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## TIME AND TIMELESSNESS

The various definitions of "Time" may be classified into three different, broad types—the definitions of the mathematical physicist, of the psychologist, and of the metaphysician. The physicist is interested in the quantitative measurement of time in terms of logical relation of before-and-after, expressed in numbers. To him, time is a homogeneous continuum. Measurement requires a constant and standard unit. The difficulty in measuring time is that it "passes away". It is not possible to place intervals of time side by side and compare them, because the intervals are successive and not simultaneous. The sun serves as the standard of reference for measuring time and thus day and night, seasons, etc., are all measured with reference to the sun. For a wider field than the solar system, the velocity of light serves as the standard. Without resorting to signs, marks or signals in space, it is not possible to measure time. It is obvious that time measurement is relative, based on arbitrary standards. Einstein's theory of relativity has brought forth many paradoxes involved in the example of a man travelling in space with a speed either less or greater than that of light. In that case, mathematically, a man's death should occur before his birth. Further, time has been proved by the relativity theorist as the fourth dimension, and hence every point is a 'space-time' point instead of a three dimensional space point.

While the mathematical physicist is concerned with the before-after relation, the psychologist studies time as past-present-future. For the former, the position of the observer counts, whereas for the latter, mind is the basic factor. Physical time is contemplated, but mental time is enjoyed. The psychological problem is not how Time itself comes to be but how the individual comes by it. The psychologist is concerned not with Time as such, but with our awareness of time. The psychological present is not the mathematical present, but is a slab of duration, a certain length of the time-line known as "the specious present". We experience the present, remember the past and anticipate the future. In pre-

cognition, the wakeful future becomes the dream-present and cases of extra sensory perception prove that the mind has the power to transcend the limitations of space and time. Thus the psychological consideration of time also leaves us in confusion. Though specious present is not a mathematical point but a length of time consisting of a part of the past and a part of the future, we still distinguish past, present and future as constituting the distinctive character of events. We speak of time flowing like a river. Still it is not easy to tell whether time moves past us or we move past time. Our estimates of time vary notoriously. In certain situations, time drags on, in certain others, it is fleet-footed.

In the case of the metaphysical consideration of time, for the idealist, time is subjective, and for the realist, it is objective. Kant regards time as a pure form of our sensuous intuition. Space is a form of the outer sense, while time is a form of the inner sense. Time is a priori mode by conforming to which the given becomes given. The distinctive feature of time is "succession". It is that which makes for the coming into being and passing away of things. Kant does not make a distinction between subjective succession and objective succession. For Bergson, it is space that is homogeneous. For him, time is *la duree*, a ceaseless, continuous flow, and is itself Reality. It is an integral unity, and is purely heterogeneous. In the realist group also opinions widely differ. According to Alexander, space and time are interdependent, so that there is neither Space without Time, nor Time without Space. Space is temporal and time spatial. The continuity of time, the togetherness of past and future, is impossible without space. Time would be a mere "now" but for Space. Similarly, Space is saved from being an empty negation by Time. The relation between space and time is comparable to that of soul and body. If space, for instance, has three dimensions, it is because Time is successive, irreversible and uniform in direction. The one reality, then, is Space-Time of which the space-times of individual observers are perspectives. It is Space-Time that makes for creativity and is the basis of evolution.

As in Western thought, so in Indian Philosophy, there is a variety of views about Time. There is no single measure of time to the *Paurānikas*. A single day to the creator Brahmā comprises of 432,000,000 years of men. The higher a being is in the scale of evolution, the quicker time passes for it. Some schools of Indian thought like Buddhism consider time as a subjective mode of the mind. To the *Nyāya-Vaisesikas* time is objectively real.

It is infinite and without parts and the division of time into seconds, etc., is only conventional. In the theistic systems, time is real. In the *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, time does not fall outside Brahman, it evolves, and its evolutes are moments, hours etc. While time is co-ordinate with *prakṛti*, space is a product of *prakṛti*. In the *Pāncarātra* system, time is one of the constrictors of the soul. Time is that which makes for the maturation of all things. The time we experience is an effect; the cause of it is the impartite, unchanging, indivisible time. In *Saiva Siddhānta*, time is one of the five constrictors. The paradoxes metaphysical time involves us in, are no less pernicious than those of physical time and psychological time. What is time? What is its relation to space? Is time single or multiple? Is it identical with events, or different from them? Is it the same as change, or is it that in which there is change? These are some of the questions which continue to puzzle the philosophers. It is usually said that time flows. Does it flow as a whole or only in parts? If the whole of time flows, then past, present and future which are parts of time must be simultaneous, which is absurd. The same absurdity persists if we say that the parts of time flow. When it is said that time flies, one would like to ask: wherein does it fly? It cannot fly in space, for, then, time would be a spatial thing. If it flies in time, then we have the paradox of two times, one which moves and the other which is unmoving. When we are placed in such an awkward situation, we are inclined to agree with Alice in her Wonderland: "I think you might do something better with the Time than waste it asking riddles with no answers".

Bradley argues dialectically that time must be an appearance. Time, he says, "is a relation and, on the other side, it is not a relation; and it is, again, incapable of being anything beyond a relation...If you take time as a relation between units without duration, then the whole time has no duration, and is not time at all. But if you give duration to the whole time, then at once the units themselves are found to possess it; and they thus cease to be units. Time in fact is "before" and "after" in one; and without this diversity it is not time. But these differences cannot be asserted of the unity; and, on the other hand and failing that, time is helplessly dissolved."<sup>1</sup> "Time is so far from enduring the test of criticism,"

1. *Appearance and Reality* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd. London), 1908, p. 39.

observes Bradley, "that at a touch it falls apart and proclaims itself illusory."<sup>2</sup> Yet, he is compelled to admit that, though a mere appearance, time exists and "must somehow in some way belong to our Absolute."<sup>3</sup>

Time is illusory, but it does not belong to the "Absolute" as Bradley says. To attempt to relate the appearance to Reality and to characterize the relation as a belonging is, it seems to me, an unwarranted procedure. From the standpoint of the Absolute—if standpoint it may be called—there cannot be time. In the plenary experience, *Brahmānubhava*, time cannot be, even as in perfection, imperfection cannot be. But to the inquiring intellect time must present a perpetual puzzle. Like *māyā*, time is indeterminable (*anirvacaniya*).

What, then, it may be asked, is the purpose of time? Its purpose, it may be said is to serve as the gateway to Reality. As Lotze said, "to ask, what is the nature of time is to ask, what is the nature of Reality." In other words, our inquiry into the nature of time must lead us to an understanding of the nature of Reality. The purpose of the notion of time is the same as what, according to Gaudapāda, is the object of the teaching about creation. Just as the creation texts have no purpose of their own, but are designed to serve the purpose of introducing the texts which declare non-duality, the discussion of time is not an end in itself, but must take us to the knowledge of the Real. Time, if properly approached, can be our friend inducting us into Eternity. Time serves as the channel for all the orders of creation to return to their source which is the eternal *Brahman*. But time is not left behind, for it too is consumed.

Meditation on time is recommended in the Upanishads as a means for getting beyond time to the timeless reality which is Brahman. In the *Maitri-upanishad*, for instance, time is said to be one of the principal forms of the supreme, immortal, unembodied Brahman. As such it is to be meditated on. The supreme Brahman is not in the sphere of what is seen, and it is without shape. So, the mind cannot be dissolved in it directly. One of the indirect ways of mind-dissolution is the contemplation of time as the image of Brahman. Meditation always implies imaginative

2. Ibid., p. 207.

3. Ibid., p. 205.

substitution and makes it necessary to make believe. But it is useful in that it leads us through the image to the real. The image may be external or internal, gross or subtle. As one progresses in meditation, one makes the image more and more subtle. Of the most subtle images of Brahman, time is pre-eminent. The fruit of time-meditation is not to cling to time as if it were ultimately real, but to transcend it. As the Upanishad declares, "He who worships time as Brahman, from him time withdraws afar."<sup>4</sup> He ceases to be time-bound.<sup>5</sup>

"There are two forms of Brahman: Time and the Timeless," says the *Maitri Upanishad*, "That which is prior to the sun is the Timeless *akāla*, without parts (*akala*). But that which begins with the sun is Time, which has parts."<sup>6</sup> Further on, the Upanishad quotes an ancient verse:

'Tis Time that cooks created things,  
All things, indeed, in the Great Soul (*mahātman*).  
In what, however, Time is cooked—  
Who knows that, he the Veda knows.

Time is said to cook because it makes everything mature and resolve in Brahman. But time itself is cooked ultimately and is resolved in Brahman. Time is not the true nature of the Absolute. Time is with parts, whereas the Timeless is without parts. Brahman is the Timeless.

The expression "timeless" as applied to the Absolute has been objected to. Change and lastingness cannot be predicated of the timeless. But one need not conclude that the timeless must be unreal. Change and lastingness are characteristics of time. These cannot characterize the timeless even when it is called the super-temporal. To attribute these to the super-temporal is to make it temporal. Change and lastingness have meaning in time, and not beyond it.

It is not possible to have a conception of God without introducing relation, and to introduce relations is to make God part of the time-stream. The worshipper-worshipped relation sublimates, it is true, all other relations. It attenuates the worshipper's ego

4. *Maitri* vi, 14: *yah kalam brahmety upasita kalastasyatiduram apasarati.*

5. *Ibid.*, Ramatirtha's commentary.

6. *Ibid.*, vi, 15.

and makes him as if he were nothing before the magnificence of his Maker. The direction of the mind in worship towards God makes it one-pointed and holy and prepares the way for its dissolution in its cause. Thus the necessity of worship and its great utility are not disputed. But to insist that in the ultimate reality there should be difference and that souls and matter are eternal with God, though not external to him, is not proper because it sets limits to the Ultimate and thereby makes it relative.

It is not God that is illusory, according to *Advaita*, it is God alone that is real. Because the term "God" is generally used in a relational sense, we would rather use the other term "Absolute". It is in the Absolute that the relational God disappears, and along with him the devotee. This dissolution in the Absolute is a consummation which one would very much like, for the Absolute is not an alien spirit, but is our true Self. In fact, according to *Advaita*, it is not a question of dissolution either. It is the realization of one's eternal nature. Only from our point of view, which is the order of time, it seems to be, and is spoken of as, an occurrence.

Reality, in the view of *Advaita*, is truly timeless—timeless not in the sense of endless duration, but in the sense of eternity and completeness, requiring neither a "before" nor an "after". The best way to indicate the nature of Brahman, the timeless reality, is *via negativa* as "not this, not this".

Self-realisation or the realisation of the Absolute is man's final goal (*parama-purusārtha*). This Brahman-realisation may be compared to aesthetic enjoyment. In both, time comes to a stop, distinctions and divisions vanish. But while in the latter we have only a glimpse of perfection, in the former the ideal is reached once and for all. The poet, for example, receives "shocks" from the eternal during moments of the highest poetic experience. During such moments, time stands still and serves as an image and symbol of eternity. But the poet does not stay there for ever; he is drawn back again into the stream of time. T.S. Eliot, imagines that

To apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time is an occupation for the saint.

This is how, it seems to me, the saint's experience appears to the poet. The order of time and the order of eternity meet at a point and then part company. The experience of the saint and the sage,

however, is of eternity as including and transcending time, in a word, as timelessness. With reference, to the image of the intersection of the natural order by the divine order, W.T. Stace says that the moment of intersection is internally eternal, but externally a moment in time. We can agree that to us who are still in the order of time, the divine experience appears to be a moment in time. But we cannot endorse his view that "looked at from the outside as it is seen, not only by all of us in our normal consciousness, but by the mystic himself when he has passed out of it into the time-order, and looks back upon it in memory—looked at thus externally it is a moment in time." The *mukta* (released soul)—even this expression is meaningful only to us—is never more thrown into the tract of time. For him there is no return to the time-order. In the words of Sankara, the state of release is of one consistency, because it is Brahman itself.

*Moksa* is not what is to be experienced in a different place or at a future time. It is right here and now. One realises it the moment *avidyā* (nescience) is removed through *vidyā* (knowledge). As the *Kathopanishad* puts it, "When all desires dwelling in the heart vanish, then a man becomes immortal; and (even) here attains Brahman".<sup>7</sup> This is known as *jivanmukti*, liberation while yet living. We, who are on the hitherside, look upon the *jivanmukta* as an individual continuing to inhabit a body, and seek to explain this phenomenon by saying that his body will continue to live as long as the unspent portion of his *prārabdha*<sup>8</sup> lasts, and that he will attain *videhamukti* (liberation from the body) at the end of his life when *prārabdha* will have spent its force. But this is not the truth. In the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, a work ascribed to Sankara, it is stated that there is no *prārabdha* for the *mukta*. "After the knowledge of Truth has arisen, there is no *prārabdha* at all, because the body, etc., are unreal, even as there can be no dream after waking".<sup>9</sup>

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7. *Kathopanishad*, II, iii, 14.

8. The portion of the past *karma* which is responsible for the present body.

9. *Aparokṣānubhūti*, verse 91.