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Buddhist Philosophy and St. Augustine's Time-theory

Masao Matsumoto

By saying that the past does not exist because of its being already gone, that the future does not exist because of its not coming yet, and that the present does not really exist because of its only *raison d'être* consisting in its flowing out of existence at any moment, St. Augustine concludes at first the non-existence of whole time i.e. past, present and future. This thesis corresponds to the nominalistic doctrine of Buddhist philosophy which denies real existence of the three tenses.

But advancing his observation that, though things of the past be gone, the fact that they passed away really exists, and though things of the future come not yet, the fact that they do not come yet exists really as the present, he admits the present of the past (*praesens de praeteritis*) and the present of the future (*praesens de futuris*), and distinguishing between present things and the present he adds to these, the present of the present (*praesens de praesentibus*), and thus reduces these three existing presents to the memory, attention and expectation which are called the extension of the consciousness (*distensio animi*).

This latter doctrine of St. Augustine agrees most wonderfully, with that of nine tenses and ten tenses of Avatainsaka sutra, which distinguishes, as to the past, the past of the past, the present of the past and the future of the past, as to the present, the past of the present, the present of the present and the future of the present, and as to the future, the past of the future, the present of the future, and the future of the future,

and though dividing, as it were, the time into nine tenses, claims however, that there are ten tenses, because the three presents among nine are truly existent and they blend each other in one mind, thus forming one more tense. After all the above-mentioned thesis of St. Augustine seems to be a kind of idealism, which reduces everything into an actual existent consciousness, and corresponds as it were, to a doctrine of Buddhist philosophy, which claims the existence of the present alone, denying the existence of the other two tenses. Such theory of consciousness (Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra) interpretes all things themselves as modifications of one actual existent consciousness, as did the phenomenology of E. Husserl, although if it had substantialized this existent consciousness it would have remained to be only a common idealism.

In the Buddhist philosophy, it is categorically required that it should deny not only the existence of thing itself, by nominalizing the external world and the past and future which represent it, but also the existence of human mind itself, by nominalizing existential consciousness and the present which represents it: i.e. it prohibits any adherence to the present as being a substance, and claims that even the present as well as the past and the future is a fictitious being, in as much as the present is to be determined on the reciprocal relation of Hetu-pratyaya to the past and the future. It is therefore undeniable that there is some common trend between this doctrine of non existence of the present, and that of the former thesis of St. Augustine to which I referred at the beginning.

If it must not remain to be an idealism which substantializes the consciousness of the present, and if it is not more than passing just through the idealism at least in its first stage, the time-theory of St. Augustine can be said to be quite similar to

the Vijnaptimātra-tāsiddhi-śāstra of Mahayana Buddhism, where the things themselves of the external world are first unified by consciousness, and after that, even consciousness itself has to be unified by the absolute nothingness. Then this theory can be same as that of the Sūnyatā śāstra of Mahayana Buddhism in conclusion, though different in method, since the latter denies whole things (including consciousness) radically, claims their true nothingness and at the same time, denying even this nothingness itself, arrives at the mystical absolute being.