

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion it has been found that in the strict deterministic interpretation of reality there is no scope for becoming. It is needless to reiterate the persistence of the Eleatic tradition, in philosophy and science, that renders temporal becoming into a mere illusion.

The problem of time is the most fundamental problem, since it is the problem of experience itself. Change, movement and succession are the chief features of our experience. An analysis of the contents of our experience, the experience of change and its implicate time, can only reveal to us the ultimate truth. In the philosophy of Bradley and Whitehead we find an identification of reality with experience. Bradley¹ lays down a fundamental truth when he says, "experience is the same as reality ... to be real is to be indissolubly one with sentience". Like Whitehead Bradley

also attempted a far-reaching and thoroughgoing criticism of metaphysical first principles. But Bradley's metaphysic was vitiated by his failure to appreciate the bearing of scientific first principles on cosmology. This is clearly revealed in his treatment of space, time, causality and other objects of experience as appearances. As an idealist Bradley hardly realised the importance of cosmology for speculative metaphysics. Again, Bradley and Whitehead agree in their general conception of reality as a concrete whole. But Bradley's reality is self-subsistent, a whole which is not the result of a process of development, and is, therefore, static in nature. Whitehead, on the contrary, in rejecting the substance-attribute category as a fundamental mode of explanation, conceives of reality as a concrete whole in the process of development. It seems that Bradley's idealism has caught hold of a fundamental truth in its conception of reality as a concrete whole. But the self-subsistent and self-consistent Absolute of Hegel and of his followers like Bradley and Bosanquet, is practically the same as the substance of Spinoza - static and devoid of process.

In the temporalist philosophy of Bergson, James and Whitehead there is the reinstatement of becoming; reality is conceived as dynamic and incomplete. The world process is the everlasting coming of concrete novelties into being, the creative advance in nature, in which potentiality is

transformed into actuality. The classical concept of causality is being replaced by the concept of dynamic causation which is compatible with the emergence of novelties in the genuinely growing world.

Temporal becoming, which may also be expressed as the flow of time, is not only an irreducible feature of everything we experience, but of our consciousness as well. As William Barret² expresses, following Husserl and Heidegger³, that reality is what reveals itself in our everyday experience of the world. Barret attacks Grunbaums thesis of the mind-dependency of temporal becoming. Specifically, he attacks Weyl⁴ for claiming that reality ought to be understood in terms of the abstract theoretical concepts of science.

The physicist's concepts of 'the direction of time' or 'time's arrow', of course, suggest the idea of a time flow. Even Newton, an absolutist with regard to space and time, used the word 'flow' in his definition of 'time', that time flows in an even tenor. W. James used the same concept to describe our private psychological time. As he puts it, "... the specious present, the intuited duration, stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it"⁵.

We have here two opposite descriptions with regard to time-flow. So the question arises - does time flow forward

from the past to the future, or backward from the future to the past ?

The two descriptions above seem equally plausible. If we adopt a passive attitude, the future seems to come to us; when, on the other hand, we adopt an active attitude, we have the feeling of moving towards the future. Both these expressions, however, metaphysically express the irreversibility of temporal becoming. A reversal of time direction would imply the process of unbecoming. Aristotle⁶ maintained that even God cannot make undone things that have been done.

However, if the irreversibility of the process of becoming is understood in terms of spatial imagery then that generates paradoxical conclusions. But these paradoxes do not make any difference to our ordinary conception of time and becoming. The time which the scientist studies is an abstraction from lived duration. To the physicist the logical relation of before and after is more important than the past, present and future divisions of time. In the relativistic interpretation, to an observer speeding away faster than light, the time-order of events on the earth would be reversed, for during his journey he would catch up successively the waves of light which had left the earth before him. But this is only a theoretical possibility. As Cleugh puts it, "Einstein's assertion that simultaneity is relative has no derogatory effect at all - except as the result of confusion - upon the

certainty of the plain man that his judgements of simultaneity are true"⁷.

It may be pointed out that the scientists are mainly occupied with the development of theories that describe what the universe is, while the philosophers are concerned with why is it so. Modern physics describes the universe in terms of two basic theories - the General theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. According to the former space and time become meaningful only with reference to the actual events of the world. In this conception the idea of an eternal unchanging universe has been replaced by the notion of a dynamic expanding universe.

If the universe is expanding there must have been a time in which the world was very small. Quantum mechanics is in search of the evidences by means of which the hypothesis of an expanding universe can be justified. The scientist hopes that this study will ultimately lead him to a complete unified theory that will explain all the phenomena of the universe. If his aim is fulfilled, the unified theory will perhaps reveal the truth behind the mystery of the universe and solve all the paradoxes of time and the allied concepts. The philosopher may then find answers to their queries of why the universe is so. The 'what' of the scientist and the 'why' of the philosopher will then meet at the same point. Unless and until that point is reached the nature of time

will perhaps remain a mystery to philosopher, poet and scientist.

In the words of Whitehead "... it is impossible to mediate on time and the mystery of the creative passage of nature without an overwhelming emotion at the limitations of human knowledge"⁸.

Time has, and will perhaps remain a riddle to us. Our emotional life is deeply infected with an awareness of time. In mythology, Greek or Hindu, there is an apotheosis of time. "Time's chariot" not only hurries ever near, as John Donne thought, but as Tagore said, it carries us on it. We are all children of time.

The problem of the relation of time and eternity has haunted the mind of man, and thrown unforgettable images. Tagore, for example, has spoken,

"Kālīre rahe vakṣe dhari śubhra mahākāl
Bāndhena tāre kālo kaluṣ jāl".

: Eternity holds time, but remains unaffected by it. Shelley on the other hand says,

"Time like a dome of many coloured glass stains the white radiance of eternity".

McTaggart said that the last enemy to be overcome before we achieve eternity, is time⁹. In Plato's Timaeus we find the unforgettable expression "Time is the moving image of

eternity". The Advaita philosophers held that reality is timeless. Timeless does not mean endless duration; it means eternity and completeness. The problem of time thus brings one to the problem of the relation between time and eternity. Eternalists maintain that time embraces contradictions because it involves change and transiency. In their attempts to solve these contradictions time has been transformed into timelessness.

It is to be admitted that time is one of the most difficult philosophical subjects to treat satisfactorily. But it is also the richest of philosophical subjects. It has occupied the minds of philosophers and scientists of all ages. We cannot avoid mediating on time for we are embedded in time. Temporality is a dimension of human existence. A non-temporal existence appears unintelligible to our commonsense view. The idea of an eternal being with a kind of consciousness of things, to use Spinoza's expression, sub specie eternitatis, may have profound philosophical implications, but it is doubtful whether it makes any sense in relation to ourselves.

According to Kant time and space belong to a percipient being as forms of intuition. While to McTaggart, as our consciousness moves from more confused to clearer awareness of objects, it realises that time represents a non-temporal series which appeared as temporal.

Unlike Kant and McTaggart there are philosophers as well as scientists who believe that our awareness of duration, of temporality, of the distinctions between past, present and future are based on some objective factor. The faculty by means of which we are aware of time, appears to be the most important of the faculties that distinguishes us as human beings from other living creatures. Against those who contend that time dissolves into unreality under the weight of analysis, it might be pointed out that perhaps the fault lies with their analyses. Temporal characteristics seem to be undoubtedly present in the objects that we experience. But an object cannot exist with incompatible characteristics. So it might be said that the criticisms that have always been directed against temporal characteristics or for that matter, against time, should have been against the descriptions that have been made of them, or the conclusions that have been drawn from them, or the constructions that are based on them. There are some paradoxes of time constructed on the basis of the supposed infinity and continuity of time. We are not directly aware of the infinity and continuity, in the mathematical sense, of time. Any criticism that refers to the infinity and continuity of time, if successful, does not necessarily imply that time is unreal. For these criticisms are really directed against these constructions or descriptions of the temporal characteristics of the objects of our experience. The only justifiable conclusion would be that

some particular ways of describing the temporal characteristics are unsatisfactory, so we should look for some better ones.

Those who claim that events are only simultaneous with, or before or after one another, and thus seek to save time's reality at the cost of its dynamic aspect, seem to have an impoverished conception of time. Time's transience is a fundamental postulate of experience. Heidegger and his follower Barret have described it as the ontological presupposition for there to be a world or consciousness at all.

Temporal becoming, they would say, is not an object to know or discover among other things in the world. It is basic and irreducible, and hence it cannot be understood in terms of anything else without being involved into circularity. The flow of time is neither 'psychological' nor 'physical', for to understand the meaning of physical time or psychological time a reference is to be made to the basic flow of time.

We do encounter time as passage in our experiences, we are within the flow of time in the sense that we cannot get out of it, we cannot escape it. Even when we make the best use of our time, the moment of departure gradually approaches.

Then time flows away from us into the no-longer. As

Shakespeare has expressed it inimitably :

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore

So do our minutes hasten to their end".

REFERENCE

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4. Weyl, op.cit.
5. W.James, op.cit., p.630.
6. Aristotle, Ethics, op.cit, Book VI, 2.
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8. Whitehead, The Concept of Nature, op.cit, p.73.
9. McTaggart, The Nature of Existence, op.cit.