

REAL TIME AND TEMPORAL ILLUSION

Transience and Mortality. The difficulty of the present subject is that it demands a critique of something which is normally taken for self-evident: the instability and transience of nearly everything, which is confirmed all the time by sense data. Time as the enemy is taken to be self-evident and has long been enshrined in poetry, as in "Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away"; "the great globe itself, yea all which it inherit, shall dissolve and leave not a wrack behind." To go from that universal perception to the idea of time *preserving* its contents may look insanely paradoxical, but nevertheless, sense-perception creates illusions of its own. Could the whole realm of mortality really be only a result of selective attention? Parmenides, the first philosopher to leave writings, defended the idea that change was either unreal or at most of very limited reality. As Carl Du Prel puts it:

"The senses give us only a very small part of reality, but they give it with a violent insistence which makes us over-rate it, and feel unable to attend to any other kind of reality, and as long as we cannot understand that we apprehend through the senses only a minute part of total existence and reality, we cannot escape from the violent effect of its suggestion." (*The Philosophy of Mysticism*, p.65)

Time is conceived to be a dimension, but beyond that, all attempts to define it meet with little success. It is commonly divided between an "A" series which corresponds to the most obvious aspect of passing-time, and a "B" series, which consists of the contents of the time process, and the interactions of these two series make up what we know as time. Is time inseparable from the events which take place in it, or is it an empty dimension into which events may or may not be

inserted? The former option would mean a qualitative idea of time, as found in traditional wisdom, while the latter would be that of modern quantitative science. The former alternative would mean that all parts of time are members of a continuum to which they all belong equally, while the quantitative idea would make the events of time as accidental to time as the objects in space are to space.

Common sense inclines to the idea of temporal events as accidental contents, while confining itself to the so-called "A" series, where everything is in either past, or present, or future. The "B" series, which consists of the physical contents of the time-series, gets little or no attention in popular thought, despite the fact that the "A" series has no meaning for either science or philosophy, because it is rooted in the subjective conditions of experience. This unreflecting attachment to the "A" series is owing to an almost instinctive belief that only the present is real. This belief is the root of the illusions to which the passage of time gives rise. Thus the perception of everything being subject to the relentless cycle of mortality follows perfectly logically from the postulate that all reality resides in present time. The main question, therefore, is why this postulate is hardly ever challenged.

The pursuit of universal truths leaves little room for the temporal relations of things which matter in our personal lives. "Past," "present," and "future" might characterize the intrinsic natures of the things concerned, as common sense supposes, but they could just as well be understood as merely expressions for our *relations* to temporal things, in which case they would say nothing about those things in themselves; in that respect they would be just like "here" and "there" and

"near" and "far" applied to objects in space, these being also words which say nothing about the objects in themselves.

Only the Present is Real? The usual preference for the "A" series therefore comes from a mixture of practicalities and subjectivity, and not from any attempt to understand the world in depth. This is where illusion arises, especially where we are led to think of past, present, and future in watertight compartments, with things present having a degree of reality much greater than that of those in the past and future. The past as such is taken to have so little reality that it would consist in little more than people's memories, written records, and audio-visual images. The present, on the other hand, is taken to be fully real, and to be besides the container of everything which makes up one's own reality. This is because it is the locus of all our practical business, as well as the fact that the present alone is known by sense-perception. Although memory, reason and imagination are also used in the present, they are the only means by which we can relate to the past and the future, because nothing in them is open to the five senses. Almost instinctively, that is taken to denote an inferior degree of reality in them, if they have any at all.

This is what creates the illusion of passing-time, with its uniquely real present and the shadowy past and future. The mindset revealed by this is the cause of a vast amount of suffering to those who are ruled by it. The picture it presents is one of irretrievable loss involving oneself and everyone else, and is all the worse for appearing to be based on direct evidence. As a result, "looking back" is nearly always

identified with wallowing in nostalgia, and useless longings for what can never return. This is almost the opposite of its valid purpose, visiting outlying parts of one's own property to keep them all in mind and judging how they could be improved. Thus one's past failings can be rectified in the light of experience. It is never suspected that the past does not return because it has never really been away.

There is an analogy with perspective distortion here, where a small object seen in the distance is seen to get bigger as we approach it, and to reach its full size when we get to it, and then get smaller again as we move on. Could this full-size view of the object we are next to when we reach it be like the special reality of the experienced present time? The analogy is not complete, however, in that all the views of the object in space are equally contents of sense-perception, while in time only the present moment is given in sense-perception, but not the past and future, which are known by reason and inference.

But despite the feeling of certainty which attaches to the perception of the past as no longer real, no one is ever able to say exactly how or whether anything is destroyed or nullified as it goes from the present to the past, or to suggest any mechanism or evidence for such changes. This would suggest that only the "B" series is fully real, even though it is outside both the practical and subjective needs of human life equally. In the "B" series, all its parts are equally real, and that must be the case regardless of different degrees of accessibility to our faculties. The fact there is no sense-perception of an object in its states before our present time proves nothing, as is shown by the fact that where one object in the past was

destroyed, while all the other things with it remained, there would still be no sense-perception of the things that were *not* destroyed, any more than of the object that was destroyed. Nevertheless, the mind of the average person fails to distinguish between lack of direct accessibility and physical destruction or nullification.

Thus lack of sense-evidence cannot prove anything about either the existence or non-existence of things in the past. We are so used to the senses being able to decide the existence or non-existence of things in the present that we forget that this function does not extend beyond the present. However, there are other reasons why the past is taken to be unreal. If the most essential part of time is the "B" series, one's own existence and that of innumerable other life-forms and objects would then apparently have to exist in as many closely-similar copies as there have been intervals of time.

But the idea that countless related but separate instances of oneself might have to exist, all to make up the same time-series, would be just as hard to make sense of as the physical destruction of everything which ceases to be present. At any rate, this question shows how the equal reality of all parts of time is resisted because it could lead us into complexities which most of us have no idea how to deal with.

Paradoxes of Common Sense Time. In reality, the idea of innumerable instances of oneself and of others is unworkable because it would make the question of which one was the real person unanswerable. If all these instances of oneself were real, our self-unity, on which our identity depends, would be scattered beyond recovery. A more rational answer would be

that all these related states of existence must be so many accretions or extensions-of-existence in one and the same person, animal or object, extending through the "B" series. What you are today is an *addition* to what you were yesterday (whether advantageous or not), and thus one's real self grows continually in a way similar to the way a tree keeps adding more rings, or the narrative of a book develops as you turn its pages.

Besides the problem of how the self can exist at many times simultaneously while remaining one, the supposed unreality of the past, if taken literally, would also mean that everything is being annihilated *and then re-created out of nothing* a moment later, only to be annihilated again in the next moment, and so on, and moreover, without anyone noticing that this was going on. This is obviously an absurd conclusion and a travesty of the way God holds all creation in existence, but it is implicit in the belief that the past ceases to be. In any case, annihilation or negation gets more than enough prominence from the fact that the world, as the senses grasp it, is dominated by a universal pattern for which everything is seen to come into existence, develop, and then decline, perish, and revert to nothing.

Even if the difference between the present and the past was less extreme than this, we would still have to believe that things entering the present have reality magically put into them, while things entering the past have reality magically taken out of them. Such thinking reveals a failure to understand what "reality" means, because it is being treated as though it were simply one more natural phenomenon among others, with its property being communicated to other things in the way that coldness comes from ice, and sweetness from

sugar. None of that is true of reality as such, because things are either intrinsically real or not real in a way which comes from their essences and not from their relations to other phenomena.

The imagined confinement of all reality to the present time results in the nightmare picture of physical reality which Buddhism makes so much of, along with pessimistic forms of thought in general. We perceive things continually perishing in the world, and get the impression that all things must fall irresistibly into non-existence, as though their cessation in our present time was a manifestation of their unreality outside our perception as well. Where the present is taken for the fullest reality, the cessation of anything there is taken to mean the cessation of all its previous temporal states. The clearest alternative conception would be a single real psycho-corporeal self which undergoes continual expansions or additions with every moment of its life. This would not require any quasi-magical changes. This property of continual expansion was perceived in the soul by Heraclitus, for whom it was part of personal identity:

"To the soul belongs a *logos* that increases itself," which goes on endlessly, and makes the soul boundless. (Edward Hussey, *The Presocratics*, p.57).

In this case, what common sense takes to be death is to a large extent illusory, if we consider exactly what it is that dies when some person is said to have died. Clearly it cannot be any part of the person at any of the times which preceded the moment of death, because nothing can traverse time backwards and do any harm to what went before. In that case,

what death can put an end to must be an extremely small part of the real self, that being only one from among its innumerable self-extensions, while soul and spirit remain themselves. Where this applies to the destruction of non-living physical objects, the entire entity comes to an end, but without any loss of the being and reality it had up to the moment of its destruction. On the other hand, every embodied being thus has its own timespan or *aeon* which is part of its essential nature, and however short it may be, it remains one of the abiding realities of the universe, precisely as that entity as such. What we think has "ceased to be" has merely ceased to have any more of its time-span in parallel with the timespan inhabited by ourselves, and so is no longer accessible for us.

Plato's Treatment of Time. The view of time for which all temporal states are equally real does not appear to have much support among philosophers, or by literary tradition as a whole, but Plato's understanding of it is different, and can be seen in a remarkable passage in the *Parmenides*:

"We may infer that the One, if it is such as we have described, cannot even occupy time at all. Whatever occupies time must always be becoming older than itself, and 'older' always means older than something younger. Consequently, whatever is becoming older than itself, if it is to have something than which it is becoming older, must also be at the same time becoming younger than itself... Consequently, what is becoming older than itself must at the same time be becoming younger than itself." (141 B-C, Cornford tr).

Cornford shows that this is not a sophism, as some have thought, but he still relates it only to the widening interval between the older self and the younger self, and their logical relation:

"Consequently, whatever is becoming older than itself, if it is to have something *than* which it is becoming older, must also be at the same time becoming younger than itself." (*Plato and Parmenides*, p.127)

He never considers the natural implication, namely, that for Plato, all the parts of an entity in time must be equally real, so that each of its earlier states must in reality be becoming younger in relation to the later ones, and not just logically. It appears that Plato took this to be self-evident, as he offers no reasons for it. It is remarkable that the present-time illusion should be so strong that even great minds cannot shake it off, even when it would be logically appropriate. Like nearly everyone else, Cornford does not pause to consider the wider implication that if the present time had the exclusive reality which most people believe it to have, Platonic philosophy as such would be radically wrong, as it bases knowledge on reason, not on sense-data. The present is the state most open to change, and the one most filled with change, whence the belief that it is the fullest reality, which would leave no basis for the eternal and universal truths sought by Platonists.

One point to notice about this dialogue is that Plato does not make anyone in the discussion protest at the seeming paradox of getting older and younger at the same time.

Instead, it is simply presented and accepted without further justification. In this case it is not at all surprising that Plato should have thought that the present time should have no privilege in terms of reality. This is consistent with the Platonic idea of the intellect and the senses as different bases for understanding the world:

"Did we not say some time ago that when the soul uses the instrumentality of the body for any enquiry, whether through sight or hearing or any other sense – because using the body implies using the sense – it is drawn away by the body into the realm of the variable, and loses its way and becomes confused and dizzy, as though it were fuddled, through contact with things of a similar nature? Certainly. But when it investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it and strays no longer. . . ." (Phaedo 79 c-d).

These two ways of knowing would thus correspond to the realms of passing-time and of permanent time, and we are able to attend to the one and ignore the other.

Bodily Permanence and Immortality. The permanence of our psycho-physical being is relevant to the question as to whether the soul can ever be truly disembodied. During natural life, the corporeal, psychic and spiritual components of the being run in parallel, but after death, the psychic and spiritual powers no longer have the function of animating the body, but they remain in continuity with the functions they had before death. They are in a sense still embodied, owing to

their relation to the body they had formerly, therefore, since their "disembodied" state is physically continuous with all the embodied states which went before. If they are re-embodied subsequently with a body of a superior kind of matter, as according to the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, this would not alter the nature of the soul, but simply transfer it to another and greater aeon. Conversely, if the soul really could be disembodied, it would thereby cease to be a human soul, since man is by definition a union of body, soul, and spirit whether in this life or the next. In the spiritual order, such changes of nature are not possible, because it is spirit, e.g. Forms, which dictate identity, not the body or anything material which has no intrinsic identity.

Any loss of the physical body would not in any case include the *spirit body*, otherwise called the *Ochema Pneuma* or the *Augoeides*, which for later Platonism, though not Christianity, is understood to mediate between the soul and the body of gross matter, and to be permanently joined to the soul.

Space-Time Combinations. It is not hard to argue for the position that every moment of every existence is situated in a unique combination of space and time, a combination of the three spatial dimensions, further specified by a moment in time. Out of countless parts of space and time, just one of each can combine in a uniquely individual manner which is immovably secure against all that can happen at earlier and later times. The same applies to every future position of object or person. A whole life, as lived up to any point, is unique to an even higher degree, since this would be the uniqueness of one space-time combination raised to a power

equal to the number of such combinations making up the life or existence. There is a mathematical property in this, which makes it very hard to see how it could be over-ridden so as to make the past unreal.

Another negative consequence of taking the present to be the truest reality comes from the fact that the present is invariably in a state of change. Being mostly made up of change, it is impossible to define the reality we ascribe to it or find in it, since definitions require stability and fixity. Nevertheless, the modern view of time is psychologically blocked against Platonic thought. In default of stable definitions, we cannot know what we are talking about. Plato says there is no real knowledge of sense objects, on the grounds that such objects are in constant change, and this is usually taken to refer to the mutability of the things in themselves. But not only is this true of them, but the whole field of experience in which these things are embedded is changing even more swiftly and uncontrollably than they are. Thus the relations between the objects of perception, and the relations between the observer and the things observed are constantly changing, even where the objects show little or no change.

Knowledge of the past and the future, being so much the more composed of rational reflections and inferences than knowledge of the present, is in most respects more reliable and useful than the knowledge we have of the present, for all its immediacy. An example of this would be the question of personal identity: if it was known only by sense perception, it could only be understood materialistically, whereas its

spiritual nature can be known only through memory and rational inferences, given that they apply to abidingly real things. This equal reality of past and present, besides being an obvious basis for unique personal identities, is also affirmed in Scripture in connection with the righteous dead: "Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds (or works) follow them." (Rev.14 v.14) Here, past and present remain equally real beyond this life.

A Plotinian Problem. Plotinus raises the question as to whether the repetition of any experience, whether pleasant or painful, can ever increase one's total amount of good or bad, and whether we really have any less if we have received them in just one instance. More of the same may perhaps not make any real addition to the total good we have. (See *Keys of Gnosis*, by R.Bolton, Ch.6, ref Enn.I,5,3, and I,5,6)). These texts show that Plotinus, like nearly everyone else, thinks that the past is literally non-existent, where he says (Enn.I,5,10), that to add up a total of happiness from both past and present instances is *to combine non-existents with things that actually exist*.

If even Plotinus could think that the past no longer existed, despite all his authority as a source of Platonic thought, his belief in this idea was still only an unwitting result of popular thinking, only held because of never having been properly examined. The idea that things can cease to exist without any kind of violence done to them, as though they were products of the imagination, is a result of confusion between the imaginary and the material. All material existents are resistant to pressures which would destroy them,

and such pressures could only entail some kind of violence. However, no such violence is ever known in the normal temporal transitions from present to past. Neither does material existence, for example, behave like that of effects of light and shade.

If we were to share the assumption that past things no longer exist, it could still be seen that Plotinus makes a valid point, in that the perceiving subject is not enriched by the repetition of experiences, and that, without a real past, there would be no place in which they could all be added up. The only good of repetition would be to deepen the original impression. But if the past still does exist, the repetition of goods and evils would still be surplus, as before, but now the repeated experiences would remain and form a real collectivity. Further additions of the same things would be less necessary than before, but the addition-sum of the experiences (necessary or not) would objectively exist in the form of the life of the person who lives through them, given that all temporal states are equally real. This would make repetition even less necessary than it would be in the assumption that only the present is real. Plotinus could be said to weaken his argument in this instance by assuming that only the present is real.

In Enn. III, 7, Plotinus gives a sustained treatment of time, but mainly to refute false or tautologous definitions of it. Its origin is said to be in the activity of the World Soul, and likewise in all other souls according to their capacities. The "desire of succession" was latent in the Authentic Existent and fully realised in the Soul, in "the establishment of ever-new difference. . ." "For the Soul

contained an unquiet faculty, always desirous of translating elsewhere what it saw in the Authentic Realm, and it could not bear to retain within itself the dense fullness of its possession." (Enn. III, 7, 11)

Besides, "in going forth from itself, it (the Soul) fritters its unity away; it advances into *weaker greatness*." (Ibid.) There is nothing in all this which has any bearing on the idea that only the present can be real. The Soul's desire for an expansive serial activity which always falls short of the reality of the Authentic leads unavoidably to the formation of the world of instantiations. Plotinus does not say this directly, but asserts that the Soul's activity realises a lower degree of reality in which quantity abounds. What could that be if not a series of instantiations? Thus for Plotinus it involves "(a quantitative phase) of the Life of the Soul, a Principle moving forward by smooth uniform changes following silently upon each other - a Principle, then, whose Act is (not like that of the Supreme but) *sequent*." (Ibid.)

A Form cannot be physically manifest as such, because its content is too great, and therefore it appears as a series of related images. As such, there are no grounds for thinking that any of these images or instantiations should be less real than others. Even less are there grounds for thinking that any of them should spontaneously cease to exist, as he supposed would happen when events enter the past. In short, the problem here is that Plotinus' thought is so much concerned with eternity rather than with time, that he does not treat time in sufficient depth.

A Deceptive Objection. What in space would be continual expansion is, in time, continual extension or prolongation. Here, there is but one entity, the same in all parts of its time-span, which has no extrinsic limitations, unlike its limits in space. What one perceives of it at any one time would, on this basis, result from its continuity with all its previous states. The reality of those previous states would thus be the necessary basis for the reality it has at the present time. The reality of the present would in this case be proof of the reality of the past.

However, this simple argument is open to the objection that the necessity for a cause does not require the existence of that cause beyond the time needed for it to have its effect. We are all descended from innumerable ancestors, nearly all of whom have long since died. Clearly, a permanent causal connection does not appear to be needed to account for the existence of ourselves or of any other living entities. This may well be one of the main reasons why people habitually think of the past as unreal, and yet it is also clear that this objection cannot be extended to the existence of inanimate objects. We know how successive generations propagate themselves down to our own time, but we have no idea how a silver coin, minted a hundred years ago, can have caused the one we see here today, if the past is unreal. To be real now, the coin must have been equally real at all times between its manufacture and now. Any break in this continuum would mean it would have ceased to exist whenever the break took place.

There is a deep confusion here: the propagation of life from

one generation to the next is by no means the same thing as the preservation of living beings in the time dimension, or that of material objects, as in the case of the coin. What happens is a confusion between the original production of any entity, living or non-living, with the subsequent continuation of that entity through the time following that production. It is only the latter which is at issue here. To create or make or procreate an entity is to cause it to enter into the time-stream or Aeon where it began. Once it exists, it continues by its own self-expansion in time. This property of time is therefore not productive or originative as such, but it is conservative of its content, and what brings any existence to an end can therefore result only either from the action of other entities like itself or from its own inner conflicts.

Consequently, the above objection to the reality of the present being dependent on the equal reality of the past is in fact a red herring, for all its psychological effect. What brings about the end of any being has its effect only in the brief temporal extension of that being required for death or destruction to take place, but it can have no effect on its previous states, all the way back to its origin. Thus things in time only come to an end in the way that the top of a table comes to an end at its edge.

If the above reasoning is correct, the constantly-experienced ephemerality of persons and things does not mean that they cease to exist, but that their existence is confined to a realm to which our senses have no access. The immortality of the soul is affected by this because it would now reside in a world where permanence is the norm. In this case, it would

no longer be a lone protest against a law that everything must pass away. Granted that a limited and mundane kind of immortality is involved in this, it is one upon which spiritual immortality can readily develop.

Our Two Psychological Systems. To say that we all have two psychological systems working together may appear an extreme conclusion from the oppositions observed between reality as sense-perception and reality as intellect, and between passing-time and permanent time. However, these are no more extreme than the opposition between the self understood as an object in the world, and the self understood as the container of the world in representation. (See "S & S" Ch.2). The primary duality is the first of the three referred to, namely, the choice of understanding through either the senses or through the intellect. The other two derive from it.

However, the common peculiarity of these three pairs of oppositions is that each one of them presents us with the option of living according to just one out of two possibilities and ignoring the other, which may not raise any practical problems. This is why it is said (e.g. by Maurice Nicoll), that there are two different psychological systems in us, regardless of whether these are integrated and harmonised or not. The distinction between intellect and reason can be seen to arise from the four universal levels of being, firstly the inorganic material or mineral level, secondly that of life, thirdly that of consciousness, and fourthly that of self-aware consciousness. (see: E.F.Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*). It is the third and fourth of these which are

manifest to us as reason and intellect respectively. (see R.Bolton, *Keys of Gnosis* Ch.3)

The human state comprises all four of these levels of being; life is common to vegetal, animal, and human species equally, while sensory consciousness is common to the animal and human species. Thus man has a consciousness like that of the animals, which registers external objects, while he also has the fourth level of reality for which the sensory consciousness and all its contents is itself an object. Thus, what is the conscious subject on level three is an object for the self-aware consciousness. These are the levels of consciousness which I have called the "First order" and "Second order" in *Person, Soul and Identity: Philosophy and the Real Self*. What is *subject* for the third level, then, is *object* for the fourth, hence there follows the inverse relation between these two branches of intelligence; neither can be simply an extension of the other.

What, then, keeps the level three and the level four branches of intelligence in relation? This is necessarily reason, since it is common to them both. It is one of the universals of level four (or intellect), with application to Forms or universals, while it relates equally directly to particulars in the sense-bound realm of consciousness common to mankind and the animals, i.e. level three, where it is the only part of level three which has the universality of level four. This is why consciousness or level three has an appearance of self-sufficiency or completeness.

These two levels, three and four, could be called those of the Participant and of the Observer. Our true consciousness

(or being) is that of a union of the two with the Participant in a subordinate position. If it is mistakenly thought that the Observer represents mere passivity, it is clear that if the function of the Participant was represented by the driver's operation of the clutch, gears and steering-wheel of a car, the Observer would be the perception of the road ahead, a different order of activity, but still utterly essential.

This polarity between the third level and the fourth level of consciousness is the basis of the polarity already referred to, between the common sense identity of the self and that of identity as the container both of the former and of the world in which the self of common sense moves. The fact that the third order consciousness is an object for the fourth order means that the whole world of third order conscious contents is also object for it. Thus consciousness of a world as a whole is typical of the highest grade of consciousness, which manifests its status as spirit, or *capax universi*; whereas the third order grasps only particulars. Here we can find the true meaning of the oracular statement of Gurdjieff that: "Your level of being attracts your life;" this level of being is in fact level four; and how strongly (or not) the person is integrated with it, determines his hold on life.

Given these levels of being, human nature always has freedom of choice as to which level it wants chiefly to identify itself with, and all too often this is not the fourth level, but the third, simply because it is the one most directly conducive to material gain and power over other persons. A form of power is indeed obtained on this level, until it reveals its inevitable limitations, and conflicts with others

making the same choice. This duality between the third and fourth levels is also manifest in the two different experiences of time presented above, where the world of passing-time belongs to the third level of being, with its constant focus on the five senses and the consequent non-existence of past and future which the senses do not reach.

I have called this the world of illusion, even though it is verifiably real according to its own criteria. This is because there is no more dangerous source of illusion than a partial reality which is taken for all reality, and it can easily appear to untrained thought that the difficulty in challenging it is a result of the apparently greater power of the third level of being. However, the highest power comes in reality from the fourth level, however hard this is for common sense alone to understand. A contemplative and almost other-worldly state of being would seem to have no defence against harm from external forces. However, the greater the hegemony of the fourth level, the more it frees one not so much from external forces, as from the *possibility* of such hostile action, as well as from accidental harm, because all forms of harmful conflict are confined to the first three levels of being; only like can interact with like. Here is the root of the central paradox of human life, that the greatest and most enduring self-power comes from a close relation to God, normally mediated by the intellect, ("level 4"), and not from a mastery of all kinds of physical force as are manifest in the sense world ("level 3"). Attempts to invert or reverse this order can come only from delusion and end in wickedness.

The authentic relation to time must therefore be a combination of passing-time and permanent time in which

passing-time has always a very subordinate position, just as the real self is a combination of self-as-object in the outside world and as container of that outside world. Here one can see the point of Parmenides' denial of the reality of change: real or permanent time belongs to his "Way of Truth" and passing-time to his "Way of Seeming." The choice is that of identifying with one's role in one or the other of these alternatives. Under real time, everything one has ever had and everything one has been remain real and belong to one for ever, and they are the basis of everything which one may reach in the course of one's future development.

21st.Dec.19 – 17th.March 20.

A Postscript Concerning Mysticism. In view of the above discussion of time, there appears to be a law that the higher the state of being, the less it is bound by time, and the more extended the time-series in which it exists. This has a direct bearing on what many mystics say about the higher states they have experienced. They usually attribute the difficulty in describing what they experienced to the nature of our mental faculties. Those faculties, they say, are designed only for knowing the inferior level of reality we have here. Even the relation of subject and object, and the sense of its belonging to the self are treated as signs of its ultimate inadequacy.

But in the light of the conception of real time as described here, our cognitive limitations are above all owing to the shortness of time on the psycho-physical level of this life. It gives no grounds for supposing an inadequacy in the nature of our faculties themselves; after all they suffice for us to

have a knowledge of God, even in our present state of being. If the rule is, the higher the state of being, the less limited it is in time, at the highest level, as C.S.Lewis says, God has all eternity to attend to a prayer which took only one or two seconds in our time. In this case it would follow that the deficiencies that mystics find in consciousness as we know it can be explained by the shortness of time in this world, i.e. because of the way that the length of an average human lifetime dictates the time-spans available for all the activities contained in it.

At higher levels of being, then, the effectiveness of our faculties becomes less and less of an issue, in proportion as they have ever-longer time scales in which to operate. In this case, alternatives like that of the cessation of self-aware consciousness, offered by the mystics, can only be an irrelevance.

28th.Apr. 2020