

(Religious) Language and the Decentering Process: McNamara and De Sublimitate on the Ecstatic Effect of Language

This paper outlines how the perspective of De Sublimitate concerning the effect of great literature resembles ancient and modern notions of religious experience. To demonstrate this similarity, the paper draws on McNamara's concept of the decentering process in religious experience. This concept of the decentering process serves as a framework for understanding how an encounter with writing that the author deems to be *hupsos* ("sublime" or "elevated") has similar decentering effects. The paper engages, but also moves slightly beyond, McNamara's understanding of the role of language in the decentering process. The first part of the paper provides an overview of McNamara's concept of decentering. In particular, it highlights four aspects of the decentering process: (1) the loss of agency; (2) the experience of ecstasy; (3) the role of the emotions; (4) and the cognitive changes that occur during and after the process. The second part of the paper demonstrates the presence of similar ideas in De Sublimitate's discussion of the effects of encountering literature that is characterized as *hupsos*. The concluding section considers how this reading of De Sublimitate aids in an understanding of the relationship between religious texts and religious experience, drawing a connection with Celia Deutsch's concept of "text work" as religious experience.