references as a kind of “hyperbole,”<sup>45</sup> he nevertheless strives to emphasize a “humanist” perspective, for he tends to secularize the term *sublime* by using it as a reference to profound human experiences of nature.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Augustine seeks to emphasize the divine perspective, for sublimity is provided in the union with God at the very core of the self. Thus, the Augustinian sublime would be defined as *sacred awe*, in contrast to the Longinian sublime. Here, I locate the Plotinian sublime in between that of Longinus and of Augustine. The soul’s experience of the sublime moment, which takes place in the union with the One in Plotinus, seems to lean toward but is not identical with Augustine’s concept. The nature of sublimity in Augustine is different from Plotinus because the ontological difference between God and the soul, which is maintained in Augustine, is not applicable to Plotinus.<sup>47</sup> Nightingale argues that upon its

---

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 244.

<sup>45</sup> Doran cites this passage from Longinus, *On Sublime*, trans. with commentary by James Arieti and John M. Crosssett (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985): “Other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity [*hypsos*] raises us towards the spiritual greatness of god” [36.1]; “he concentrates [vehemence and power] all in himself—they are divine gifts, it is almost blasphemous to call them human” [34.4].

<sup>46</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Soul*, 42.

arrival at the “innermost citadel,” the Augustinian self experiences neither “the Platonic contemplation of the reality” nor “the Plotinian vision of the One”; the deficiency of the vision occurs because, unlike the Plotinian self becoming the One, the Augustinian soul is not becoming identical with God but is overwhelmed by the excessive reality of God.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the different nature of the sublime in Plotinus and Augustine, we can see how the tragedy of Narcissus is overcome and happiness is regained for each author. Arnold Davidson claims that the Plotinian sublime is “the joy of a self beyond itself, of a self that has surpassed itself in ecstasy.”<sup>49</sup> He cites Plotinus, “The life of the Gods, and of divine and happy men, a liberation from all terrene concerns, a life unaccompanied with human pleasures, and a flight of the alone to the alone.”<sup>50</sup> The happy inner man is also found in the divine life of God in Augustine: “The authentic happy life, to set one’s joy on you, grounded in you and caused by you” (*Conf.* 10.22.32); “The happy life is joy based on the truth. This is joy grounded in you, O God, who are the truth, ‘my illumination, the salvation of my face, my God’” (*Conf.* 10. 23.33). Therefore, although the Augustinian and the Plotinian self touch different aspects of the transcendent, both become a happy inner self when experiencing the sublime awe in their true homecoming.

## Conclusion

From an examination of the question of how the Plotinian opposition between Narcissus and Odysseus can be applied to the Augustinian inwardness, I have now come to the conclusion by looking at the Plotinian and the Augustinian self arriving at their different respective homelands. Although the Neoplatonic influence on Augustine ultimately failed to replace the Augustinian inner man with the Plotinian self, the Plotinian inspiration made Augustine nostalgic for sublimity and led him to start his interior journey toward the true self, finally leading his self to experience

---

<sup>48</sup> Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Enn.* 6.9.11, cited in Taylor, *Select Works of Plotinus*, 322.

the ecstatic joy of the true homecoming. Just as Augustine confesses, “Who would deny that the first human beings were happier in paradise, before their sin,”<sup>51</sup> the happy inner self of both Plotinus and Augustine is evident once they have reentered their own paradise.

***Shin Young Park*** is a second-year doctoral student in systematic theology at the Graduate Theological Union. She holds a M.Div. from Yale Divinity School and focuses her research on theological aesthetics, theological anthropology, and the theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

## **Bibliography**

- Augustine, *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Cary, Phillip. *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Clark, Gillian. *Augustine: The Confessions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Coleman, Janet. *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*. Translated by Michael Chase. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Hochschild, Paige E. *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2013.
- Kilgour, Maggie. “‘Thy Perfect Image Viewing’: Poetic Creation and Ovid’s Narcissus in ‘Paradise Lost.’” *Studies in Philosophy* 102 (Summer 2005): 307–39.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

---

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 11.42 (Nightingale’s translation), cited in Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature*, 34.

- Liebregts, P. Th. M. G. *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004.
- Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Translated with commentary by James Arieti and John M. Crossett. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985.
- Nightingale, Andrea. *Once Out of Nature*. Chicago: Chicago Press, 2011.
- Nikulin, Dmitri, ed. *Memory: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2012.
- Miller, Patricia Cox. "Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity." In *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, edited by David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman, 15–39. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Plotinus. *Enneads*. Translated by A. H. Armstrong. 7 vols. Loeb series. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966–88.
- Porter, James I. "The Sublime." In *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, edited by Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray, 393–405. Wiley: Blackwell, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Sublime in Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Rappe, Sara. "Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the *Enneads*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 250–74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Remes, Pauliina. "Inwardness and Infinity of Selfhood: From Plotinus to Augustine" in *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, edited by Pauliina Remes and Juha Sihvola, 155–76. London: Springer, 2008.
- Robbins, Jill. *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Spaas, Lieve, ed. *Echoes of Narcissus*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

Taylor, Thomas. *Select Works of Plotinus*. Edited by G. R. S. Mead.  
London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914.