



Time and Eternity (II)

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HINDUISM

In SA. VII, cf. AA. II.3.5 ff., a series of progenitive triads is expounded on the analogy of grammatical crasis. *Samdhi*, the crasis of prior and posterior forms [e.g. as Sayana says, of *a + i*], really neither confuses nor splits them apart. To pronounce in Nirbhujā fashion without distinction [as *e*] is appropriate for one who desires only food, earth (this world); to pronounce them in Pratrna fashion separately [as *ai*] is appropriate for one who desires only the sky (yonder world); to pronounce them in Ubhayamantarena fashion, i.e. in the intervenient Middle Way [as *ai*, diphthong], includes both and is appropriate for one who desires both worlds, and so “the mode that declares the crasis is their harmony (*saman*),¹ combination or union (*samhita*)”.

In general, the “prior form” is the mother, the “posterior form” the father, their combination or union (*samhita*) the child. Analogous triads are, *in divinis*, Earth and Sky, parents of the Gale or Lightning or Time (*kala*): or subjectively, within you, Voice and Mind, parents of the Breath, or Truth, or Knowledge, or Self; and Prescience² and Faith, parents of Sacrificial-Action (*karma*).³ But the most significant from the present point of view is the further triad, procession (*gati = pravrtti*) and recession (*nivrtti*), parents of stasis (*sthiti*). All measures of time, from *dhvamsi*’s up to Years, are united in this union (*samhita*), that of the Stasis,— “it unites these times” (*kalan samdadhati*). The text goes on: “Time (*kala*) unites procession, recession, and stasis, and by these All This (world, or universe) is united.”⁴ That is, *in divinis*. Subjectively, psychologically, “the past (*bhutam*) is the prior and the future (*bhavyam*) the posterior form, and the present (*bhavat*)⁵ is their union (*samhita*), or product.” In illustration of this, the Aranyaka quotes RV.X.55.2, “Great is that hidden Name, and far extending, whereby thou madest past⁶ and Future (*bhutam... bhavyam*)” and might have cited AV.XIX.53.5 and 54.3: “Sent forth by Time (*kala*), what hath been and shall be stand apart... Time hath engendered what hath been and shall be,” and KU.IV.13 “Lord of what hath been and shall be, He is both today and tomorrow,” and AV.X.7.22: “Wherein what hath been and shall be, and all worlds are instant (*prati-tisthata*), tell me thou of that Pillar (*skambha*, Axis Mundi), what it may be.”

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Note, above, (1) that Time is on a par with Lightning and (2) the words, “Time unites procession, recession, and stasis” (*kalo gatinivrtti-sthitih samdadhati*, SA.VII.20). This last can only mean that here Time (as in AV.XIX.53 where Time is the *source* of past and present, and so cannot be identified with either one or both of these durations) is a static *point*, that of the Stasis in which the two contrary motions *momentarily* coincide, but which otherwise separates them. The root in *sthit* is *stha*, to “stand,” “exist,” “be in a given state,” implying stability, and contrasting with *gam*, or *car*, *cal*, to “go” or “move,” implying instability: “what goes” and “what stands” together making up the whole of the existence of which the Sun is the Self (RV.I.115.1). The contrast of “standing” with “going” may be noted in Mbh.XIII. 96.6 where the Sun “stands at mid-day for half a twinkling of an eye”; that is not, of course, to be thought of as a measurable period of time but a 'split second.' For even for those who thought of the sun as daily ascending and descending, a real pause in the Zenith was always miraculous,⁷ and neither does the revolution of the earth, which makes the sun seem to rise and decline, ever stop.⁸

On the other hand, as in the case of the miracles cited,⁷ so in that of the Comprehensor, the Sun⁹ “having risen in the Zenith, will no more rise nor set, but will stand (*sthatr*) in the middle . . . For the Comprehensor of this Brahmapanisad, it is once-and-for-all (*sakrt*) day” (CU.III.11.1,3).¹⁰ And, also, with reference to Brahma, “there is this indication: *in divinis*, That in the Lightning that flashes forth and makes one blink (*nyamimisat*); and within you, That which, as it were, comes to the mind, and by which one instantly (*abhiksnam*) remembers, — that concept (*samkalpa*)” (Kena Up.IV.4,5).¹¹

In AV.XIX.53 and 54, cited above, “Time” — absolutely - is the source of all relative times; not itself a duration, but rather the Timeless, Eternity, to which all moveable time is ever present. It is in these terms that the Maitri Upanisad distinguishes the “two forms” (*dve rupe*) of Brahman, i.e. aspects of the two natures (*dvaitibhava*)¹² of the single essence (*tad ekam*), as “time and the Timeless (*kalas-cakalas-ca*).” From one who worships, thinking “Time is Brahma” (*kalam brahmeti*), time (*kala*, also death)¹³ reflows afar. As it has been said:

From Time flow forth all beings,
From Time advance to their full growth,
And in Time, again, win home,-
“Time” is the formed (*murti*) and formless, both.

There are, indeed, two forms of Brahma; time, and the Timeless. That which is prior to the sun is the Timeless (*akala*) and partless (*akala*); but that which begins with the sun is the time that has parts (*sakala*), and its form is that of the Year... Prajapati... Self.¹⁴ As it has been said:

The time (that has parts) cooks (*pacati*, matures) all things,
In the Great Self, indeed;
But the Comprehensor of That (Time without parts) in which time itself
Is cooked, *he* knows the Vedas!

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This extended (*vigraha*, specific, hypostasised) time is the regal-river of begotten beings... (the ultimate source) of All This here, and of whatever fair or foul there is to be seen in the world” (MU.VI.14-16).¹⁵

“Other than “has been” and “shall be,” without beginning or end, Lord of what has been and shall be, He alone is today and tomorrow” (KU.II.14, III.15, IV.13). He, then, “who is partless, the constant amongst the inconstant, the One of the many, all-maker, all-knower, immortal, omnipresent is the “creator of time” (*kalakalah*, *kalakarah*, Svet. Up. VI. 13-19): “at the command (*ajna*, as a verb, primarily to know, hence to exercise authority) of that Imperishable (*aksara*, also “Word,” Logos) the moments (*nimesa*), hours, days, ... and years exist apart” (*vidhrtas tisthanti*, BU.III.8.9). And such is what William Morris rightly calls “the entering in of time from the halls of the outer heaven.”

For the *Yoga Sutra Bhasya* III.52, a moment (*ksana*) is the “ultimate minimum of time, and cannot be further divided up... and the continuous flow of such moments is their “course” (*krama*)... Their uninterrupted course is what is called “time”... The whole world passes through a mutation in any one moment; so all the external qualities of the world are relative to this present moment.” The control of the moments and their sequence leads to a discriminative gnosis, of which the final development (*ibid.* 54), “the Deliverer” (*taraka*), “has all things for its object, and all times, without-regard-to-their-course (*akrama*) as its object.” It will be seen that this is the same procedure that is described in the Buddhist *Kalacakra* tantra cited below; it reminds us also of Meister Eckhart's saying, “Not till the soul knows all that there is to be known, can she pass over to the unknown good.”

Reference must also be made to the Indian “atomism.” The word *anu*, often synonymous with *suksma*, “subtle” or “acute” (cf. *suci*, “needle”), is not literally “atom”, but does mean “indivisible particle or principle,” so that *anu*, or *paramanu* and *anutva*, are the real equivalents of “atom” and “atomicity,” and may be translated accordingly; the related *ani* is the sharp “point” of anything, such as an axle or needle; and I render *animan* by “minimum,” though in some contexts it stands rather for the *power* to assume the “minimum” form (which is really that of the “thread-spirit,” *sutratman*), in which alone it becomes a possibility to pass through “solid matter” or wherever there is no dimension through which to pass. Furthermore, and just as *atomos* can be used of either spatial or temporal minima, so the reference of *anu* may be either to a “point” of space, without dimension, or to a “point” of time, without duration.

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NOTES FOR CHAPTER ON HINDUISM

- ¹ Evidently to be taken here in the sense of the hermeneia *saman* = *sa* + *ama* “she and he,” as in AB.III.23, JUB.I.53.4, and CU.VI.1 and 7, cf. my *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power...*, 51 ff.
- ² *Prajna*: Keith's mistaken and unintelligible “offspring” merely reflects the misprint *praja* in his own edition of the text, *Aitareya Aranyaka*, 1909, 210.
- ³ Cf. SB XI.3.1; and AB.VII.10 where the sacrificer represents Truth, and his wife, Faith.
- ⁴ Essentially, this is the doctrine attributed by Ramanuja to the Jains: “Time’ is a particular atomic substance which is the cause of the current distinction of past, present and future” (in comment on BrS H.2.31, SBE XLVIII, p. 516).
- ⁵ Note that *bhavat*, as an honorific, is also “Presence,” as, e.g. Milton, “Sov’ran Presence,” and cf. the doctrine of “Total Presence.”
- ⁶ Keith's “present” is an obvious slip, as he has, rightly, “past,” for *bhutam*, above.

It may be worth noting in the present context that “the original sense of the perfect was not distinguished from the present in point of time but denotes a state” and that this “oldest sense is common in the Rgveda... [“past”] participles which express a completed action whose results persist into the present,” Keith, *Aitareya Aranyaka*, 1909, p. 211, n.8 and 247, n.1. Examples of participles are “the originally timeless force of the form *kṛtya*” (*ibid.* p. 179, n.1, cf. Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar* 889, 894). Something of the same sort can also be recognized in that kind of ancient art in which successive events of what is verbally expressed by narrative are represented as if occurring simultaneously, in one and the same frame. Again, in Genesis, no time interval can be inferred as between “Let there be light” and “There was light,” which is also the light that is now. The common Buddhist expression *yatha bhutam*, “as become,” used with reference to things “as they really are” implies the ripening of past causation in present effect. Some scholars assume that such forms as *he may*, *he can*, “are survivals of a primitive atemporal era, when “preterits” were used indifferently for the present” (G. Bonfante, in *Word* I, 1945, p. 148). “To the Hopi, time is not cut up into segments which can be measured, like an hour, a day, or a year, but it is rather conceived as a duration, in which the Law is being fulfilled” (Laura Thompson, “Logico-aesthetic Integration in Hopi Culture, *American Anthropologist* 47, 1945, p. 542): “Once we have rid our minds of the idea of parts of Time ... all the notes are held together by the uninterrupted succession which in this case is the tune” (F. H. Brabant, *Time and Eternity in Christian Thought*, 1937, p.177). As I have often remarked, the “long ago” or “once upon a time” with which our fairytales *begin* are really timeless expressions.

- ⁷ As in J.I.58 where the sun stands still above the Bodhisatta, for so long as he is plunged in *jhana*, but still moves for others, and this is expressly a *patiharya*; and Joshua 10:13 “the sun stood still in the midst of heaven.”
- ⁸ Consider a stone, thrown into the air vertically; how long does it “hang” in the air before it begins to fall again? The answer to this depends upon the fact that the vertical projection of a missile, which first rises and then falls, is only the limiting case of a course that is really curved. When a missile is projected not merely upwards but at the same time forwards, it also rises first and then falls; but its course is an unbroken curve, and we do not even imagine that it stops or hangs for however short a time at the highest point of the curve; and in the same way in the case of vertical projection there is no actual time, however short, during which it “hangs,” but only a point without duration in which the upward and downward motions, past and future, *meet*.

The problem is fully dealt with by Aristotle, who shows that when the direction of motion of a continuously moving object is reversed we cannot properly say that the object “has reached” or “has left” the point at which the reversal takes place, “but only that it ‘is there at an instantaneous ‘now’ and not in any space or period of time at all” (Wicksteed and Cornford's rendering). The point at which the reversal takes place is no more an actual stopping place than are any of the other of the indefinitely numerous points on the way, in each of which the object *might* have stopped but did not.

To avoid any possible confusion, it should be realised that the final “coming to rest” of the object on the ground is not a “stasis,” but only a condition of relative immobility for some period of time beginning from the terminus of the particular kind of motion first considered; though this does not arise in connection with the sun or earth, of which the motion is continuously of the same kind. In any case, “all rest is in time” (*Phys.IV.* 12,221 B).

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- ⁹ Here the “intelligible Sun,” — “not the sun whom all men see, but the Sun whom not all know with the mind,” AV.X.8.14, i.e., Apollo as distinguished from Helios, Plutarch, *Moralia* 393 D, “the Sun of the Angels” as distinguished from “the sun of sense,” Dante, *Paradiso* X.53,54, Philo's “Sun of the sun,” Spec.1.279.
- ¹⁰ “Thy sun shall nevermore go down,” Isaiah 60:20; “There all is one day, series has no place; no yesterday, no tomorrow,” Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.4.7; “the eternal day which neither dawns nor sets,” St. Augustine *In Ps.* CXXXVIII. Many other parallels could be cited, e.g., SB. XII.2.2.23, and St. Augustine, Conf.XI.13.16.
- ¹¹ Lightning is the standard symbol of divine manifestation, revelation and illumination, a brilliance “like lightning in that it lights up the whole body at once,” MU.VII.11; “in the Lightning, Truth,” Kaus.Up. IV.2. “The Person in the Lightning is the Breath, the Harmony (*sâman*), Brahma, the Immortal; as it were a sudden (*sakrt*) flash of lightning, and even such is his splendour who is a Comprehensor thereof” (JUB.I.26.8+BU.II.3.6). *Sakrt* is “one-making,” “once,” “but once” (Macdonell, *Vedic Grammar* 306,409, Keith, *Sanskrit Literature* 229); the opposite of *asakrt*, “recurrent,” MU.II.4.
- “Suddenly a light, as if from a leaping fire, will be enkindled in the soul,” Plato, *Ep.* 7; “the principle of knowledge, that is conceptual, pure, and simple, flashes through the soul like lightning and offers itself in a single moment's experience to apprehension and vision,” Plutarch, *De Iside* c.77; “the moment of (supreme) illumination is short-lived, and passes like a flash of lightning” (Eckhart, Evans' ed. I. 255); “suddenly there shone from heaven a great light,” Acts XXII:6; “the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses,” (Numbers XII:4). Many other parallels could be cited.
- ¹² MU.VII.11.8; cf. BU.II.3, MU. VI.22 etc.
- ¹³ “Day and night are death, but they do not affect the divinity Aditya (Sol invictus), for they are only the occasion of his rising and setting” (*Vadhula Sutra*), but really “he never rises nor sets” (AB.III.44), “for the Comprehensor it is evermore high noon” (CU.III. 11.3).
- ¹⁴ The solar Self (*atman*), transcendent and immanent, “is called time (*kala*), who devours all existences (*bhutani*) as his food” (MU.VI.2); it is from this all-devouring solar time or death that the concept of a timeless Time is a deliverance. Cf. Claudian, *Stilicho* 11.427, 430.
- ¹⁵ The formless and undivided Time of MU. corresponds to the absolute Time that “unites procession, recession, and stasis” (SA;VII.20 cited above), i.e. past, future and present, and to Sankara's “impartite Time” (*niskala kala*) of which the aeons, years, seasons and all other “times” are only “imagined” arrangements (*kalpita*, *Vivekacuddmani* 497). In other words, all duration is an articulate form imposed by our own thinking on a Reality to which all such articulation is foreign.