

THE ROLE OF MYSTICISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
OF HATANO SEIICHI (1877-1950)

Generally speaking, the central points in Hatano's philosophy of religion are as follows: (1) religious experience; (2) fellowship with others; (3) Agape of the eternal God; and (4) time and eternity. If we are to have a correct understanding of his philosophy of religion, we must be acquainted with Plotinus's conception of nous and St. Paul's mystical conversion to God. In Hatano's philosophy of religion, the religious experience which he particularly emphasizes is, indeed, based on Plotinus and St. Paul. It seems to me that many students of Hatano's thought have somewhat ignored this fact. In this report I would like to explain briefly the role mysticism plays in his philosophy of religion.

- - - Hatano talks about Paul's mysticism in his Genshi Kirisutokyô (Primitive Christianity) (1950). Mysticism in its extreme form tends towards pantheism and, as such, denies the person. Hatano, however, states explicitly that "essentially, mysticism does not contradict the experience of personalism." In the section on mysticism in his Shûkyô tetsugaku (Philosophy of religion) (1935), he had already said that "personalism can retain religiosity only after accepting mysticism or the mystic tendency as an essential moment." Yet, what does it mean when he says that a moment of mystical experience is necessary for the formation of personalism? Paraphrasing Meister Eckhart's words, he continues: "Union with God is nothing but the experience of the self being equivalent to nothing, or the experience of the finiteness of the self... We are glad to see the strong indication of the necessity of conversion from mysticism to personalism. Personalism begins where mysticism ends."

That personalism begins where mysticism ends means, thus, to experience the self as equivalent to nothing. The question, then, is how the self is considered in this case. It was the mysticism of Plotinus that gave Hatano the idea that the concept of "subject" in modern idealism should be seen in terms of the concept of real existence in ancient Greece. In this sense, for Hatano mystic experience could act as a medium to convert the ideal self into the real self. In his opinion, modern idealism, as in the absolute spirit of Hegel, regards the self as that which advances to its own omnipotence and the absolute real being, guided by its own subjective direction. In other words, it is a self that absorbs the object within itself. Mysticism is an important element for such a self in converting itself to what is equivalent to nothing.

According to Hatano, mysticism explains nothingness as occurring

when the advancement and transition of the relations in the world are suddenly halted and made meaningless by an obstacle from an entirely unimaginable world. The existence and meaning of this world are toppled completely by this sudden stop. However, Hatano explains the turnover of the self as follows:

"It is the existence of this new meaning, i.e., the sudden appearance of existence as a symbol in this moment of self-reversal or self-destruction that is nothingness.

Unless the self and the world are experienced as sinking into the depths of nothingness, there is no purely religious experience."

Thus mystical experience is an indispensable condition for reaching personalism. According to Hatano, the essential meaning of religion lies in personalism. Mystical experience is the first step to the religious life, while revelation is the second step.