



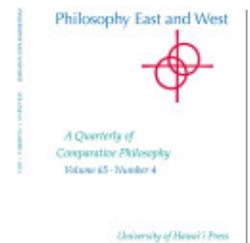
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AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS AND SENG ZHAO ON 'TIME': AN INTERPRETATION OF THE *CONFESSIONS* AND THE *ZHAO LUN*



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Introduction

Es ist uns, als müßten wir die Erscheinungen *durchschauen*: unsere Untersuchung aber richtet sich nicht auf die *Erscheinungen*, sondern, wie man sagen könnte, auf die *'Möglichkeiten'* der Erscheinungen. Wir besinnen uns, heißt das, auf die *Art der Aussagen*, die wir über die Erscheinungen machen. Daher besinnt sich auch Augustinus auf die verschiedenen Aussagen, die man über die Dauer von Ereignissen, über ihre Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, oder Zukunft macht. (Dies sind natürlich nicht *philosophische* Aussagen über die Zeit, Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft.)¹

It is as if we should *see right into* phenomena: our investigation, however, is not directed toward phenomena, but, as one could say, toward the *'possibilities'* of the phenomena. That is, we reflect on the *type of statements* we make about phenomena. That is why Augustinus also reflects on the different statements one makes about the duration of events, about their being past, present, or future. (These, of course, are not *philosophical* statements about time, the past, present, and future.)

Wittgenstein (our translation)

With this reflection in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (pt. I, 90), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) not only acknowledges the important influence Aurelius Augustinus (354–430) has had on his personal thinking,² but, more generally, gives testimony that the question “What is time?” has permeated the entire philosophical and religious history of humankind. Indeed, the question “What is time?” concerns the fundamental philosophical and religious issue of the ‘meaning of a human being’s personal life,’ and extends into the question of the ‘meaning of human life *an sich*.’ The answers that have been formulated on this fundamental question involve such reflections (Wittgenstein’s *besinnen*) as whether time exists ‘as such’ as an independent entity, or whether time is inherent in the things of the world, including in the human body. Put differently, the fundamental question is whether humans are the creators of their own lives within either an infinite or a finite independently existing ‘time’ or whether the creative force of one’s life is restrained by ‘time,’ which is an

inalienable part of this very life. This is related to the question whether ‘time,’ regardless of whether or not it has an independent reality, was created, and, if so, by whom?

With the above-quoted assessment of Augustinus’ famous remark “Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare uelim, nescio” (What, then, is time? If no one asks of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not³), Wittgenstein maintains that, in structure, the question “What is time?” is similar to such questions as “What is the specific gravity of hydrogen?” which belong to the domain of the natural sciences. The answers to these natural scientific questions, however, are absolutely different from possible answers to the question of what time is. Because the gravity of hydrogen can be measured, the above-formulated question may lead to the acquisition of new knowledge. Inquiry into time, however, does not help to acquire new knowledge, according to Wittgenstein, as it tries to understand the essence of time, not the phenomenon of time itself.⁴ As quoted above, “It is as if we should *see right into* phenomena.” To speak with Wittgenstein: the question of what time is leads to different “statements one makes about the duration of events, about their being past, present, or future,” whereby these statements are of course not “*philosophical* statements about time, the past, present, and future.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s reference to Aurelius Augustinus (hereafter Augustine) is a witness to the fact that the latter’s worldview and ideas on the purpose and meaning of human life have deeply influenced the Christian tradition in particular and Western philosophy in general.⁵ The question “What is time?” concerns the *condition humaine* of all people alike, and has been reflected on in all the different philosophical traditions of the world. In this article, we will address Augustine’s interpretation of ‘time’ as developed in his *Confessions*, the thirteen chapters of which relate his life until he was converted to Christianity, an event that has to be dated 387 C.E.,⁶ and the interpretation that his contemporary Buddhist counterpart Seng Zhao 僧肇 (374–414) unravels in his *Zhao lun* 肇論.⁷ Not only were Augustine and Seng Zhao contemporaries; they both reinterpreted, albeit in different ways, a similar inherited cyclical time concept, whereby their interpretations are rooted in the respective Christian and Buddhist philosophical traditions to which they belong.

Augustine’s Theory of ‘Time’

In the European philosophical tradition that predates the time of Saint Augustine, a few philosophers stand out for their relevance in the discussion of what ‘time’ is. In the fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus (Herodotus) (490–425/420 B.C.E.) and Thukydides (Thucydides) (460–after 400 B.C.E.) shifted the traditional Greek temporal focus from the domain of the mythological to the secular domain of human history.⁸ This made the domain of politics the primary object of human history, as it is this domain that goes beyond the particular and individual, into the larger relevance for society, and transgresses the cyclical regularity of the mythological realm.⁹ This important innovative interpretation brought the creative force of human beings to the center of history, as it is human beings who, through their creative force, create meaning for society

as a whole. In this respect, written history, perhaps more than oral transmission, contains enlarged perspectives for identity building, that is, positioning one 'political society' against another 'political society,' or against the sphere of the sacred. This 'identification process' therefore also encroaches on the question of the 'truth' of human life *vis-à-vis* the world of the sacred, and, as a consequence, on the question of the meaning and purpose of human life itself.¹⁰ The duality between the temporality of human life and the permanence of the cosmos is central also in Plato's (427–347 B.C.E.) interpretation of 'time.' For Plato as well, human history is particular, and deviates from the cyclical movement of the cosmos that conforms to the uniqueness of divine rule.¹¹ According to Plato, it is precisely because divine providence withdrew from human life that human beings became responsible for their own particular lives.¹²

In contradistinction to Greek philosophy, which is characterized by different concepts of the divine, Christianity advances the thesis that God is the almighty creator of the world, including human beings. Further, the God of Christianity—through His incarnation as Christ—is a personal God, and it is His mercy that explains this incarnation. Deliverance is therefore only possible through union with this personal God—that is, through rebirth in Christ. As human beings only exist because of God, it is their duty to follow His will as it has been revealed in His divine word.¹³ As Augustine states in his *Confessions*:

And Thou, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting. But I have been divided amid times, the order of which I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together unto Thee, purged and molten in the fire of Thy love. (bk. 11, chap. XXIX, 39)¹⁴

This interpretation of the purpose of human life, namely deliverance through rebirth in Christ, makes life on earth worthless. Coupled with the fact that God's incarnation as Christ is a unique historical event—and not a recurring cyclical event—this implies that one's present life offers the only possibility to fulfill one's duty with respect to God.¹⁵ This teleological orientation of human life, naturally, encroaches on the way 'time' is perceived.

Objective Time

The 'time' question, according to Augustine, is above all a question that relates to the creation of the world by God. As a Christian theologian, Augustine believed that it is God who created everything out of nothing, and that God is the only eternal being. If God created everything, including time, this excludes the possibility that there was 'time' before God created it. It must therefore be that God created the world at the same time he also created 'time.' Augustine reasons this as follows:

For whence could innumerable ages pass by which Thou didst not make, since Thou art the Author and Creator of all ages? Or what times should those be which were not made by Thee? Or how should they pass by if they had not been? Since, therefore, Thou art the Creator of all times, if any time was before Thou madest heaven and earth, why is it said

that Thou didst refrain from working? For that very time Thou madest, nor could times pass by before Thou madest times. But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What didst Thou then? For there was no "then" when time was not. (11, XIII, 15)¹⁶

Within the question of what God was doing before he made heaven and earth, as there was no 'time' then, lies a fundamental Manichean question—it may be reiterated here that, before Augustine converted to Christianity, he had been an adept of the Manichean faith.¹⁷ He ponders this issue as follows:

Lo, are they not full of their ancient way, who say to us, "What was God doing before He made heaven and earth? "For if," say they, "He were unoccupied, and did nothing, why does He not for ever also, and from henceforth, cease from working, as in times past He did? For if any new motion has arisen in God, and a new will, to form a creature which He had never before formed, however can that be a true eternity where there ariseth a will which was not before? For the will of God is not a creature, but before the creature; because nothing could be created unless the will of the Creator were before it. The will of God, therefore, pertaineth to His very Substance. But if anything hath arisen in the Substance of God which was not before, that Substance is not truly called eternal. But if it was the eternal will of god that the creature should be, why was not the creature also from eternity?" (11, X, 12)¹⁸

In his elaboration on the created nature of time, he thus asserts that the only eternal being is God. Having defined time as something God created, he subsequently reflects on the nature of time itself: Is time something that has an objective reality independent of other things—like a container that cases all earthly things? Augustine denied this hypothesis, because

. . . if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time. (11, XIV, 17)¹⁹

But then, if time is not independent of things, is it then inside things? Apparently not, because no entity that can be called 'time' can be discerned inside things when breaking them up into even the tiniest pieces. If time exists neither independent of things nor dependent within things, then how does time exist, or does it simply not exist? A possible answer might be that time is "the motion of a body." This opinion is also denied by Augustine:

Since, then, the motion of a body is one thing, that by which we measure how long it is another; who cannot see which of these is rather to be called time? For, although a body be sometimes moved, sometimes stand still, we measure not its motion only, but also its standing still, by time; and we say, "It stood still as much as it moved;" or, "It stood still twice or thrice as long as it moved;" and if any other space which our measuring hath either determined or imagined, more or less, as we are accustomed to say. Time, therefore, is not the motion of a body. (11, XXIV, 31)²⁰

In this passage, along with the rebuttal of the idea that time is 'the motion of a body,' Augustine also points to the impossibility of measuring the duration of the motion of a body:

I measure the motion of a body by time; and the time itself do I not measure? But, in truth, could I measure the motion of a body, how long it is, and how long it is in coming from this place to that, unless I should measure the time in which it is moved? How, therefore, do I measure this very time itself? (11, XXVI, 33)²¹

From the preceding, it can be deduced that Augustine interprets the concept of 'time' as a function of three relational pairs—God and time, heaven-and-earth and time, and created things (including human beings) and time. In the relational pair God and time, Augustine advocates that time is created by God: "Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else wouldest Thou not precede all times. . . . Thou hast made all time, and before all times Thou art, nor in any time was there not time."²² As the creator of everything, including time, God is beyond time, precedes time, and, therefore, cannot be judged according to time. Bertrand Russell formulates this as follows:

Time was created when the world was created. God is eternal, in the sense of being timeless; in God there is no before and after, but only an eternal present. God's eternity is exempt from the relation of time; all time is present to Him at once. He did not *precede* His own creation of time, for that would imply that He was in time, whereas He stands eternally outside the stream of time. This leads Augustine to a very admirable relativistic theory of time.²³

The relational pair heaven-and-earth and time, involves 'heaven' and 'earth' as two created manifestations that are of the same nature as 'time' is. Here, as becomes evident in the twelfth book of the *Confessions*, 'heaven and earth' are not understood as the 'worldly' heaven and earth 'with form,' but 'heaven' is rather the 'heaven of heavens', and 'earth' is 'invisible and formless.' In Augustine's words:

Thou wast, and there was nought else from which Thou didst create heaven and earth; two such things, one near unto Thee, the other near to nothing,—one to which Thou shouldest be superior, the other to which nothing should be inferior. (12, VII, 7)²⁴

Augustine realizes that heaven and earth are two things that are as infinite—not eternal, as only God is eternal—as time is.²⁵ As God created time simultaneously with heaven and earth, heaven and earth therefore enjoy the same infinite nature as time does:

[T]wo things I find which Thou hast made, not within the compass of time, since neither is co-eternal with Thee. One, which is so formed that, without any failing of contemplation, without any interval of change, although changeable, yet not changed, it may fully enjoy Thy eternity and unchangeableness; the other, which was so formless, that it had not that by which it could be changed from one form into another, either of motion or of repose, whereby it might be subject unto time. But this Thou didst not leave to be formless, since before all days, in the beginning Thou createdst heaven and earth,—these two things of which I spoke. (12, XII, 15)²⁶

The third relational pair contrasts time with all finite beings, that is, all things except for God himself, who is eternal, and for heaven and earth, which infinitely

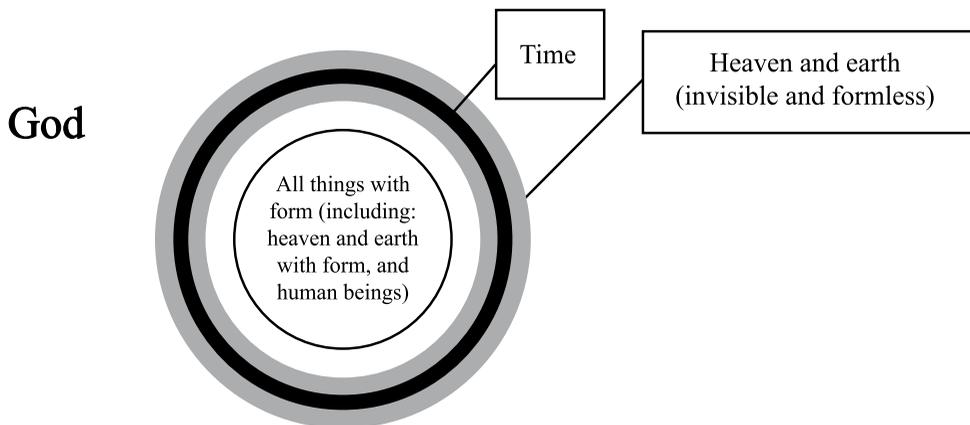


Figure 1. Saint Augustine's theory of time in objective terms.

coexist with time. On this relation of human beings and all things, including heaven and earth with form, which are produced out of the formless and invisible heaven and earth with time, Augustine says:

[W]hence another heaven might be created, and another earth visible and well-formed, and water beautifully ordered, and whatever besides is, in the formation of this world, recorded to have been, not without days, created; because such things are so that in them the vicissitudes of times may take place on account of the appointed changes of motions and of forms. (12, XII, 15)²⁷

Human beings and all mortal beings and things with form are thus seen as subject to the vicissitudes of time. The following figure represents Augustine's theory of time in objective terms. It shows that, in Augustine's view, God and only God stands beyond time eternally and timelessly. Heaven of heavens and earth in its invisible and formless condition coexist infinitely with time because time is created together with them. All things that have form, including heaven and earth with form, and human beings, are finite within the stream of time (see Figure 1).

Subjective Time

Given the impossibility of defining 'time' objectively, Augustine therefore turns to the human inner nature to formulate a tentative answer to the question "What is time?"

Whence it appeared to me that time is nothing else than protraction; but of what I know not. It is wonderful to me, if it be not of the mind itself. (11, XXVI, 33)²⁸

Here, in other words, Augustine gives his famous "subjectivist" answer: time is the protraction of the mind.²⁹ He realizes that when he measures time inside his mind, he is actually measuring his impression:

In thee, O my mind, I measure times. . . . In thee, I say, I measure times; the impression which things as they pass by make on Thee, and which, when they have passed by, remains, that I measure as time present, not those things which have passed by, that the impression should be made. This I measure when I measure times. Either, then, these are times, or I do not measure times. (11, XXVII, 36)³⁰

When a sound passes by, it leaves behind an impression in one's mind. If this impression is left when another sound passes, then the first impression will become the criterion for comparing these two impressions. Time can thus be measured by comparing the different lengths of these impressions. Through this investigation, Augustine recognizes that time is a protraction, which is different from the extension of things in space. In this, he realizes that what is at stake is probably the protraction of the mind, whereby this protraction is realized through three activities of the mind: expectation, consideration, and remembrance:

For it both expects, and considers, and remembers, that that which it expecteth, through that which it considereth, may pass into that which it remembereth. (11, XXVIII, 37)³¹

Augustine explains this protraction of the mind through the description of his own experience of this mental phenomenon when repeating a psalm from the Bible:

Before I begin, my attention is extended to the whole; but when I have begun, as much of it as becomes past by my saying it is extended in my memory; and the life of this action of mine is divided between my memory, on account of what I have repeated, and my expectation, on account of what I am about to repeat; yet my consideration is present with me, through which that which was future may be carried over so that it may become past. Which the more it is done and repeated, by so much (expectation being shortened) the memory is enlarged, until the whole expectation be exhausted, when that whole action being ended shall have passed into memory. (11, XXVIII, 38)³²

As a subjective impression, Augustine describes the three time periods as follows:

[B]ut perchance it might be fitly said, "There are three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future." For these three do somehow exist in the soul, and otherwise I see them not: present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation. If of these things we are permitted to speak, I see three times, and I grant there are three. (11, XX, 26)³³

Past and future are both activities of the mind (memory and expectation, respectively), or, in Augustine's words, the "protraction" of the mind. They therefore do not exist independently. It thus appears that only the present really exists. However, the present is also an activity of the mind (sight). If the mind does not perceive—as when a man is asleep—then the present is not present either. Therefore, time is a subjective perception (see Figure 2).

To sum up, time is both objective and subjective. To God, it is objective, as He created it together with heaven and earth; to the human mind, it is subjective, being the protraction of the mind. Time cannot be found anywhere, except in one's mind.

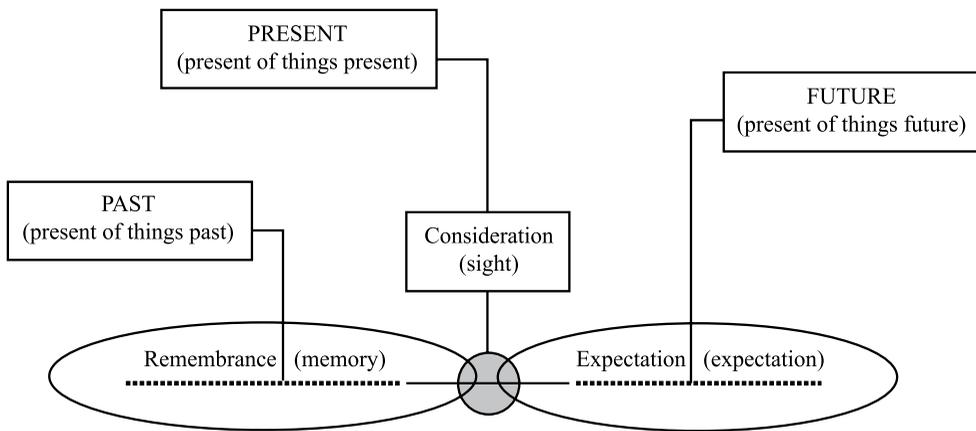


Figure 2. Saint Augustine's theory of time in subjective terms.

Seng Zhao's Theory of Time

Objective and Subjective Time

Above, we have referred to the cyclical time concept of Greek mythology. The Buddhist concept of time is also a cyclic one. In contradistinction to the Greek view, however, the Buddhist flow of time is not thought to be determined by divine power, but is seen as a mechanical process, determined by karmic force. It is through the karmic result (*karman*) created by his conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*) that a living being (*sattva*) casts a future life and thus, as a mechanical result, continues the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). This mechanical process is explained in terms of the chain of dependent origination in twelve members (*dvādaśāṅgapratītyasamutpāda*): (1) ignorance (*avidyā*), (2) conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*), (3) consciousness (*vijñāna*), (4) the psycho-physical complex (*nāmarūpa*), (5) six senses (*ṣaḍāyatana*), (6) contact (*sparśa*), (7) sensations (*vedanā*), (8) craving (*tṛṣṇā*), (9) grasping (*upādāna*), (10) existence (*bhava*), (11) birth (*jāti*), and (12) old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). A living being is further thought to consist of five constituents, the so-called five aggregates (*pañca-skandha*): (1) matter (*rūpa*), (2) sensations (*vedanā*), (3) conceptual identifications (*saṃjñā*), (4) conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*), and (5) consciousness (*vijñāna*). Being composed of these five ever-changing constituents, a living being is devoid of a 'self-nature' (*svabhāva/ātman*). In this sense, it is therefore not an individual's personal life that is continued after 'old age and death,' but 'life' as such. In an 'objective' sense, 'time' is therefore the infinite process of the twelve members of dependent origination in which one life is exchanged for a next life.³⁴

In the version of this concept as it was standardized by the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins—the philosophical school that became the predominant one for the development of Chinese Buddhism—this process was explained as belonging to

PAST

1. ignorance (*avidyā*)
2. conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*)

PRESENT

3. consciousness (*vijñāna*)
4. psycho-physical complex (*nāmarūpa*)
5. six senses (*ṣaḍāyatana*)
6. contact (*sparsā*)
7. sensations (*vedanā*)
8. craving (*tṛṣṇā*)
9. grasping (*upādāna*)
10. existence (*bhava*)

FUTURE

11. birth (*jāti*)
12. old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*)

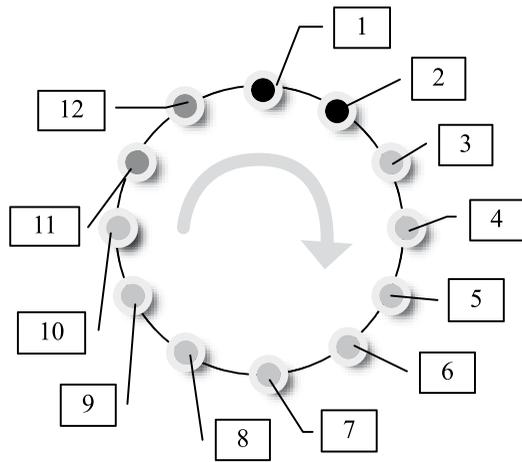


Figure 3. The twelve members of dependent origination and the three time periods.

three time periods (see Figure 3). Conditioning forces (*saṃskāra*) of a previous life that, in themselves, are the result of ignorance (*avidyā*) regarding the fact that a living being is only a combination of five constituents and, as such, has no self-nature cast a new existence in the present, the first member of which is consciousness (*vijñāna*), that is, the primary consciousness of a newborn human being. In the present, this living being casts a new existence through volitional actions. This is explained as follows: As a material and mental being, that is, the psycho-physical complex (*nāmarūpa*), a living being comes into contact (*sparsā*) with the sentient world through his senses (*ṣaḍāyatana*). This contact gives him either good, bad, or neutral sensations (*vedanā*) that are the cause of his craving (*tṛṣṇā*). This craving results in grasping (*upādāna*), and thus forms the present existence (*bhava*). The karmic result of this present existence will experience a new birth (*jāti*) in the future. Also, this future existence will suffer old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*), after which the cycle will recommence.

According to the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins (lit., those who advocate that everything exists [in the three time periods]), this causal process implies that each of these twelve ‘states’ through which a living being proceeds encompasses the former member and the subsequent member; if not, the chain of causality—and, by extension, the whole karmic concept—would be broken. This means that while the twelve members themselves are non-temporal, their function is temporal, or, put differently, temporality consists in functioning; time is synonymous with function.³⁵ The Vaibhāṣika understanding of the twelve members of dependent origination as belonging to three time periods can, in this respect, be interpreted as an individual’s, that is, one combination of the five aggregates, allotment of ‘time,’ in other words

one cyclic moving through the twelve members. Given the fact that it is conditioning forces that are responsible for the continuation of life, an individual's personal allotment of time can also be seen as his 'subjective' time. This implies that an individual has power over the continuation of his individual allotment of time; he can stop the mechanical karmic process and, in this sense, stop 'time.' It is therefore logical that there can be no supermundane God-like being who can have created time. This is confirmed in the **Dvādaśadvāra* (Twelve gates treatise), a summary digest of Madhyamaka philosophy, based on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the fundamental work of Madhyamaka philosophy, composed by the famous Indian master Nāgārjuna (ca. 113–ca. 213), alleged founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist philosophy:

復次彼若自在者。不應有所須。有所須自作不名自在。若無所須何用變化作萬物如小兒戲。復次若自在作眾生者。誰復作是自在。若自在自作則不然。如物不能自作。若更有作者。則不名自在。... 復次若自在作萬物者。為住何處而作萬物。是住處為是自在作。為是他作。若自在作者。為住何處作。若住餘處作。餘處復誰作。如是則無窮。若他作者則有二自在。是事不然。

When, further, someone would be sovereign (*īśvara*), he would have no needs. [A sovereign] who creates [something] because [he] has needs, is not called 'sovereign.' When there are no needs, why then should he, like a little boy does, in a playful way create the ten thousand things? Again, when a sovereign would create all beings (*sattva*), then who has created this sovereign? It is impossible that a sovereign would create himself, as it is likewise impossible that things create themselves. When there would be a further creator, then this one is not called 'sovereign'. . . . When, further, a sovereign would have created the ten thousand things, where did he abide to do so? This place is created either by the sovereign himself or by someone else. If it is created by the sovereign, then where did he abide to do so? When he abided in another place to do so, then who created this other place? This leads to an infinite regress. When [this place] was made by someone else, then there are two sovereigns. This is impossible. (our translation)³⁶

Voidness and the Interpretation of 'Time'

With respect to the problem of 'time' under discussion here, the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist philosophy formulated a fundamental criticism of Sarvāstivāda ontology. According to the Mādhyamikas, and in line with the ontological reflections of what has become known as Mahāyāna Buddhism, it was logically untenable to claim that a human being is composed of five constituents (the five aggregates) and, as such, has no self-nature, while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of these constituents themselves. For Mādhyamikas, the nature of these constituents (*dharma*) can be no other than the nature of the things formed by them; that is, these constituents cannot also have a self-nature. In other words, they are as void (*śūnya*) as the things formed by them are. When all things are void, time cannot be part of them.

When time is not inherent in the things, the question then is whether time exists independently of things, and whether things pass through this independently existing time. At this point, we can turn our attention to Seng Zhao. A native of Jingchao in the vicinity of present-day Xi'an, Seng Zhao was born in 374. According to his biog-

raphy, included in the *Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳,³⁷ he was of humble descent and had to earn a living as a copyist. This is how he gained an extensive knowledge of the classics and of historical literature, became especially knowledgeable in the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*, and developed a particular affinity for the section “De” of the latter work, that is, the manifestation of ‘dao’ in the concrete things of the world.³⁸ The *Gao seng zhuan* further informs us that it is the reading of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (*Weimo jing* 維摩經, Sūtra spoken by Vimalakīrti) that led him to convert to Buddhism and become a monk.³⁹ The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, one of the most influential texts in the development of Chinese Buddhism, glorifies the layman Vimalakīrti, whose wisdom and pure conduct are a model for others to follow. The text emphasizes the conduct and practice of a *bodhisattva* as against those of the adept (*śrāvaka*) of early Buddhism.⁴⁰ We further are informed that Seng Zhao assisted the famous Kumārajīva, a native of Kučā who, in Chang’an (present-day Xi’an), translated the most famous Madhyamaka treatises. Seng Zhao also wrote introductions to some of Kumārajīva’s most important translations.⁴¹ It is recorded that when he had written the essay *Boruo wu zhi lun* 般若無知論 (*Prajñā* has no knowing), he presented it to Kumārajīva, who praised it highly. The text was circulated in the Buddhist community of Mt. Lu 廬山 (Lu Shan), one of the most important Buddhist centers of the time.⁴²

That his essay was so highly valued may have stimulated him, later on, to write the essays *Bu zhen kong lun* 不真空論 (Emptiness of the non-absolute), *Wu bu qian lun* 物不遷論 (Things do not shift),⁴³ and *Niepan wu ming lun* 涅槃無名論 (*Nirvāṇa* is nameless). These four essays make up the extant *Zhao lun* 肇論 (*T* 45, no. 1858): part 1, “Things Do Not Shift”; part 2, “Emptiness of the Non-Absolute”; part 3, “*Prajñā* Has No Knowing”; and part 4, “*Nirvāṇa* is Nameless.” Discussing the extant *Zhao lun*, Richard H. Robinson called the *Wu bu qian lun* the “most philosophical” of the four essays, as it deals with the problems of time, change, and motion, rather than with soteriological themes that are peculiar to Buddhist doctrine.⁴⁴

In the *Wu bu qian lun*, Seng Zhao does not directly raise the question ‘What is time?’ Even the Chinese word *zhou* 宙, which was commonly used for ‘time’ in that period, is not mentioned.⁴⁵ Rather, ‘time’ is analyzed in terms of a series of dual concepts: *xi* 昔 / *gu* 古 (past) and *jin* 今 (present); *qu* 去 (going) and *lai* 來 (coming); *qian* 遷 (shifting) and *zhu* 住 (abiding); and *dong* 動 (motion) and *jing* 靜 (quietude). In doing this, Seng Zhao, like Augustine, also conforms to Wittgenstein’s observation that the question of what time is leads to different “statements one makes about the duration of events, about their being past, present, or future,” whereby these statements “of course, are not *philosophical* statements about time, the past, present, and future” itself.

Occurring twenty-eight and twenty-four times, respectively, *dong* 動 (motion) and *jing* 靜 (quietude) are the most frequently used pair of concepts in the *Wu bu qian lun*, and can thus be regarded as the key concepts of the text. They easily transform into other concepts: *dong* transforms into *qian* 遷 (shifting), *zhuan* 轉 (rotating), *liu* 流 (flowing), *wang* 往 (going), et cetera; and *jing* transforms into *bu qian* 不遷 (not shifting), *bu dong* 不動 (not moving), *zhu* 住 (abiding), *liu* 留 (remaining), et cetera.

In the argumentation in the *Wu bu qian lun*, *dong* and *jing* are, further, not ‘absolute’ terms. In accordance with our previous remark that in the causal process of the twelve members of dependent origination each of these twelve ‘states’ through which a living being proceeds encompasses the preceding member, and the subsequent member, *dong* and *jing*, as such, manifest one another dependently; each *dong* contains *jing* and vice versa. In this sense, *dong* and *jing* are one substance with two different names; they represent the identity of opposites.

The opening lines of the essay *Wu bu qian lun* read as follows:

夫生死交謝。寒暑迭遷。有物流動。人之常情。余則謂之不然。

That birth and death yield to each other, that cold and heat alternate, and that all things flow and move, is the common opinion of people. I say that this is not so. (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151a9–10; our translation)

In these lines, Seng Zhao contrasts the view of ordinary people with his own view. By doing this, he claims that there are two ways of perceiving time (the moving of things): an ordinary one, belonging to the domain of the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), and a superior one, belonging to the domain of the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*). He begins his argumentation with the following reference to the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (*Fangguang boruo jing* 放光般若經): “*Dharmas* have no going and coming, they have no moving and rotating” (法無去來。無動轉).⁴⁶ With this reference, he shows that he builds his theory on the philosophical heritage of *Prajñāpāramitā* thinking, out of which Madhyamaka philosophy developed. He argues as follows:

尋夫不動之作，豈釋動以求靜，必求靜於諸動。必求靜於諸動故雖動而常靜。不釋動以求靜故雖靜而不離動。然則動靜未始異，而惑者不同。

When examining ‘the action of not moving,’ how could that be abandoning motion to find quietude? It is within all motions that quietude must be found. Because of having to find quietude in all motions, there is permanent quietude, although there is motion. Because of not abandoning motion to find quietude, there is no parting from motion, although there is quietude. This being so, motion and quietude have never been different, but confused people see it differently. (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151a11–14; our translation)⁴⁷

In other words, when we accept, as the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* states, that things do not move or rotate, it cannot be so that quietude is the result of abandoning motion, for that would imply that things change from a state of motion to a state of quietude.

It thus has to be so that the quietude of things is part of their motion. It therefore is within all motions that quietude must be found, and, hence, there is permanent quietude although there is motion. The co-existence of motion (*dong*) and quietude (*jing*) being acknowledged, it is easier to understand Seng Zhao’s other conceptual pairs related to time. In the following passage, he connects *dong* and *jing* to *xi* (past) and *jin* (present) and to *qu* (going) and *lai* (coming):

夫人之所謂動者，以昔物不至今，故曰動而非靜。我之所謂靜者，亦以昔物不至今，故曰靜而非動。動而非靜以其不來，靜而非動以其不去。

What people call ‘motion’ is [called] that because past things do not reach the present; they have to be said to have moved and not to be in quietude. What I call ‘quietude’ also is [called] that because past things do not reach the present, they have to be said to be in quietude and not to move. [When people say that] they have moved and are not in quietude, this is because they do not come [to the present. When I say that] they are in quietude and do not move, this is because they do not go [to the past]. (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151a22–26; our translation)

That things move to the past (as a form of *dong*) is the ordinary impression that things of the past have not always been past, and thus must have moved from the present to the past. According to ordinary people, therefore, things are in motion. Seng Zhao refutes this opinion. He claims that past things are not discernable in the present. They thus do not shift to the present, and, therefore, have to be in quietude. This implies that things abide in the moment they are in (as a form of *jing*), and do not change along with time. For this argumentation, Seng Zhao builds on ideas formulated in the Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka literature. More precisely, he refers to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (*Dao xing boruo jing* 道行般若經):

法本無所從來。去亦無所至。

Dharmas [fundamentally] come from nowhere, and have nowhere to go to.⁴⁸

and to Nāgārjuna’s *Madhyamakaśāstra* (*Zhonglun* 中論):

觀方知彼去。去者不至方。

When observing a place, it is known that the other [place] has gone; the one that has gone does not reach [this] place.⁴⁹

With this statement, according to David J. Kalupahana, Nāgārjuna denies its positive counterpart that ‘what has moved is being moved,’ as the latter would imply the existence of a permanent substance, a substance “with which movement was associated in the past and which is also presently moving.”⁵⁰ Also the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (*Da zhidu lun* 大智度論), a text attributed to Nāgārjuna, is quoted:

諸法不動。無去來處。

All *dharmas* do not move. They have no place to go to or to come from.⁵¹

Ordinary people, although they face voidness as the absolute truth, are not aware that when they accept that things move through time, they actually admit the existence of a permanent substance. As Seng Zhao says:

既知往物而不來。而謂今物而可往。往物既不來。今物何所往？何則？求向物於向。於向未嘗無。責向物於今。於今未嘗有。於今未嘗有以明物不來。於向未嘗無故知物不去。覆而求今今亦不往。是謂昔物自在昔。不從今以至昔。今物自在今。不從昔以至今。

Since they know that things that have gone do not come [to the present], they say that things of the present have the ability to go [to the past]. Since things that have gone do not come [to the present], where, then, should things of the present go to? What does this mean? When looking for things that have retreated among what has retreated, they are never inexistent among what has retreated. Laying charge upon things that have retreated

in the present, they are never existent in the present. Given that [things that have retreated] are never existent in the present, it is clear that [these] things do not come [to the present]. Because they are never inexistent among what has retreated, it is known that [these] things do not go [to the past]. When subsequently examining the present, the present also does not go [to the past]. This naturally means that past things are in the past, and that they do not reach the past from the present. Things of the present naturally are in the present, and they do not reach the present from the past. (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151a28-b4; our translation)

At this point, Seng Zhao, quoting the *Fo shuo chengju guangming dingyi jing* 佛說成具光明定意經, compares his teaching with that of a *bodhisattva* who “abides among those who reckon on the permanence (*nityatā*) [of things], and teaches them the doctrine of impermanence (*anityatā*)” (菩薩處計常之中而演非常之致),⁵² and, as expedient means (*upāya*), he gives the following examples:

人則謂少壯同體。百齡一質。徒知年往。不覺形隨。是以梵志出家。白首而歸。鄰人見之曰。昔人尚存乎。梵志曰。吾猶昔人。非昔人也。

People then say that the body is the same when being young or adult, and that it is of the same substance during one hundred years. They only know that the years pass by, but are unconscious of it that [one’s] shape follows [the years]. That is why, when a brahmin who [at a young age] had left home (*pravrajyā*) returned white-haired, the people of the neighborhood, upon seeing him, asked: “Does the man of the past still exist?” The brahmin replied: “As the man of the past, I am not the man of the past.”⁵³ (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151b24–27; our translation)

and:

故談真有不遷之稱。導俗有流動之說。

Therefore, when [the Buddha] talks about the absolute (*paramārtha*), he [uses] the term ‘does not shift’; when instructing about the conventional (*saṃvṛti*), he [uses] the words ‘flowing and moving.’ (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151c2–3; our translation)

Seng Zhao concludes this section with the following:

人則求古於今。謂其不住。吾則求今於古。知其不去。今若至古。古應有今。古若至今。今應有古。今而無古。以知不來。古而無今。以知不去。若古不至今。今亦不至古。事各性住於一世。有何物而可去來?

People then examine the present [in search of] the past, and say that [the past] does not abide [in the past]. I myself examine the past [in search of] the present, and know that [the present] does not go [to the past]. When the present would reach the past, the past should contain the present; when the past would reach the present, the present should contain the past. As the present does not contain the past, [we] therefore know that it does not come. As the past does not contain the present, [we] therefore know it does not go. When the past does not reach the present, neither does the present reach the past; [it has to be so that] the specific nature (*bhāva*) of each thing abides in one single time period.⁵⁴ What object could exist that can go or come? (T 45, no. 1858, p. 151c13–17; our translation)

Through the connection of the conceptual pairs *gu* 古 (past) and *jin* 今 (present), *qu* 去 (going) and *lai* 來 (coming), and *qian* 遷 (shifting) and *zhu* 住 (abiding), with the

conceptual pair *yin* 因 (cause) and *guo* 果 (fruition), the concluding section of the *Wu bu qian lun* links the topic of ‘time’ to the one of karmic efficacy, and the notion of dependent origination outlined above:

功業不可朽。故雖在昔而不化。不化故不遷。不遷故則湛然明矣。... 果不俱因。因因而果。因因而果。因不昔滅。果不俱因。因不來今。不滅不來。則不遷之致明矣。復何惑於去留。踟躕於動靜之間哉。

Karmic efficacy cannot decay. Therefore, although in the past, it does not change. Because it does not change, it does not shift. Because it does not shift, [the principle] is profoundly clear. . . . There is fruition depending on a cause, [but] a fruition is not together with its cause. Because there is fruition depending on a cause, the cause [cannot] have perished in the past. Because a fruition is not together with its cause, the cause [can] not come to the present. Given that [the cause] has not perished [in the past] and does not come [to the present,] it is clear that this results in ‘not shifting.’ What further confusion concerning going and remaining, wavering between motion and quietude? (*T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151c21–26; our translation)

From this concluding section of the *Wu bu qian lun*, it is clear that what Seng Zhao refutes is not the karmic law of dependent origination *an sich* (“karmic efficacy cannot decay”), but, rather, the way in which we approach it. When accepting the ordinary beings’ perception that things move in time, one has to accept that things have a specific nature (*svabhāva*). Now, according to the Madhyamaka, all things are empty (*śūnya*), that is, devoid of a specific nature. To address this wrong view, the Buddha “[uses] the words ‘flowing and moving.’” When things flow from the present into the past, one has to accept a continuity. This position cannot be logically upheld. It is as with a movie: every frame of a movie stays in its position without leaving, but when cast on a screen, the spectator has the impression of a continuity.

In reality, according to Seng Zhao, there is no such continuity. Having realized this, one can address the absolute. For doing this, the Buddha “[uses] the term ‘does not shift’”; that is, by changing to the opposite position, and revealing the logical problems this position brings with it, he makes clear that the law of causality cannot be apprehended logically. The state of mind to understand the Buddhist truth is of the same nature as the truth itself; that is, it is void. In other words, for Seng Zhao ‘time’ (*zhou*) is a mental construction, no ontological ‘reality.’ *Gu* and *jin*, *qu* and *lai*, *qian* and *zhu*, and *dong* and *jing* are all different terms for the *Erscheinung* of a thing. As such, ‘time’ is an illusion.⁵⁵ With this principle, Seng Zhao agrees with Augustine, when the latter stated:

Since, then, the motion of a body is one thing, that by which we measure how long it is another; who cannot see which of these is rather to be called time? For, although a body be sometimes moved, sometimes stand still, we measure not his motion only, but also its standing still, by time; and we say, “It stood still as much as it moved;” or, “It stood still twice or thrice as long as it moved;” and if any other space which our measuring hath either determined or imagined, more or less, as we are accustomed to say. Time, therefore, is not the motion of a body. (*Confessions* 11, XXIV, 31)⁵⁶

Conclusion

The mortality of one's body, that is, the temporal finiteness of one's life, confronts human beings with the 'time' question: Do human beings pass through a time that is either finite or infinite, however independent, or is time an integral part of one's own body? Confronted with the undeniable mortality of the body, the seeking mind only has a few options to explain its co-existence with time and to make life meaningful.⁵⁷ Under the hypothesis that time is independent of human beings, making the body live on as long as the (finite or infinite) time exists is a way to overcome this discrepancy. Such a search for immortality can be found in many cultures.⁵⁸ The hypothesis that time is not independent of human beings, but is an integral part of one's own body, implies that with the death of the body, (one's personal allotment of) time also comes to an end. Augustine's time theory comprises elements of the latter reflection: when time, in its subjective interpretation, is the 'protraction of the mind,' it results that when the mind stops, time also comes to an end. This helps to explain why Augustine, in accordance with a Christian theology that sees the purpose of human life as rebirth in Christ, values life on earth as, in itself, worthless: a human being's earthly span of time is only valuable to the degree to which he fulfills his duty with respect to God. In contrast to the cyclic interpretation of time in Greek philosophy, Christian theology therefore is characterized by a linear time concept.⁵⁹ This 'time' has been created by God at the same time He created heaven and earth. To God, 'time' is therefore an objective reality. For human beings, 'time' can, by the pondering mind, only be regarded as the 'protraction of the mind,' and, as such, has no objective reality. A human being's allotted time span on earth, further, has no 'objective' reality, but is only valid with respect to God's demand.

As is the case in Greek philosophy, for Buddhists also, 'time' is a cyclical process. In Buddhist philosophy, time is an objective mechanical process of rebirth through karmic retribution. In karmic retribution also lies the 'subjectivity' of time: as it is conditioning forces that are responsible for the continuation of life in time, it is an individual who has the power to stop this objective mechanical process, and, in this way, stop 'time.' Therefore, there is no God-like being who has created time and in reunion with whom one's individual allotment of time would stop. Developing on the Madhyamaka concept of voidness, that is, the concept that all things are devoid of a self-nature, Seng Zhao claims that there are two ways to perceive 'time': an ordinary view and a superior view. As did Augustine, Seng Zhao also thus approaches the question of what 'time' is from the way human beings perceive time. While Augustine's answer is rooted in Christian theology, Seng Zhao's answer builds on a straightforward application of logical reasoning to earlier Buddhist ontological premises. According to the ordinary view, things move through time. The ordinary view therefore has to accept that things have a self-nature. This view cannot be logically upheld. By shifting to the opposite position, and revealing the logical problems this view brings about, Seng Zhao makes clear that the law of causality—and thus of time, cannot be apprehended by logical reasoning. The true nature of time can only be known intuitively. The consequence of this is that where Augustine did not go

beyond a mere objective-subjective dichotomy, Seng Zhao moves beyond this dichotomy and concludes that, in the end, all is void.

Notes

- 1 – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 72.
- 2 – It may be noticed here that Wittgenstein starts the first sentence of his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* with the words: “Augustinus, in den Confessionen. . . .”
- 3 – *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin, with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, vol. 1 of *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, [1886] 2004), p. 168.
- 4 – Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, p. 71.
- 5 – See Günter Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte: Ihre Entwicklungslogik vom Mythos zur Weltzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 322–327.
- 6 – Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste in Numidia (in present-day Algeria), the son of a non-Christian father and a Christian mother.
- 7 – The traditional dates of Seng Zhao are 384–414. Zenryū Tsukamoto, *Jōron kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1955), p. 121, offers a convincing argument that Seng Zhao died in 414, at the age of forty-one.
- 8 – See Thomas Göller and Achim Mittag, *Geschichtsdenken in Europa und China: Selbstdeutung und Deutung des Fremden in historischen Kontexten* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2008), p. 17.
- 9 – See Christian Meier, *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 345–349, 356–367.
- 10 – On this see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, [1948] 1963), pp. 17–33, 40–42.
- 11 – See Göller and Mittag, *Geschichtsdenken in Europa und China*, p. 22.
- 12 – See Otto Apelt (ed.), *Platons Dialog Politikos oder Vom Staatsmann. Übersetzt und erläutert* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1914), p. 50.
- 13 – “A new attitude towards history grew up, according to which the historical process in the working-out not of man’s purposes but of God’s; God’s purpose being a purpose for man, a purpose to be embodied in human life and through the activity of human wills, God’s part in this working-out being limited to pre-determining the end and to determining from time to time the objects which human beings desire” (Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 48).
- 14 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 174.

- 15 – See Göller and Mittag, *Geschichtsdenken in Europa und China*, p. 25.
- 16 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 234. See also Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte*, pp. 167–168.
- 17 – See *Confessions* 5, III, 6: “. . . and I compared them with the saying of Manichaeus. . . . But therein I was ordered to believe, and yet it corresponded not with those rules acknowledged by calculations and my own sight, but was far different” (Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 81).
- 18 – See Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 167. The same problem is addressed in *Confessions* 11, XXX, 40: “nor will I endure the questions of men, who by a penal disease thirst for more than they can hold, and say, ‘What did God make before He made heaven and earth?’ Or, ‘How came it into His mind to make anything, when He never before made anything?’” See Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 174.
- 19 – Ibid., p. 168.
- 20 – Ibid., p. 172.
- 21 – Ibid.
- 22 – Ibid., p. 168.
- 23 – Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 330. See also note 29.
- 24 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 177.
- 25 – See *Confessions* 12, XVII–XXII and XXVII–XXVIII.
- 26 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 179.
- 27 – Ibid.
- 28 – Ibid., p. 172.
- 29 – Dux states that, also for Augustine, the question of the nature of time in its paradox between its experience in the world and the logical structure of reasoning came to the fore (Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte*, p. 323). With respect to the so-called “subjectivist” claim to Augustine’s interpretation of time (e.g., Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 330–331), he claims: “Ich fürchte, daß die Subjektivierung, die man in dieser Lösung sieht, den Blick dafür verstellt, daß *Augustinus* damit weit entfernt ist von einer Subjectivierung im neuzeitlichen konstruktiven Sinne. Worum es ihm zu tun war, war gerade, den Ort zu finden, an dem die Zeit als real im substantiellen Sinne erfahren wurde” (Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte*, p. 316).
- 30 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 173.
- 31 – Ibid.
- 32 – Ibid., p. 174.

- 33 – Ibid., p. 170.
- 34 – For a historical assessment of this series see, among others, Bart Dessein, “Self, Dependent Origination, and Action in Bactrian and Gandhāran Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Texts,” in *The Notion of ‘Self’ in Buddhism*, ed. Bart Dessein, *Communication and Cognition* 32, nos. 1/2 [1999]: 53–83.
- 35 – See K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna’s Philosophy as Presented in the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1966), pp. 58–59.
- 36 – *Shi’er men lun*, in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, vol. 30, no. 1568, p. 166a29–b15 (hereafter “T” followed by volume, number, and page). The Chinese version of the **Dvādaśadvāraka* was done by Kumārajīva in 408–409 C.E.. On the nature of the work see Richard Gard, “On the authenticity of Pai-lun and Shih-erh-mên-lun,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 2, no. 2 (1964).
- 37 – *Gao seng zhuan*, in *T* 50, no. 2059, pp. 365a9–366a29. See also Walter Liebenthal, *The Book of Chao* (Beijing: Catholic University Press, 1948), pp. 4–6, and Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 123.
- 38 – *T* 50, no. 2059, p. 365a9–12. This is visible, e.g., in the references to the Daoist and Confucian literature in the *Wu bu qian lun*. For references to the *Laozi*, see *T* 45, no. 1858, pp. 151a17, 151a17–18, 151c12–13, 151c19–20; for the *Zhuangzi*, see *T* 45, no. 1858, pp. 151b5–6, 151b12–13, 151b21–22; for the Confucian *Lunyu*, see *T* 45, no. 1858, pp. 151b9–10, 151b22–23, 151c20.
- 39 – *T* 50, no. 2059, p. 365a13–14.
- 40 – Seven translations of this text into Chinese have been made. Three of these are extant: the translation by Zhi Qian 支謙 in the third century (*T* 14, no. 474, *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經), the translation by Kumārajīva in 406 (*T* 14, no. 475, *Weimojie suo shuo jing* 維摩詰所說經), and the translation by Xuanzang 玄奘 in the seventh century (*T* 14, no. 476, *Weimogou cheng jing* 維摩垢稱經). For a short content of the text see Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 383–385.
- 41 – *T* 50, no. 2059, p. 365a19–23. For a short introduction to Madhyamaka (San-lun) in China see Junjirō Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 96–107.
- 42 – *T* 50, no. 2059, p. 365a24–28.
- 43 – This is the title as translated by Robinson in *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, p. 146. The title of this essay was translated as “On Time” by Walter Liebenthal, in his *Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), p. 45. Hsu Fancheng translates the title as “On things unchanging,” in *Three Theses of Seng-Zhao: A Translation from Chinese*, introd.

and notes by Fancheng Hsu (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Publishing House, 1985), p. 2.

- 44 – Robinson, Richard H., *Early Mādhyamika in India in China* (Madison WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), p. 146.
- 45 – This does not exclude that the definition of *zhou* by ancient sages, especially those Daoist sages like Laozi and Zhuangzi whose words and metaphors he frequently cites, may have exerted some influence on Seng Zhao.
- 46 – *T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151a10–11. Reference to *T* 8, no. 221, p. 32c19–20: “諸法不動搖故。諸法亦不去亦不來亦無有住處。” (Because all *dharmas* do not move or sway, they neither go, nor come; nor do they have a place to abide).
- 47 – This refers to *Fanguang boruo jing* 放光般若經, *T* 8, no. 221, p. 32c19: “諸法亦不去亦不來亦無有住處。” (All *dharmas* neither go, nor come, nor do they have a place to abide), and to *Guang zan jing* 光讚經, *T* 8, no. 222, pp. 203b8–11: “亦不見來時亦不見去時。亦不見住處。衍亦如是。所以者何。一切諸法不可轉動。是故無有住者無有來者亦無所住。: (No time of coming can be discerned, and no time of going can be discerned, nor can a place of abiding be discerned. The same is true for spreading out. Why? All *dharmas* can not rotate or move. Therefore, there is no abiding, there is no coming, and there is no place to abide).
- 48 – *T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151a20–21. Reference to *T* 8, no. 224, pp. 473c9 and 475a19: “本無所從來去亦無所至。” (There fundamentally is nowhere to come from, and neither is there some [point] to be reached).
- 49 – *T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151a21–22. Reference to *T* 30, no. 1564, p. 3c8: “已去無有去未去亦無去。” (*Gataṃ na gamyā te tavād agataṃ naiva gamyate* / What has been moved, in the first instance, is not being moved. What has not been moved is also not being moved). See also Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, p. 315, note 9.
- 50 – See David J. Kalupahana, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 118–119.
- 51 – *T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151b16–17. Reference to *T* 25, no. 1509, p. 427b3–4: “不見來處不見去處不見住處” (The place where [they] come from cannot be discerned, the place [they] go to cannot be discerned, a place of abiding cannot be discerned), and p. 428a12–13: “是故說諸法無來無去無住處亦無動” (Therefore it is said that all *dharmas* are without coming, without going, without a place to abide, and without motion).
- 52 – *T* 45, no. 1858, p. 151b15–16. Reference to *T* 15, no. 630, p. 451c25: “處計常之中而知無常之諦” (Abiding among those who reckon on permanence, the truth of impermanence is known). In the Ming dynasty, Zhen Cheng 鎮澄 (1547–1617) harshly repudiates Seng Zhao’s argumentation, because, according to him, it prevents living beings from attaining Buddhahood:

愚謂若昔因不滅不化者。則眾生永無成佛之理。修因永無得果之期。大小乘經俱無此說也。... 若謂物各性住於一世而不化者。是為定法。定法即有自性矣。

I would say that if the past causes do not perish or emanate-transform, all beings (*sattva*) will principally never become a Buddha, and that developing [wholesome] causes will forever be without a period of attaining fruition. Neither in the *sūtras* of the lesser vehicle nor in those of the greater vehicle is there this saying. . . . When saying that the specific nature (*bhāva*) of things abides in one single time period and does not emanate-transform, they then are fixed *dharmas*. Fixed *dharmas* have a specific nature (*svabhāva*) [and not the nature of emptiness, or *sūnyatā*]. (our translation)

See 卍續藏經 *Wan Xuzangjing*, vol. 54, no. 879, “Wu bu qian zheng liang lun” 物不遷正量論, CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripitaka V1.9 (Big5) Normalized Version (Distributor: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association [CBETA], release date 2009/04/22), X54n0879_p0914c11(02–03); X54n0879_p0917c07(08).

- 53 – Liebenenthal translates the last sentence as “I look like him but am not the same man.” To our understanding, 猶 here can be understood as an abbreviation of *you shi* 猶是, which means “still is,” and could also be understood as an abbreviation of *you ru* 猶如, which means “like” (Liebenenthal, *Chao Lun*, p. 50).
- 54 – According to Liebenenthal, the use of 一世 in 各性住於一世 “seems to suggest that Seng-chao had in mind 三世, the three phases of a single karmic event, viz., appearance, existence, and disappearance (*utpāda, sthiti, vyaya*)” (Liebenenthal, *Chao Lun*, p. 51 n. 161). However, as 古 is used in this fragment—not 去 or 過去—it appears to us that Seng Zhao did not have in mind here 三世 in its karmic sense.
- 55 – On this see also David J. Kalupahana, “The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality,” *Philosophy East and West* 24 (1974): 187–188.
- 56 – Schaff, *The Confessions and Letters of Augustin*, p. 172.
- 57 – In this respect, Albert Camus opens the first chapter of his *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (“L’absurde et le suicide”) with the words: “Il n’y a qu’un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c’est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d’être vécue, c’est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie” (Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l’absurde* [Paris: Gallimard, 1942], p. 17).
- 58 – See, e.g., ambrosia to the Greeks, or the elixir of immortality for the ancient Chinese mythological hero Hou Yi 后羿.
- 59 – On this see also Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte*, pp. 327–331.