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*The Concept of Time in
Late Neoplatonism*

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THE CONCEPT OF TIME
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THE NATURE of time, with all its implications, occupied the minds of the Greek philosophers for nearly a millennium. If we take into account the inseparable bond that connects movement and phenomenological time or, more specifically, physical time, then the problem had already been discussed indirectly in Zeno's paradoxes (c. 450 B.C.), and in particular in his paradox of the flying arrow. That paradox originates in the presumption of the arrow being in a state of rest at any moment of its trajectory from bow to target, and from the antithesis between its position, which implies rest, and its path, which implies movement. When Zeno, in the paradox, emphasized so strikingly the connection between the statics of the Nows and the dynamics of a motion that consists, as it were, of the sum total of such Nows, the problem of the continuum was first formulated in a most challenging manner, and the reverberations of it echoed all through antiquity and continued to engage scientists and thinkers until the nineteenth century.

Time is specifically mentioned about a century after Zeno in pages 37–38 of Plato's *Timaeus*, in which he describes the creation of the physical world by the demiurge, the master-builder of the cosmos. According to Plato, the changing world of perception was constructed in the image of the idea of the cosmos, conceived by him as the idea of a living organism resting in the absolute immobility of eternal unity. As the physical world is always in a state of becoming, it was impossible to confer the character of this eternal Being on it in entire completeness, and so time was created as a 'moving likeness of eternity', its movement measured in numbers. Plato contrasts time, whose fleeting forms are characterized by 'was' and 'will be', with its model, the eternal Being, which is forever in the same state and can be truly described by 'is' alone. In his words there is an echo of Parmenides' poem on the Being that 'never was nor will be, because it is now, a whole, altogether' (fr. 8, 5).

The first ontology of time, outlined in the famous sentences of Plato's cosmology in what has become one of the classical passages of philosophical literature, is not mentioned at all by Aristotle in the fourth book of his *Physics*, dealing at length with the nature of time. From what is known to us of Aristotle's critical attitude to his teacher's doctrine of the Ideas, we can assume that he also rejected Plato's ontological conception of time and preferred to remain silent on the point. In contrast to the dichotomy of transcendent eternity and of time as its moving image in the physical world, Aristotle concentrates on the pragmatic aspect of time as the measure of movement. His main interest is to clarify the connection between time and movement on the one hand, and, on the other, the continuous flow of time and the Now as a point in that continuum, and thus arrive at a definition of time by which it can be used for measuring movement.

Both Aristotle's definition of time as 'the number of movement with respect to the earlier and later' (*Physics*, 219b, 1–2) and its analysis are in some points unsatisfactory, because they restrict the discussion to the purely phenomenological aspect of this concept and, in particular, because the subject is treated in an unsystematic way that is not conducive to clarity; the ever-growing body of interpretations from the Hellenistic period till the present day is evidence of the many ambiguities in Aristotle's presentation. I must, however, deal with some of his remarks, as they have a bearing on the Neoplatonic doctrines from Plotinus to Damascius. Aristotle begins by saying that some characteristic features of time make us doubtful of its reality. For the past is gone and is no more, and the future has not yet come, and thus time is composed of non-existent parts. It is difficult to conceive how a Now which divides past from future could be part of a non-existent whole, and how one Now passes and is replaced by another. Aristotle's difficulties on the last point stem from the same dilemma as in Zeno's paradox. For if the Now is conceived as a point — irrespective of its being seen as separating past and present or bridging them — there will never be two neighbouring Nows, because two adjacent Nows will always be separated by another Now. How can a subsequent Now be generated from its predecessor, and how can this process of generation be conceived as a continuous whole?

Aristotle's question led to two divergent solutions. One was based on a more profound conception of the continuum, developed mainly by the Stoic Chrysippus, which described the Now as a limiting point between nested intervals bounded on the one side by the past and on the other by the future. According to Chrysippus, the present is only 'loosely defined', because it is partly in the past and partly in the future

or, as Whitehead put it so pointedly: The present is the vivid fringe of memory tinged with anticipation. This conception of the early Stoics found its mathematical expression later in the infinitesimal calculus, since the days of Leibniz and Newton, and in the practice of the mathematical physicists which still holds in our current age of quantum physics: the Now is regarded as the limit on which shrinking time intervals are converging.

The second solution which emerged from Aristotle's question about the succession of Nows is bound up with the negation of the continuity of the flow of time. It is Damascius' doctrine of time quanta, that is, the conception of the Now as a small but finite and indivisible temporal interval. This solution will occupy us in the concluding part of this paper, but it should be noted that a similar one had been suggested by Xenocrates, Aristotle's contemporary, for the case of spatial extensions. Xenocrates, to avoid the paradoxes resulting from the infinite divisibility of a line, supposed that lines are composed of atomic and indivisible intervals. It is probable that he suggested a like solution for temporal extension as well, and in some fragments of Stoic writings there seems to be a hint in that direction.

Even before Aristotle raised the question of the succession of Nows, Plato in his *Parmenides* touched upon it in connection with the antinomies of the One and the Many. According to Plato, if the One partakes of Being, it also must partake of time, for to be is participation in present, past or future. One of the consequences of this aspect of the dialectical treatment of the One is that the notion of transition is predicated to it, and that notion involves the conception of 'suddenness'. '“Sudden” — he says — seems to imply a something out of which change takes place into either of two states; for the change is not from the state of rest as such, or from the state of motion as such; but there is this curious nature which we call “sudden” between rest and motion, not being in any time.' By the idea of 'suddenness' as a kind of negation of time, Plato emphasizes the dialectics of the blending of discrete Being with continuous Becoming.

For Aristotle, who is far from indulging in dialectical sophistications of this nature, the connection between the point-like Now and the flux of time is given by the following reasoning: we arrive at the conception of time as the number of movement by perceiving *two* Nows, one as earlier, the other as later; movement can thus be counted within the continuous flow between these two moments. The different Nows can be compared to the different positions of a moving body, and as such they are numbers by which movement is counted. In one respect — as Aristotle observes — all the Nows are identical, insofar as, for them, the

immediate perception of presentness and the objective temporal event coincide; and in another respect each Now differs from the other, insofar as every Now is associated with another specific content. Further on, we will see that this dual aspect of the Now in Aristotle's doctrine is taken up in the discussions of the later Neoplatonists and becomes one of the starting points of their new conception. For this dualism can be interpreted as a kind of antinomy; the Now is real because of its immediate presence, and again it is unreal because of its supersession by another Now which is not yet, after having been preceded by still another Now which is no more, and all these Nows have different contents.

I do not propose to debate the whole of Aristotle's arguments that have no direct relevance to the subject of this paper, nor can I discuss his beautiful and penetrating remarks about the one-sidedness of the direction of time, which is indicated by the fact that, in the course of time, things deteriorate and perish spontaneously, whereas they are not improved and built up spontaneously — in short, his anticipation of the law of entropy. There is only one point which I would like to touch upon. He asks whether time could exist without the soul, that is, without human consciousness, for, according to his theory, it is the soul which counts the consecutiveness inherent in movement. The answer that he gives is typical of his realistic approach. The existence of time is bound up with movement, and movement, whether we count it or not, is the objective substratum of the earlier and later: thus movement *per se* is potential time which acquires actuality whenever there is a conscious human being able to count the temporal consecutivity involved in movement. Even more outspoken is the downright thinking of his pupil Strato, who defined time as a quantity flowing by itself and independently of the events happening in the flow. The definition resembles that framed by Newton two thousand years afterwards, but it seems that, in its radical formulation, it was unique in the Peripatetic School. In the centuries that ensued, the opinion generally held was that time is inseparable from physical movement, and in particular from the uniform rotation of the celestial sphere. In the consciousness of most philosophers until late antiquity, time as number or as extension of movement became a familiar concept in no need of any qualification.

In the middle of the third century A.D., Plotinus launched his devastating criticism of Aristotle's concept of time. In the seventh chapter of the third book of his *Enneads*, he argues that the definition of time as the number of movement hardly makes sense. Either this number is a mere abstraction, not connected with any particular movement, similar to the number 10 which is a generalization of all the concrete classes of ten, like ten horses, etc., in which case it is a pure number without

any relation to time. Or it is some kind of measure which cannot be separated from movement, in which case there is no possibility of discerning the difference between the measuring time and the measured movement. If, furthermore, time is some concomitant of movement, the question arises as to the nature of this concomitant. Is it prior to movement, is it simultaneous with it, or is it subsequent to it? Whatever the answer may be, the very question of a temporal order in time and movement will involve the concept of time in a vicious circle.

Plotinus' criticism, directed mainly against Aristotle's phenomenological conception, is followed by his exposition on eternity and time. This analysis must be viewed in the compass of his hierarchy of hypostases, the first stage in the systematization of Plato's doctrine which developed during the two centuries from Plotinus to Proclus. The first hypostasis is the One, identified with the Good, and below it the Intellect, identified with the demiurge. The realm of the Intellect or the intelligible essence is the intelligible world, which contains the multiplicity of ideas. On a lower level is the hypostasis of the Platonic World-Soul, and further down the sensible world, among whose sublevels matter takes the bottom rank.

Plotinus conceives eternity and time as two different modes of existence of the spiritual principle. Eternity is the life of Being in the intelligible world, its internal activity, which is marked by perfect unity and has no trace of any external movement. In contrast to the perpetual rest in Being, which characterizes eternity, time appears as the mode of existence of the spirit at the hypostatic level of the soul, as the activity of the soul exhibited as movement. Its activity, the essence of its life, is that of progress and transition. Time is thus the life of the soul when it moves from one state of life to another, whereas eternity is life in rest and immobility, life of complete unity and identity.

In his psychological theory of time, Plotinus dropped every explanation of its nature in physical terms and dissociated himself from all subjugation of time to the physical world. His time derives from the hypostasis of the Soul, which is on a higher level than the sensible world, though on a lower level than the Intellect. Ranking time on the hypostatic level of the World-Soul is also in perfect agreement with the Pythagorean and Platonic tradition, according to which the soul is in a state of eternal movement and thereby becomes the mover of all organic nature, and in particular of the human body, in whose consciousness the rhythm of this perpetual motion appears in the form of time.

Thus Plotinus revived Plato's ontological conception of time which thereafter reigned supreme during the last three centuries of late antiquity, superseding Aristotle's physical conception. But his specific

interpretation did not endure, and was itself swept away by the far-reaching conceptual transformation which took place in the Neoplatonic School. In Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Physics*, there are several fragments of the writings of Iamblichus (died c. A.D. 330) and paraphrases of his expositions. These texts, as well as some of Proclus' writings, especially his commentary on the *Timaeus*, provide ample and convincing evidence for the assumption that, with Iamblichus, there began a radically new conception, substantializing time as a hypostatic entity of its own in a way which differed from anything said before of the nature of time. From Proclus' words it seems that this revolutionary turn was connected with a critical analysis of Plotinus' conception, a reproduction in a way of what Plotinus himself did when he combined the exposition of his doctrine of time with criticism of Aristotle's theory.

Iamblichus, at the beginning of the fourth century, and, after him, Proclus in the middle of the fifth century, rejected the concept of time as the life of the soul in contradistinction to eternity as the state of life in the intelligible world. Instead, they gave to both the status of substantialized entities within a system of hypostases which was much more complex and ramified than that of Plotinus. The need for a further multiplication of hypostases probably arose from the endeavours of Iamblichus and his School to correlate their ontology with the diversified syncretistic theology of their day, and to include in their system the sacred entities and divinities of Oriental religions. There was also an intrinsic logical necessity for this process of multiplication, since Plotinus' three hypostatic levels above the physical world no longer sufficed for an unambiguous arrangement of the plethora of epistemological concepts and their variations within the Neoplatonic ontology. This gradual conceptual differentiation led forcibly to a proliferation of hypostatic levels and their splitting up into sublevels. The same process was, as well, a natural consequence of another conspicuous tendency whose character was obviously dialectical. On the one hand, the multiplicity of levels above the sensible world will of necessity *enlarge* the gap between this world and the perfect reality of the One, identified with the Good (a reality above which Iamblichus places the supreme hypostasis of the attributeless One); and, on the other, that same multiplicity will *narrow* the gaps between the adjacent levels and thus reduce to a minimum the discontinuity between the rungs in the ladder of hypostases.

We need not go into the details of Iamblichus' system of hypostases. Its essential feature is that, *in lieu* of the two single levels pertaining to the Soul and the Intellect which, in the Plotinian system, separated those of the One and the sensible world, there appear three levels — the

intelligible world (the world of ideas, that is, of the objects of thought), the intellectual world (the world of the thinking subjects), and the soul — of which each is divided into three sublevels. The main principle governing the descent on the ladder of hypostases is the gradual transition from complete unity and complete rest to complete diversity and complete motion. The intelligible world has still something of the statics characterizing the One, but it already contains the multiplicity of ideas. The intellectual world is characterized by an ambivalent state which is partly static and partly dynamic, whereas the level of the Soul is entirely dynamic, although it still is above the level of the sensible world. Typical of Iamblichus' system of hypostases, and also of Proclus' (which is even more complex), is the concept of participation, which expresses the dependence of a concept, an idea, or an hypostasis, of a certain level on the analogous essence of a higher level. The essence belonging to the higher level can be participated by that of the lower, and in that case the inferior essence participates in the superior, and there then appear in it the properties of the superior, although somewhat lessened and contracted. The dependence expressed by participation and by being participated creates links, which join all the essences in a single concatenation comprising all hypostatic levels.

A most illuminating example of this conceptual structure of hypostases and their interdependence is the doctrine of time of Iamblichus and his School, as my colleague S. Pines and I found in the texts which we translated and interpreted in the course of the last two years.¹ Some of the results of our researches I would like to record here. As against Plotinus, Iamblichus elevates Time from the level of the Soul to that of the Intellect, and Eternity to that above the Intellect. One point of departure of his theory is his criticism and interpretation of a passage from the writings of an unknown Neopythagorean philosopher (who lived some time between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200), which were attributed to the Pythagorean Archytas. In it, time is presented in the Aristotelian sense, but an example is added which portrays the special position of the Now in the eternal flux by which the future is transformed into the past.

Pseudo-Archytas begins by indicating the specific characteristic of time, namely, that each of its Nows is indivisible and transient. Time is thus unreal, because the present is gone at the moment when we perceive it, and, although the flux of time is continuous, its parts, that is, past and future, are non-existent. And here the author compares the Now to the vertex of an angle, the point of singularity between the two sides of it

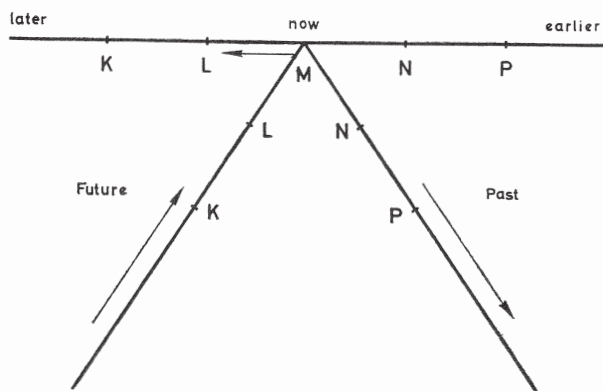
¹ To be published by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

which is, as it were, at the same time the end of one and the beginning of the other. This is an admirable exemplification, because although the Now, according to Pseudo-Archytas, changes continuously in a numerical sense, its form is still preserved. And the preservation of the form, that is, the preservation of this point of singularity in the passing of unreal time from the earlier to the later, is shown clearly in the graph of the straight line broken at an angle. We have to imagine the total of all the points of the angle moving in a continuous flow from one side of the angle to the other, and all successively passing through the vertex. At every moment, the vertex is represented by a different point which is rising from the unreality of the future and moving into the unreality of the past. But the present, too, is unreal because it is a point and indivisible.

After quoting the passage from Pseudo-Archytas, Iamblichus begins his critical analysis, which also embodies the principles of his own theory of time. The two properties which Pseudo-Archytas attributes to time — that is, indivisibility and unreality — Iamblichus regards as belonging to two different kinds of time on different hypostatic levels, namely a superior time which is participated, and an inferior time which participates. The indivisible Now is the property of a kind of time discovered by Iamblichus, the time of the intellectual world. Like all the essences of the intellectual level, it is indivisible, permanent and stable. Here he transfers the term 'indivisible' attributed to a geometrical point to the realm of metaphysics, where it defines the property of the intelligible essences that constitute indivisible unities. On the other hand, he emphasizes that the unreal is the property of time in the sensible world, being nothing but the permanent motion common to all things belonging to the physical world. This Now of the physical world cannot be separated from the things that are perpetually becoming, and it is different from the transcendent Now which is at rest. The intellectual Now has a cohesive quality which communicates something of its permanence to the numerically changing time. The antithesis of the Now and the flux of time in the phenomenological time of Aristotle is transformed by Iamblichus into the antithesis of the time of the intellectual and of the sensible world. He explains the reason why we erroneously attribute to the intellectual essence of the Now and to intellectual time the changes and affections to which all things are subject in the physical world. It is that, because of their movement, the essences perpetually coming into being in our world cannot fully receive the indivisible essence in which they participate; therefore, at every moment, different parts of them touch the intellectual essence. Iamblichus' words furnish an interpretation of his concept which constitutes a complement to the graphic representation of Pseudo-

The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism

Archytas. The time of the sensible world flows along the sides of the angle like a conveyor belt, touching the static time of the intellectual world only at the vertex, at the point of its flowing Now. Only this changing Now, therefore, is in immediate contact with reality. But the vertex also glides and passes along this static time from the earlier to the later in such a way that, consecutively, a different Now coincides with a different point of static time. Thus we experience in succession the co-existing points of intellectual time.



Iamblichus emphasizes that the function of time in the intellectual world is the ordering of the cosmos, and this time is thus elevated to a position on a level higher than that of the Soul. The principal essence of time is order, not an order that develops out of preceding things, like the order in Aristotle's time, but an order that leads all things striving towards perfection. According to Iamblichus, time in the intellectual world is not a measure of movement, and is not measured by movement; it does not reveal the rotation of the heavens, nor is time revealed by it. It is not defined as the life of the soul, or by cosmic phenomena in nature — all these are only secondary causes connected with time. Time is the earlier and later in the intellectual order, the first cause of all secondary causes in the different hypostatic levels. It is, however, clear that the level of intellectual time is inferior to that of the eternal essence. The eternal is absolutely static, with no differentiation into a one-next-to-another, which is extension, and certainly with no differentiation of earlier and later, which means order, and would result in a splitting up of unity. Therefore, the eternal essence is superior to the intelligible essence and all the more superior to the intellectual. Although the extant passages provide no details, we can assume that Iamblichus regarded the level of Eternity as situated between

the levels of the One and of the Intelligible. Thus we find intellectual time occupying an intermediate position similar to that of the Soul in Plotinus' system, where it ranks between the Intellect and the sensible world. Intellectual time ranks between eternity and the sensible world, and its position is ambivalent because of the co-existence of time and the sensible world on the one hand, and the ordering of time with regard to eternity on the other. Intellectual time resembles eternity, it is a pattern of eternity, it accordingly governs the sensible world, and physical time participates in it. The ambivalent position of time in the other world, as Iamblichus frequently calls intellectual time, is the result of an ambivalent essence which is simultaneously at rest and in motion. It is in motion with regard to Eternity, but at rest with regard to our time that participates in it. The earlier and the later of intellectual time are not in motion. Its points, arranged in an order of earlier or later, do not possess the property of flux which makes the future pass into the present and the present into the past, but it is, as it were, a static earlier or later which, moreover, cannot be represented by spatial extension. Every graphic representation, like that given above, is only a poor makeshift of which we have to make use in the absence of a more suitable one. Iamblichus says in this context that the demiurge, so to speak, unravels intellectual time from the tangle of threads of the divine order in the intellectual world and passes it on into the sensible world, where time becomes a flux. This mechanism of the threads unravelling themselves again explains time's place on the level of the intellectual essence, which possesses an element of motion in spite of its intellectual, static, nature.

Proclus' discourse on time in his commentary on the *Timaeus* (written in A.D. 440) is essentially a commentary on Iamblichus' theory of time. In part, it is a systematization of that theory, and, in addition, it provides a more general scientific foundation for Iamblichus' views. There is, besides, Proclus' criticism of Plotinus' psychological time, and the emphasis on the theological aspect of time in support of Iamblichus' new ontological concept. Broadly, it may be said that his contribution to the theory of intellectual time is more in the nature of a special nuance to Iamblichus' statements than a supplement of original ideas.

After this general appraisal, I can limit myself to a summary of Proclus' arguments, in which he often refers directly to Iamblichus. He proves from the *Theaetetus* and other writings of Plato that nothing can move wholly and absolutely. Every movement, be it a change of place or of quality, can only occur against a background of rest, otherwise the concept of movement does not make sense. When this background is only potential and is not actualized, it will be meaningless. When it is actualized but changes into movement, then a second background

becomes necessary against which the movement can be measured. Thus we find that the background must be actual but motionless. This is the specific property of time, that is, of intellectual time, or, as Proclus calls it, the monad of time, or primary time, or the time above the cosmos. Proclus, however, strongly emphasizes the dual character of this primary time which is at rest and also in motion, intelligible and also created, indivisible and also divisible. There is an inherent contradiction in its character which we can only grasp when we remember that the Soul, too, occupies an intermediate position, although it belongs to an hypostasis inferior to that of time. The graphic representation which Proclus employs is that of the centre of the circle and its periphery. As the centre of the circle, primary time is at rest, and as its periphery it is in motion, that is, in participation with the secondary time of the sensible world. In the periphery we also find a hint of the numerical aspect of time. The time which is above the cosmos and in participation is thus at rest and also progressing, whereas cosmic time in which it participates is wholly in motion, carried along by movement.

Proclus also criticizes Aristotelian time, which exists only in the objects of the sensible world as a concomitant phenomenon, as the *accidens*, as it were, of an *accidens*. He also passes stricture on Platonic time, which depends entirely on the soul, whereas it is evident that inanimate objects, for instance, which have no soul, participate in time. He clearly defines the following proportion: the ratio of Eternity to the Intellect is the same as that of Time to the Soul, namely, time is prior to the Soul in the same way that Eternity is prior to the Intellect, and the dual essence of time is an intellectual one inferior to that of the Intelligible. As to the sacred character of time — are not the hours and months, day and night, regarded as gods to whom we pray? All the more is time itself the god who embraces all of them.

Damascius' discourses on time, most probably written in the early sixth century, are preserved in their greater part in Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics* of Aristotle, in quotations as well as in paraphrases incorporated in Simplicius' critical remarks, and, to a less extent, in Damascius' own book *On the First Principles*. Damascius introduces two extremely important innovations into the theory of time. One is the quantization of physical time which participates in primary time. He starts from Zeno's arguments about movement and the point-like Now. He sees the solution of the paradox in the supposition that movement in time progresses along a temporal extension which consists of points of Now that themselves have no extension. Tens of thousands of extensionless Nows will still only add up to an equally extensionless quantity; one must, therefore, suppose that the motion of time progresses by finite

steps that happen suddenly, in jumps, as it were, which constitute finite, complete and indivisible units. Each of these jumps, each quantum of time, in modern parlance, is wholly sudden, simultaneous, and not divisible into smaller parts of time. The flux of time in our world consists of the progress of these intervals, whose size depends on the velocity of the moving body. Thus, for instance, for a slower star, time progresses by smaller steps, by smaller quanta, and, for a swifter star, by bigger ones. The present, or the Now, which Damascius calls 'the Being that is becoming', is, therefore, a relative quantity, yet always finite and not point-like, because rest, too, consists of a series of jumps. It is obvious from Damascius' explanations that what he has in mind is what we now call the quantization of a certain quantity. The jump of becoming is itself not becoming, but it is being. According to one of Damascius' definitions, it is the 'aggregation of progress'. This aggregation takes place section by section, and, as these sections are complete in themselves, Damascius calls them 'demiurgic sections' in which time progresses at once. The problem that occupied Aristotle, how one Now can emerge from another, thus finds its solution in that one present of finite length borders on a second finite one, and the two touch only in the point separating them, which is the end of one jump and the beginning of the following. We are reminded of Plato's words in the *Parmenides*, quoted at the beginning of this paper, which introduce the term 'suddenly' in his description of the paradox of the blending of Being with the continuum of Becoming. The flux of our time is composed of movements that are a combination of motion and rest, or, to use a modern example, it resembles a film consisting of many pictures, of which each presents a position of rest and is separated from that of its neighbour by a small yet finite jump. Damascius' conception of time-quanta of finite duration makes the present more concrete, more real. As each present is a unit that exists at once, it follows that, while we live in our time, we participate at every moment in a small section of that one Being which is above time, in that essence about which Parmenides, one thousand years earlier than Damascius, said that 'it never was nor will be, because it is now, a whole, altogether'.

According to Damascius, we receive, as it were, in each Now a glimpse of the essence that is wholly present at once, yet the flux of our time in its flow brings to us one section after another of the real essence belonging to the intelligible world. What, however, is the nature of this essence in its entirety? With regard to primary time in its totality, Damascius repeatedly emphasizes that the whole of it exists simultaneously in reality — a statement which his friend and pupil Simplicius is unable to accept. Possibly Damascius' colleagues shrank from the comparison

of the simultaneous extension of primary time to a spatial extension, which constitutes his second important conceptual innovation. Damascius compares intellectual time to the extension of a river from source to mouth conceived as being at rest at a certain moment, or to the appearance of the whole of a river if we could halt its flow. Then we would be able to perceive the whole river as a single unit in a state of rest, as a simultaneous one-next-to-the-other of its extension from which the concrete river derives, all of its parts flowing and discharged one after the other. In the same way as the simultaneous extension of the whole river whose flow is halted is the ontological basis of the flowing waters of the river, so the simultaneous extension of intelligible time is the basis of our time, which makes the present flow from the past into the future, or which flows from the future through the present into the past. This is the basis of the 'river of becoming', as Damascius calls the time of the physical world.

There is yet another parallel between space and time in Damascius' theory. Space separates the bodies and prevents their merging one into the other. Space, therefore, possesses something like a principle of the ordering of co-existence. The same principle exists in intelligible time, because the one-next-to-another of its simultaneous extension fixes the order of the succession of events in the sensible world once and for all. The picture of the river also indicates the unilateral direction of the flux of time: of two events, one is earlier (that is, nearer the source) and the other later (that is, nearer the mouth), and this arrangement of earlier and later will never change. It is immaterial whether the two events took place in the near or in the distant past, or whether one has happened and the other is going to occur in the future, or whether both are still in the future. Damascius uses as his example two wars: the Trojan war happened before the Peloponnesian, and this relation of earlier and later will never change, because it is based on the order of the one-next-to-another which was established from the beginning in the extension of intelligible time.

Human beings are not able to perceive the simultaneity of intelligible time as they can the simultaneity of space in its extension throughout the world. But Damascius sees no essential difference between the simultaneous perception of the entire spatial world and that of the entire temporal world, if it is said with regard to intelligible time. But as we feel only the eternal flux of physical time which our consciousness splits up into the three sections of past, present, and future, we can only use analogies or substitutes. According to Damascius, one such substitute is the faculty of the soul to bridge between the substance of the sensible world and that of the intelligible world. This enables it to integrate

certain lengths of time like a day, a month, a year, or the duration of a game or a play, and to perceive them in its imagination or memory as simultaneous units in a state of rest, although the lengths are in motion. In the conceptual integration of a long period of time and its fusion into one unit that is at rest, our soul grasps something of the simultaneous essence of intelligible time.

Iamblichus' concept of time was elevated to its highest perfection in Damascius' theory of sensible time, as he describes it in the metaphor of the river whose flow is halted and which thus exists at once in its entirety, and further in his interpretation of sensible time as a combination of quanta of indivisible Nows. Neither before Iamblichus and his School nor afterwards, until our own times, has the ontology of time been presented with such lucidity and persuasiveness, and we may say that, even if he had contributed nothing else but his theory of time, the place of Iamblichus in the history of philosophy would be secure. The two great modern philosophers who, according to their systems, could have followed in his steps — Spinoza and Hegel — made no clear distinction between eternity and intelligible time. In this respect, their ontology of time is not as clear as that of the later Neoplatonists.

At the conclusion of this paper, I must, however, mention an important contribution of our century to the analysis of time — the brilliant and profound essay by the Cambridge philosopher, John Ellis McTaggart (1866–1925). His paper, 'The Unreality of Time', was published in the English journal *Mind*² in 1908. Although he does not mention the Neoplatonists, he wrote in the very spirit of Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius, and in his analysis of the changes characteristic of sensible time goes even beyond them. Events happening in time may be characterized by attributing to each a certain position in time which is either earlier or later than another position. But the series of earlier and later does not fully represent the character of change in time; the basic series of changes, which cannot be further reduced, is the series of positions in time running from the future to the present and from the present into the past. Each event possesses three characteristic qualities — its being past, present and future. These are incompatible as long as we do not postulate clearly that they are not simultaneous. We must state carefully that, for instance, an event that happens at the moment is present, *was* future and *will be* past. Thus we find that we can resolve the contradiction of these qualities, all three being inseparable from any event, only by the vicious circle of saying that each event possesses

2 See also Ch. 32 of his *The Nature of Existence*, CUP 1927.

The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism

them one after the other. According to McTaggart, this vicious circle reveals the unreality of time, especially for the reason that the contradiction of the three qualities is attached to our own present, which itself is carried along and passes from an earlier to a later position. In divergence from the series of change which McTaggart regards as an unreal one, one can, he holds, postulate another series, again of fundamental significance but possessing reality. This is the series of the order of events, which in itself is not temporal, but, when combined with the series of change, results in the series of earlier and later. The series of the order of events in his theory is nothing else but the time of the intelligible world in the doctrine of Iamblichus and his School. It has thus reappeared in our century in the guise of Hegelian idealism and holds its own in the sharp polemics which it provoked and which are still being waged heatedly among philosophers.

These fleeting remarks have had as their sole purpose to prove by an instance from modern philosophy that the concept of time of the late Neoplatonic school, far from being a freak in the history of ideas, is, indeed, a basic discovery of permanent worth that has enriched our knowledge of one of the most difficult and enigmatic phenomena of our reality.

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