

Augustine's Self Ascension and Intelligible Vision

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In *Confessions*, Augustine positively recollects three ascensions that he had experienced ten years earlier. Searching himself in memory, he makes self an object of rational study and thus manifests that he is still influenced by neo-Platonism even after he had been in the Catholic church for a decade. The ascension of self is in the high part of the soul, which fittingly returns to *the Intellect* and in turn to *the One* for an ultimate reunion, since the soul descends from *the Intellect* which emanates from *the One*. Among the faculties of the soul, Augustine focuses on memory, which is an internal seeing and hearing. In Christianity, the salvation of a sinner comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit. In contrast to *the Enneads* by Plotinus, this paper analyzes unsolved problems of Augustine, such as saving faith and a distinction between the intelligible world and the spiritual world.

Keywords: Augustine, self, ascension, intelligible vision, Plotinus

Introduction

Augustine (354-430) spent all his life in the Latin part of the Roman Empire, which formally split into two parts in 397. At that time, he was writing *Confessions* (397-400), in which he recorded his experiences up to the time he was thirty-three years old. With great philosophers Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC), the Greek elite loved wisdom, that is, the vision of truth. Being a chosen people and with a much longer documented history, the Jews loved God in obeying the Law of Moses (1446-1406 BC). The Latin people were much inferior to the Greeks, first in philosophy and later in interpreting Christianity due to *the New Testament* being written in Greek. Up to Augustine's time, the Latin people were similar to the ancient Japanese, who had been learning from the Chinese since the Tang Dynasty (唐朝, 618-907).¹ The Latins are also similar to the Chinese themselves, who since the end of the Opium War (1843) in the late Qing Empire (清朝, 1644-1911) from which current China (中国, 1949-) inherited most of its territories, have been learning from the West through translated works of science, technology, and philosophy. Such learning came indirectly at first, through Japanese translations by those who were culturally and geographically nearer than the West. The ideas spread to China in less than two hundred years, although conceited Chinese still hold their self-centered way of thinking that Confucianism is always the best or the most correct philosophy, while considering the land covered by central China as the center of the world since its earliest beginning.

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¹ Chinese originals or translations are added for key terms or names. Terms from Greek and Latin are all cited by transliteration in English.

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In the cave allegory by Plato (428-348 BC), the first person who broke their fetters and ascended to see the true light is a philosopher who should be a ruler. But Plotinus (204-270), who himself experiences four ascensions in which he has union with *the One* through *the Intellect* (Porhyry, 2018), perfects Platonism in which one cannot ascend to the Good, the highest metaphysical notion. It is natural to say that there is an unconscious confusion of Christianity and neo-Platonism, or the spiritual and the intelligible in Augustine's *Confessions*, although there is a Biblical comparison of these two worlds (Hebrews 9:23-24).² Unlike Cicero (106-43 BC) centuries earlier, Augustine himself did not translate any Greek philosophy into Latin, but he made contributions in both philosophy and understanding Christian faith through learning Greek philosophy in its Latin translation and then writing in Latin. Thus, he developed faith by seeking understanding and opened up the great potentiality of Latin, a non-Biblical language, in spreading faith and rational training for its users, although in *Confessions*, he did not mention Tertullian (150-225), who first introduced the conception of *person* in Latin. When he was ordained a priest and then bishop (395/6) in Hippo, Augustine had only an old version of the Latin Bible because Jerome (ca. 347-419/420) had not yet finished his Vulgate (405/6).

Unlike Hebrew or Greek, the Chinese language's written form had no radical changes in more than two thousand years, but it is also not a holy language and thus is similar to Latin in that way. In my opinion, the simplified Chinese characters officially mandated in mainland China are not blasphemy against the old characters still used in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In fact, most Biblical ideas and Western philosophical conceptions can be translated into Chinese coherently without coining new characters. Rather, they expand the Chinese vocabulary and renew the Chinese mind, such as the terms sin (罪), regeneration (重生), church (教会), and freedom (自由), among many others.

Is there any possibility for a native Chinese speaker to understand Augustine and accordingly grow in both faith and reason? Definitely. Being a native Chinese, I can follow Augustine who endorses realism that we human beings, created in the image of God, have a universal language (*Confessions*, XI.iii (5)), although internally, the voice of conscience being a good example (Romans 2:15). Since Confucianism subjectively pursues a union with Heaven (天), a notion well below *the One* metaphysically and a confusion of the Creator with his creation, it can be renewed or measured by Augustine's self ascension. This holds even if one, whether a Chinese Christian or a Confucian Chinese, cannot recognize faith seeking understanding, and such a union with heaven can be rejected if one can distinguish between faith and reason.

Human Nature

For the Jews, a man was born from his parents but made by God (Psalms 100:3), although he would like to introduce himself as the son of his father (Nehemiah 1:1) or be called as the son of his father (John 1:42). Causally, a man may be born with a physical deficiency if his parents sinned (John 9:2). Nevertheless, the Jews did not study human nature rationally.

Augustine came to Christianity without any Jewish family background, so his case is similar to a cultural Chinese who has no knowledge or experience of any Jewish tradition but just accepts the gospel of Jesus presented by Chinese-speaking evangelists who were first Western missionaries and later native Chinese Christians. Without a conception of a covenant God in the Israelite history or Heaven as a moral judge for the

² For related verses and historical dates, this paper refers to the *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, USA, 1978. For Greek terms, it refers to the *Greek-English New Testament*, Christianity Today, Washington Building, Washington D.C., 20005, 1975.

ancient Chinese, Augustine, a native speaker of Latin, did not previously believe in the one true God. Rather, he was inclined to accept dualism in which one good god and one evil god coexist, and he then even pictured God as a vast sea with creation being a soaked sponge (*Confessions*, VII.v (7)).

God is spirit (John 4:24), without soul or body, while a man has spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). In Greek thought, the Platonic view is more spiritual than that of the Jews, since a man is a soul using his body, whereas the imperishable soul is uncreated, and a union with body dishonors the genderless soul. The soul should belong to a timeless and senseless world. The self, if represented by one's soul, is not the truest in this empirical world of time because it is bound by a body. But even if there is a Form of Soul, it is below *the Good* in the real world of Forms. If the essence of human is humanity, then it is above and beyond any particular human by Plato, while a departed or separate soul is imperishable. Therefore, it is more difficult for Plato to study humanity than Aristotle, his opposing disciple who drags down the Platonic forms from its static world into substances in this changing and sensible world. In Aristotelian definition, man is a rational animal; the species "man" belongs to "animal" as its nearest genus with rationality as an essential difference. For a human person, body is matter, and soul is form. All living things have a soul, but only humans have a rational soul. Animals are conscious of self but have no self-knowledge. A man is born due to his mother being a material cause and his father being an efficient cause. Human nature is related to both body and soul. The Aristotelian god, the unmoved Mover, can be an object for love, but it does not love people. Nevertheless, both Plato and Aristotle do not investigate humanity deeply enough.

About the same historical time in China's Warring States Period (403-221 BC), Mencius (孟轲, 372-289 BC) held that men were born with a good human nature. This idea has been the most widely accepted view by the cultural Chinese, and Mencius is ranked only next to Confucius (孔丘, 551-479 BC), the founder of Confucianism. Nevertheless, his arguments are not ontological, and his extant writings much less in number than those of Plato, who holds an ontological notion of *Good*. Socrates (469-399 BC), who despised death and obeyed the law, was esteemed as the highest moral example by Plato, his disciple, who was born and lived in Athens, a city-state most prosperous in the Greek world where slavery was prevalent. A slave, a living tool, does not belong to himself but to his master who owns him. Accordingly, the conception of self cannot equally apply to people. For Aristotle, people understand human nature through studying other people. Logically, humanity as an abstract conception should first be found in a concrete person since there is no absolute person with an absolute body and soul, and Platonic Form of Man in the intelligible world has no existence.

In the biblical book of Romans, the Apostle Paul analyzed human nature using himself as an example (Romans 7:14-22). Being an Israelite, Paul explains that Christianity is rooted in a prophetic longing for a Messiah (Isaiah 53:1-10). All Christians, not only his contemporary Hellenistic Jews and Greeks but also later people like the Chinese, can understand the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, since all inherit a sinful human nature descended from Adam. Paul himself did not originate the conception of original sin, but we cannot say Paul is a philosopher even though he wrote in Greek and wrote on a theme discussed by philosophers, when the popular philosophy in the Roman Empire was Stoicism. Adam prefigured the human nature of Jesus who, though having a human body and form (Romans 5:14), would never sin but serve as an offering to God for all sinners (1 John 3:5-6).

Augustine, however, not only recollects his own life experience in *Confessions*, but with memory, he also treats the self as an object of rational speculation with selected stories in which he sinned. The self is intimately related to humanity but can be more abstract. By ontological measure, *being* is the most abstract conception,

and *self* is only a concrete *being*. In syntax, *S is P* as Socrates is man; while *S* and *P* can change or represent different things, *is* remains. Generally, in English, we can use *being* to stand for the ongoing *is* (*am* for the first person and *are* for the second person). What is *being*? For realism beginning with Parmenides (born ca. 510 BC), *being* is one and timeless, the object of speculation, with *being as being* as that ultimate object for metaphysics defined by Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 1002a20-30). Rationally, the ultimate logical rule is the Law of Non-contradiction in that *being* is not *non-being* (*Metaphysics*, 1005b8-34). Therefore, the early Greek naturalists were not so self-centered when they wondered about the origin of the world, although they held there was neither creation nor evolution. Augustine mentions the naturalists, such as Anaximenes (*Confessions*, X.vi (9)).

A self is within time, but humanity, if a corresponding Platonic form exists, is the true being beyond time, while perfect humanity is not a divine mind for Plato, who holds *the Good* as the highest Form. This idea is rather hard for people to accept by common sense. But for Aristotle, humanity is found in a concrete man. There is no mutual relation between his god, and a concrete man like Socrates. The unmoved Mover as a divine Mind, is unlike the Platonic divine Craftsman *Demiurge*. Historically, *Nous* (Mind), unlike any material element, was first introduced by Anaxagoras (500-428 BC), who disagreed with other naturalists in explaining the origin of the world. In *Timaeus*, Plato used the World Soul to interpret the moving world. Aristotle does not accept the World Soul. Being a cause, the Aristotelian god, evolved from *Nous*, a thinking being but impersonal, is only the cause for the movement of the world (*Metaphysics*, 1072a25-b30), but it never created the world. Moreover, human happiness is not obtained through a virtuous life or bodily pleasure but rather through rational thinking fully actualized.

Since what God created was good (Genesis 1:31), and there was knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16), being good is a state for a being, and evil, the negation of good, would be an object of knowledge even if there had been nothing evil. From an early age, Augustine began to wonder about the origin of evil, in which only moral evil is counted as sin, from his own sense of sin. A thing came to existence through receiving being from God. Augustine understood "*I AM WHO I AM*" (Exodus 3:14) to mean that God is the origin of being (*Confessions*, VII.x (16)). He parted company with Manichean dualism, in which evil is a principle of being, and accordingly, accepted the neo-Platonic viewpoint that evil is non-being, since the world of sense was generated by *the Soul*. When he interprets *Genesis*, Augustine uses forms for God in creating. There was no Form of Evil. To Aristotle, prime matter is formless, and god is pure form, and formless things are not perfect. When the earth was created, it was formless and empty (Genesis 1:2). But another dilemma accrues: Could the eternal God create the world with Forms that are eternal? If that is so, God would not be simple but composite. People were created by God, and they are endowed with various characters and temperaments. Did God create them with combinations of Forms so that they are individualized? Once soul is embodied and individualized, it should remain its identity with that concrete body.

Self and Soul

The world of Forms in which *the Good* is the highest but impersonal, is like the origin or home of the soul that uses a body; in this life, an embodied soul cannot ascend unto the intelligible world of Forms. Plotinus accordingly perfected Platonism, and later he would be named the founder of neo-Platonism, a term he himself never coined. *The One*, as the highest ontological notion, is beyond *Nous* or *Intellect*, or the Platonic world of Forms, or the Aristotelian divine Mind. Therefore, *the One* is above being but, without losing its perfection, it

eternally emanates the *Intellect*. The *Intellect* is One-Many, and it, in turn, eternally emanates the *Soul*. The emanation is timeless. *The Soul*, being One and Many, emanates the human soul that connects with the higher part that never descends into human bodies. Thus, *the Soul* made the world of senses. Only within human body is a soul within time. For Plotinus, his ecstasy means the soul leaving the body momentarily (*The Enneads*, IV.8.1.1-11). The knowledge of self is fully achieved when one experiences such a union; it is not a reminiscence of a previous self. If we contemplate *the One*, our soul can ascend and return to its origin, since it was emanated from *the One* through *the Intellect*. Unlike Plato, Plotinus holds that our soul can depart from the body temporarily and ascend into the intelligible and timeless world without physical death.

In less philosophical understanding, everything is numerically one thing and *the One*, the absolute one, emanates the oneness for everything to become one thing as it is. *The One* is less abstract than the one of Parmenides. Nevertheless, *the One*, *the Intellect*, and *the Soul* are not three persons, let alone equally, although they are easily connected with the conception of Trinity later developed in Christian orthodoxy. *The Nous*, or *Intellect*, is not a faculty of *the Soul*, but above it. If, in line with *Nous*, mind should be less influenced by will than soul, the soul has both rational and irrational parts. In the Bible, man is defined with spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23), where the original Greek for soul is *psuchee*. Paul uses the term *heart*, with which one believes to be saved (Romans 10:9-10). To love God, one should do so with all heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 13:30). The Greek noun for *heart* is *kardia*, while using *dianoia* for mind and *psuchee* for soul. Nevertheless, Paul uses *nous* for which is translated as mind in English: "...I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Romans 7:25). But the heart can receive the Holy Spirit as a deposit (2 Corinthians 1:22), where the Holy Spirit is termed *pneuma*. The heart has desires (Romans 9:2, 10:1). Moreover, Paul uses *nous* for the mind of God, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:34). Therefore, we can conclude that *kardia* has more to do with willing and *dianoia* has more to do with memory and intellect.

If man is a soul using a body, then the self, which has an imperishable soul, should have an innate idea about the soul itself. One's soul, being an imperfect copy of *the Soul*, comes from the Form of Soul. Due to the Platonic transmigration of the soul after bodily death, the Form of Soul is somewhat self-contradictory. For Plotinus, all soul is One and Many; there is not only a form of *the Soul* (*the Enneads*, 6.4.14.18-25), but also the Form for a particular person like Socrates (*The Enneads*, 5.7.1). The third man problem (*Metaphysics*, 990b17), challenged by Aristotle to Plato on Forms (Plato, 1996), is at least partly tackled. Thus, there should be an innate idea in one's soul for *the Soul*, or the oneness of *the Soul*. Logically, a divine mind is prior to *the Soul*; thus, Plotinus solves the problem Plato left unsolved. Being the *Intellect*, the divine mind is true being, One-Many; it is not static like *the Good* of Plato but emanates eternally. Augustine, who had no Judaic background, was without the Spirit of God when he was unsaved, so he was dead in spirit and did not know that *Deus*, God in Latin, is spirit. Earlier, Origen (ca. 185-250/255), a Greek theologian, allegorically distinguished that for the inner man, spirit is male and soul is female (Origen, 2002). Augustine does not distinguish spirit and soul, or, he vaguely uses the term soul to also mean spirit, because he is alive with his soul. Mind, for him, is the higher part of the soul, but there is still a divine Mind, similar to the god of Aristotle, timeless but not omniscient.

Mind is later defined by Augustine as the higher part of his soul in which memory, intellect, and will are three faculties (*The Trinity*, XV.6.42); this psychological viewpoint on trinity begins at first as being, knowing,

and willing (*Confessions*, XIII.XI (12)). Definitely, he develops and improves upon the tripartite division of reason, spirit, and desire on the soul by Plato in *The Republic*. Nevertheless, it is Plotinus who first developed *the Soul* into a conception with ontological status and the self as a possible object of speculation since it can trace its origin to *the One*, the highest metaphysical conception, simple but beyond being.

Parmenides begins metaphysics with being as a whole, and then Plato treats being as many, with an unknown number of Forms as true beings in the intelligible world. Truth, for Plato, is knowledge of the Forms in the world beyond, and thus truth is unattainable in this life since people in the empirical world can only have opinions on becoming, which is between being and non-being. Plotinus, however, disagrees with Plato and holds a less pessimistic viewpoint on truth, which means being in agreement with itself (*The Enneads*, 5.5.2.19-21). It is Augustine who follows the Plotinian method that focuses on the self as a special being and displays an imperfect person with a journey to God and truth, although he does not portray himself as a philosopher or a philosopher-king. In fact, it is not being but non-being that initially attracts Augustine since he defines evil as non-being (*Confessions*, III.vii(12)), a secondary being but not nothing. If evil is non-being, an evil god does not have its place of existence, and thus Manicheanism is a contradiction.

Intelligible Vision

Judaism believes one true God exists, but the Israelite had no metaphysical meditation on one. A union with *the One* is an ascension of the soul since *the Soul* is one, and only its lower part has been dragged down into the body. Certainly, not everyone yearns for such a union and neither can everyone have it. If one contemplates *the One*, he can possibly return to the origin, which is timeless. For Plotinus, only a separate soul can ascend to have a mystic union with *the One* (*The Enneads*, 4.8.1.1-11). When one dies, his soul returns to the intelligible world, which is unchanging, and arrives at a union with *the Intellect*; his self-awareness thus becomes less important (*The Enneads*, 4.4.2.24ff), and he has no memory of his past in the sensible world (*The Enneads*, 4.4.2.1-9).

In *Confessions*, Augustine recollects his three ascensions, among which the first two happened before he joined the Catholic church and the third being a joint ascension with his mother Monica (331-387) days before her death at Ostia. This last ascension was explicitly influenced by neo-Platonism since by then Augustine had read the books. What he sees intelligibly is distinct from what the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel saw spiritually in their visions (Isaiah 6:1-5, Ezekiel 1:1-28).

Notably, Augustine was baptized in Milan at Easter of 387, along with his son Adeodatus, born from his unnamed mistress (*Confessions*, IV.ii (2)), before his first two ascensions (*Confessions*, IX.vi (14)). His ascensions are not of a separate soul, of a Plotinian mystic level in which a thinking subject has a union with thought object, but they happen in time. In his first ascension, Augustine entered into his innermost citadel with his soul's eye, "When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being" (*Confessions*, VII.x (16)). In his preaching, Jesus mentions one's light within (Matthew 6:23). Before this happened, Augustine had forced his mistress to return to North Africa, but was impatient in waiting for an arranged girl to reach the legal age to marry him, and he once took another woman just for sex (*Confessions*, VI.xv (25)). Speaking of his second ascension, Augustine admits that due to the weight of sexual habit, he was quickly torn away from God (*Confessions*, VII.xvii (23)). Moreover, he did not quite understand the two natures of Jesus Christ (*Confessions*, VII.xix (25)). Reasonably, we can assume that he had not been saved then.

Plotinus remained unmarried all his life and was self-controlled regarding women. As for Augustine, even after two ascensions, he was still firmly tied to a woman (*Confessions*, VIII.ii (2)). Paradoxically, he was not purified enough with temperance before his ascensions as Plotinus requires. In *The Enneads*, *the Intellect* is true being above which there is *the One*. Possibly, with knowledge of Plotinian ascension, Augustine tries or imagines his own ascension while adding a faith of knowledge of God. From the many gods in Roman myth, Augustine once came to the two gods of Manichaeism and next *the One* of neo-Platonism, comparable to one true God, who was awakening him intellectually. Later, he explains that a heart can be purified with faith (Acts 15:9), and contemplation is the reward of faith (*The Trinity*, I.3 (17)).

The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). It would be coming when Jesus began preaching (Matthew 4:17), and it descended at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) after Jesus was resurrected and then ascended into heaven. Previously, the world was under the reign of death due to Adam, who sinned and brought death unto himself and then his descendants. Only a regenerated believer can see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). In Platonism, the intelligible world is more real and above the sensible world, and that concept is easily related to the spiritual world or the kingdom of God. According to the context, one with a pure heart should pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22). In the concluding part of *Confessions*, Augustine interprets the creation of God in *Genesis* with Platonism (*Confessions*, XII.xxviii (38)); this idea is inconsistent with his theory on the divine simplicity of God. Logically, as Platonic forms are regarded and *the Intellect* is all forms for Plotinus, God is prior to them; thus, God is more like *the One* which emanates eternally.

Historically, one first became a catechumen and then joined the Catholic church through baptism. Receiving baptism was related to spiritual regeneration (*Confessions*, IX.iii (6)). In fact, Augustine wrote his biography ten years later. Was he still under Platonism even a decade after he joined the Church and even had been ordained as a bishop in North Africa? At least, a historical Augustine is restored when he himself experienced the ascension in Italy. Does he still cherish Platonism, or does he just confuse ascension with the fruits of salvation? Ascension, for a sinner, is not a new birth from regeneration (John 3:3-8). Normally, a saved sinner has grace and peace from the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:3). In his last great work, Augustine explains the first and the second resurrection, commenting that the first is of the soul and should be his expression of regeneration (Augustine, 1984, p. 26). The ascending self is not a new self, which in Christianity, is a creation by God in Jesus, whom a saved sinner willingly accepts as the Savior. Accordingly, the ascension is not pulled upward by a divine will since there is no will in *the Intellect*, although the subject of contemplation still has a body which affects willing more or less. The thinking subject is not comparable to the Aristotelian god, who is a purely thinking being without a hindrance of body. Normally, saved sinners can recall the moment when they were changed by the Holy Spirit, and that time marks when they became born again.

Even the faith required for salvation is a received gift (1 Corinthians 4:7) since the sinner wills to accept Jesus Christ with a willing moved by the Holy Spirit. Unsurprisingly, Augustine remembers all of his three moments of ascension. When he heard a voice at a garden in Milan, he turned to the pages of *Romans*; actually, the verses that changed him are not a direct gospel message (*Confessions*, VIII.xii (29)); the passage is not about Jesus as the Savior for sinners, but rather Paul's admonition that Christians who had accepted the gospel should be morally improved.

We can assume that the gospel came into effect at the moment of his first ascension, although Augustine does not pray to God in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of past sins and salvation. A sinner is saved in time. In retrospection of his last ascension, Augustine mentions the “*firstfruits of the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:23) (*Confessions*, IX.x (24)), and we can conclude he then felt himself to have the indwelling Spirit. Nevertheless, he does not quote the fruit included by Paul (Galatians 5:22-23).

In ancient Greece, Protagoras (ca. 490-421 BC) was famous for “*Man is the measure of all things*”; by that saying, man should be no doubt the measure of time. Although Augustine agrees that time was a creation of God and God did not create time in time, he develops what Protagoras began. In his subjective understanding of time, there is neither the past nor future, but only the present; thus, personal salvation should always be proceeding. Accordingly, salvation is not finished once but is a process; in this, Augustine was influenced by the Catholic church, in which he would become a member as Monica, his dear mother, had been praying for. Writing of the ineffable moment of being saved, Augustine has inconsistency and vagueness in *Confessions*. Paul says, “*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*” (Romans 8:24). This may be misleading for readers; for Augustine, hope regards the future, but the future has not come yet and is only our present expectation.

Among the Beatitudes, Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*” (Matthew 5:7). In the *Old Testament*, there were several people who in visions had seen God, such as Manoah (Judges 13:19-22), the father of Samson, one of the judges, Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10-11), and the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1). Seeing God will happen in the future, which lasts to the end of time. The original Greek word for “see” is *optomai*, third person plural, for objects more abstract than that of *eido* (Matthew 3:7). With the promise of God, the Israelites can see God in what would happen to them (Deuteronomy 28:1-68). With divine simplicity, we can understand seeing the acts of God as seeing God, such as sinners coming to repentance due to the gospel of Jesus Christ or the historical event on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). We see with our own eyes. Easily, such beatitudes can be mixed with the happiness sought by Greek philosophers as the end of life. Since God is spirit (John 4:24), seeing God is like an intelligible vision, not with bodily eyes. Ideally, a pure heart does not coexist with a lustful body. Augustine gave up his former way of a sexually immoral life before his third ascension. When he was writing *Confessions*, Augustine had not yet systematically written of the term *original sin*.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-30), Jesus tells people that a separate soul still has memory of his identity and his acquaintances of the earthly life. Thus, memory should belong to the higher part of human soul. Humans have an innate idea for God because man and woman were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27); even after the sin of Adam and Eve, their descendants still have a damaged image of God. The basic meaning for God is Creator (Genesis 1:1). What Anselm (1033-1109) finds in his memory, *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* (Anselm, 1973), is not a Creator of goodness but a notion of the perfection or infinite greatness of God.

On adultery, Jesus teaches that committing adultery in one’s *heart* is already adultery (Matthew 5:28-29), where in Greek, the word used is *kardia* for *heart*; some other Greek words, like *dianoia*, *nous*, *pneuma*, and *psuchee*, can present a similar meaning. So one’s sensual desire is controlled by the heart. In the Plotinian way, a pure heart belongs to a beautiful soul, which is beautiful due to intellect and has adequate self-control.

Since the *New Testament* was written in Greek, it actually renews or redefines the meanings of some words, as the gospel was based on the Jewish prophecy and covenant history that the Greeks never had, or

coins a new term like *agape*, a divine love distinct from *philo* used in a love of wisdom. Although *the Old Testament* was translated into Greek earlier and New Testament authors quoted verses from *the Septuagint*, Jesus preached in Aramaic, not in Greek. *Kardia* was most used to express the center of a living being, including intention, will, and emotion, as in the verse “*You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound*” (Psalms 4:7).

Ascension is not faith, but it can be confused to be a result of saving faith; metaphysically, *the Intellect* is true being without a will, and *the Intellect* emanates the timeless *Soul* which in turn emanates the human soul, in which the higher part can ascend upwards to its source. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul uses the wording “*the eyes of your heart may be enlightened*” (Ephesians 1:18), where the Greek words corresponding to the eyes and heart are *ophthalmos* and *kardia*, respectively. *Ophthalmos* is a common term for the sense organ with which one can see (Matthew 6:22-23), and *kardia* is similar to *heart* in the pure heart blessed by Jesus (Matthew 5:7).

As for the third ascension (*Confessions*, IX.x), Augustine experienced it with his mother who would soon depart this world. Monica had been praying for her son, it would be natural to assume that she was a saved believer long before this event. Morally, she should be more purified than Augustine, and so one ascension is enough for her.

Thus, we can see the invisible Plotinian influence on Augustine that all soul is one since *the Soul* is One and Many, although the oneness of *the Soul* is inferior to that of *the Intellect* since the latter is One-Many, which in turn, is inferior to *the One* from which *the Intellect* has its being. Earlier, when Augustine mourned emotionally for a friend who had died, he felt that they were “*one soul in two bodies*” (*Confessions*, IV.vi (11)); in fact, at that time, Augustine had not yet written about the Platonic books and probably had not considered thoroughly its ideas. Nevertheless, ascension is independent for Plotinus. In this last ascension, Augustine seemed to have touched eternal being itself; he mentions that they had left behind them “*the first fruits of the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 8:23). Logically, he may have received the indwelling of the Spirit and thus be regenerated with this ascension. Likewise, when interpreting Acts 4:12, in which we read *of one heart and one soul* in KJV and *one in heart and mind* in NIV to translate the original Greek term of *psuchee*, Augustine holds that it seems each distinct person has one soul (*The Trinity*, XIII.1 (5)).

On the inner way of looking, which relates to Augustine's ideas of ascension, Plotinus develops the form of Beauty, which begins from concrete beautiful practices, proceeds to beautiful works, and then to the soul of those who produce these beautiful works, then back to one's own soul (*The Enneads*, 1.6.9.1-26). In preparation for ascension, a soul should be purified with the virtue of temperance. In all three ascensions, Augustine makes no mention of the Beautiful, but normally, a virtuous person for him should be his mother Monica, who had been praying for him.

In the allegory of the Cave, only the true philosopher can see the Sun and the real light, once he is freed from his fetters and shadows of light. Holding learning as reminiscence, Plato despises the senses and empirical experience, but the vision is not of internal seeing with one's internal sense. Augustine goes deeper in defining an internal self (*Confessions*, X.vi (9)), something more than an outward self known by common senses. To Augustine, the mind simply stands for the higher part of the soul since for him, one's memory is one's mind itself (*Confessions*, X.xvii (26)). He searches for himself in memory, and memory is an internal seeing and hearing.

Although he reads the Bible and philosophy in Latin translation, Augustine is creative in interpreting neo-Platonism while bringing no radical harm to Christianity. A man born blind was healed and could see

because of his faith in Jesus (John 9:1-12); the physically blind man is often cited as an example of not being blind spiritually. Also, by Plotinus, a man born blind can still ascend if his soul is purified enough (The *Enneads*, 1.6.9).

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). In this verse, the original Greek for mind is also *kardia*. Actually, the above verse is a combination of Isaiah 52:15 and 64:4, and Paul quotes the Greek from the *Septuagint*. Is ascension in this life what God has prepared for those who love him? Augustine explains the final union with God as follows, “let us rise up and go back to him from whom we have departed in our sinning. There our existence will have no death, our knowledge no error, our love no obstacle” (Augustine, 1984, XI.28).

Memory, Faith, and Salvation

In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus teaches that a departed soul still has an identity which is connected to the corresponding previous life on earth (Luke 16:19-31). Although the departed soul is in a timeless state, it retains a function of memory just as it had in time and humanity. Later, Aquinas (1124/5-1275) treats a separate soul as a substance, lower than angels (Aquinas, 1968). An ascending soul, for Augustine, is different from a separate soul since its ascension happens internally.

In Greek tradition from Plato, the sense of sight is superior to other senses (Plato, 1985). Aristotle agrees that the sense of sight is outstanding, with light needed to see (Aristotle, 1991). For Augustine, God is in our innermost and also topmost of our mind (*Confessions*, III.vi (11)) due to his omnipresence. That is to say, there is a tiny window in the mind for us to see God, but only those who ascend may see God. We can relate Augustine's argument to us having a damaged image of God. To search for God in memory is also a kind of ascension, and an expression of self-love. Before he recollects his search in memory, Augustine wonders what it means for him to love God (*Confessions*, X.vii (11)). To love God was to obey the Mosaic Law for an Israelite; for a regenerated Christian, it is to obey the indwelling Holy Spirit or the commands of God (John 14:15). But here, Augustine presents a different expression of love: to love God is to have an internal ascension.

Memory does not only retain impressions that one has experienced and innate ideas like God, truth, good, and unity; it also stores notions that are timeless, such as number 1. If one has experienced ascension, he should remember such an ascension, and in turn, only memory can ascend among the faculties of soul. In memory, Augustine meets himself. Memory is more than a two-dimensional tablet and to search in memory is also a kind of ascension. Soul, for Augustine, is not One and Many as for Plotinus; God is not a universal self or a timeless soul. An ascending self enables one to see God, not the Intellect.

Unsurprisingly, Augustine defines the inner man using internal senses, in contrast to the outer man using bodily senses (*Confessions*, X.vi (10)). This outlook is less spiritual than the Platonic viewpoint on man but leaves space for spirituality. Consistently, in his later work, Augustine holds that there is an inner altar for God in our heart (Augustine, 1984, X.3). A regenerated sinner has a new self with a body inherited from the old self (Ephesians 4:22-24). A problem arises: Is regeneration of the inner self or inner man (*Confessions*, X.vi (9))? Easily, what is intelligible is confused with what is spiritual. According to divine simplicity (Augustine, 1984, XI.10), the will and power of God is the very self of God (*Confessions*, VII.iv (6)); if the mind sees the intelligible, it is similar to seeing God, and God is like an internal light.

For realism, neither one nor self is the first object for knowledge. Nevertheless, Augustine, instead of wondering about the conception of being, is drawn more by one and self. Plotinus is less Greek-centered than Plato, who apparently did not have much experience outside the Greek-speaking world, but Augustine, with imported or translated ideas in Latin from Greek and Hebrew sources, develops realism.

When ancient philosophers agree on something unanimously, they hold it to be true, such as the proposition that Socrates is a man or the self-evident principles in geometry. Unlike the Israelites, the philosophers did not praise people with great faith in God, the Creator (Hebrews 11:4-30), since they had no such conception of God who reveals himself in a covenant relationship with his chosen people. Platonic transmigration of the soul gave people wrong guidance by claiming that the life-giving soul is without beginning and end, thus imperishable. The Platonic Good is more of an attribute of a substance by Aristotle, although his god, an unmoved Mover, has no attributes. *The One*, however, is closer to an object of faith since *the One* is higher than and above beings of all kinds, including *the Intellect*. Similar to rays shining from the sun, in which the light-giver and the light are one, emanation from *the One* suffers no loss in its perfection, since the ancient philosophers did not know rays from the sun as an emission of energy. Nevertheless, God being good can be understood in love and faithfulness (Psalms 100:5) while God primarily is holy (Leviticus 11:45, Isaiah 6:3).

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and be certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is seeing what is invisible. One is willing to accept Jesus Christ and his gospel when faith is born. This is not a philosophical definition of faith because faith is beyond reason, but in Aristotelian terms, faith should be a state of a living subject. A saved sinner has assurance of salvation through a memory of the self and the Holy Spirit. Faith is not a memory, although it grows internally in memory. For Augustine, one can ascend to see God since God exists in one's inner self. If God is omnipresent, He can reveal himself internally in our mind. It is the later Anselm who defines God rationally from memory. *The One* is similar to God but not the Christian triune God. Salvation is guaranteed by indwelling of the Holy Spirit; but looking in the opposite direction, Augustine understands his ascension in seeing God internally, a Platonic liberation of the soul in this life, not after death. Ascension is a leap of seeing intelligibly. At his time, the Catholic church still had competing churches or sects, like the Donatists or the Manicheans, and Augustine eventually joined the Catholic church to which his dear mother Monica belonged. Catholic doctrine of the time held that no salvation is found outside the Catholic church, which some viewed as just a subtle deviation from salvation being only found in Jesus Christ, as preached by the apostles, although sacraments like water baptism were still a symbol of the grace of God, including saving grace. Regarding *the Good* or *the One*, neither Plato nor Plotinus has a will or a self-consciousness of it. *The Good* is without motion and gives no help to people in the sensible world. Although Aristotle admits will as a faculty of the soul, he defines his god as being unmoved without a willing power.

In *Confessions*, Augustine focuses little on will; he treated it much more thoroughly when he contended with the Pelagianism later in his life. According to Aquinas, who focuses more on the intellect than will, Augustine confuses faith with activities of faith (Aquinas, 1981). Definitely, activities of faith makes faith living and lasting. For Augustine, his ascending self can see God through an internal window of the mind, although he is not as rational as Anselm who, without referring to the external world, gives God a definition. The ascension does not take place in the visible space, but it happens in time since Augustine describes what he sees as orderly. Although ascension cannot be defined as his witness of being a saved sinner, it expresses Augustine's thirst for truth, salvation, and eternal life.

Conclusion

It is through neo-Platonism that Augustine finally turned to Catholic Christianity. Could it be possible for Chinese readers of literature or philosophy to embrace Christianity by reading of the historical Augustine in *Confessions*? Readers might be more attracted to read *Confessions* than the Bible itself, since Augustine, being morally imperfect but writing vividly about his personal repentance, is easier to understand than Paul, who was first zealous for the Law of Moses.

In Chinese history, no one has ever written an autobiography like Augustine's, with such philosophical genius to promote understanding of the ultimate object of faith. In modern China, Lu Xun (鲁迅, 1881-1936), who first went to study Western medicine in Japan but never translated any Western works into Chinese, exposed the weakness of the Chinese nation, which was distorted and depressed in human nature under hypocritical teachings and corrupt customs. Through tragic figures in his short stories, Lu Xun could not tackle the spiritual problems that Augustine solves through embracing Christianity, since Lu Xun, without a conception of realism, never studied the self philosophically as Augustine did while he was searching for the ultimate Good. Lu Xun's pessimistic and negative view on Chinese tradition was welcomed by Communists and revolutionaries until the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), but that view is neglected by or even unknown to younger generations.

The Catholic church, whose theology in medieval times was mainly shaped by Augustine, was split at the time of the Reformation in 1517, and even the Protestant denominations are not consistent in interpreting sacraments, such as baptism and the Eucharist. Augustine's work, nevertheless, is more accessible for the Chinese than that of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) because the Chinese culture habitually ranks literature above history and philosophy. Undoubtedly, *Confessions* makes its author more outstanding in literature than Lu Xun, even though Augustine is more philosophically and spiritually concerned about concepts unfamiliar to many Chinese readers.

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