

# Time

ITS PHILOSOPHY AND ECONOMICS

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## ITS PHILOSOPHY AND ECONOMICS

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What is time? What indeed is time? The question is rarely propounded or put. And it may be we shall have to wait all eternity to get a satisfactory answer. Time, they say, is time. Everybody knows it. Why then put a question? If everybody knows it, it may almost certainly be declared that no one knows it properly. We ordinary men are acquainted with the divisions of time we have made. Day succeeding night and night succeeding day is the obvious and perceptible division of Time in Nature. The division of time into years, albeit based on the revolutions of the earth round the sun, though capable of being inferred from long and careful observation

cannot be said to be so obvious. The European division of day into 24 hours and each hour into sixty minutes and each minute into sixty seconds is only arbitrary and conventional. So also is the division of the day by Indian astronomers into *naligais* and *vinadis*. These divisions of time are man-made. In all countries where the European civilisation has been accepted or followed, the computation of the Era is either after Christ or before Christ. We may be sure that the computation of the Anno Domine (after Christ) did not begin immediately after Christ. Though the computation of B.C. or before Christ has been widely adopted, it is certain that the computation in currency before Christ could not have been B.C.

The story of the Biblical genesis which dates the creation not only of man but of the Sun and Moon and the Earth about 5000 years from now has already become the laughing stock of modern times. Western Science has spoken decidedly, if only vaguely of biological and geological eras which run back into millions and billions of years.

Modern astronomers have come to speak of light-years and the calculations of space and time based thereon may be acknowledged to be bewildering and almost inconceivable.

It must however be claimed for ancient Indians that they at least made no mistake whatsoever about the nature of time. The Puranas have refused to accept even any divine creation as the beginning, because unfalteringly they speak of countless creations and re-creations. Their division of time has been into Chatur-Yugas—Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali. Each yuga consists according to their computations of many hundreds of thousands and even millions of years. And we are told that there have been countless chatur-yugas like that. We may therefore rest satisfied that the ancient Indian conception of time is more in accord with the pronouncements of modern science.

In this connection the names given to the yugas deserve to be subjected to a scientific enquiry as to whether any true significance is calculated to be conveyed by those names. It is also a matter of popular knowledge that

there has been according to Indian astronomers a division of time into cycles of sixty years, each year of the sixty being given a proper name instead of a mere number. The true significance and appropriateness of such names have not, so far as we know, been ever explored. We should be surprised if it should turn out that those names some of which are wonderful and seemingly significant should be discovered to be meaningless or merely conventional. The further division of the year into Southern and Northern Solstices and lunar and solar months are too familiar to call for any special consideration.

Time, like space, is infinite. It has had no beginning and it has no end. So is space. Infinite time, even like infinite space is not conceivable by the finite mind of man. A great European Philosopher has solved the riddle of infinite time and space by declaring them to be not objective existences, but merely subjective forms of perception. A form of perception is one through which alone you can perceive. Just as if a man looks out through a red glass the entire world looks red, even so

the perceptions of man have, by reason of time and space being forms of perception, to be in space or time. There seems to be no escaping from it. Such a view may be all right for abstract Philosophy. But it will not do for a common sense study of time. A great mathematical philosopher of more recent times has declared and indeed established the relativity of space and time. If both are infinite, it follows necessarily that any statement about either of them can be understood and have any significance attributed to them only in relation to others. In the course of our study we may have to recur to these aspects of time if only for the purpose of the practical lessons derivable from them.

The first point to be noted with regard to our common sense conception of time is that it is always moving. Indeed it is said to be always flying. It never stops or halts even for a second. Even with the tick tick of the clock the present is passing off into the past. According to our true conception of time, these seconds and minutes that appear to come forward and immediately vanish into the past

are such that when they so vanish they cannot possibly be called back. That the past time cannot be recalled even by the Almighty so-called, is the main characteristic of time which we will do well to bear always in mind. You can dam a river, stop a train, slow down the aeroplane, but time is steadily passing without any possibility of its movement being either altered or stopped.

The second equally important consideration about time is that to the prince and peasant, to the millionaire as well as to the mendicant, to the greatest Dictators and commanders of nations as well as to the child in the cradle or the invalid on his sick bed, to all equally there are only twenty four hours in a day, or 1440 minutes or 86,400 seconds. No more, no less. As no one on earth can have a minute more or a minute less, it behoves every man to recognise for himself and in himself the value of time. The value of a thing has been sometimes considered to be as what will have to be paid for obtaining it there and then. Time is not obtainable in any such manner. It is therefore both literally and

metaphorically invaluable. Nothing can buy time, but with time one can achieve anything.

Of how many people indeed can it be averred that they have a proper sense of the value of time? I am now reminded of a number of verses in English which I wrote when I was, I believe, still in my teens. I have not been able to secure or trace any copy of it. But the first two verses I still remember. Perhaps they will suffice to give an indication. They ran as follows :—

“Time is flying, Time is flying,  
 All are crying, Time is flying,  
 All are hooting, none are shooting,  
 Yet are crying, Time is flying  
 Lazy lying, sick with sighing,  
 Still are crying, Time is flying”.

It seems to me that to make every young boy in school imbibe a proper sense of the value of time is perhaps the most necessary part of education. I venture to think that very little is being done in that direction in our Schools and Colleges. No doubt the idea of ‘time-tables’ as they are called, is given to us very early in our educational course. But that is all. By dividing



and partitioning time they promote a kind of discipline ; but even so it is far, very far from instilling into the young mind the inestimable value of time. We have seen boys in School rejoice over and celebrate the absence of any master on any day. Schools and schooling come to be regarded as irksome. Is it not true that the school-boys, as indeed even many grown up persons will like to have their long vacation as long as the year itself ? If this be a fairly accurate view of modern education, I wonder if it was very different in the Gurukulas of ancient India. There is no real reason to believe it was otherwise. Boys will be boys always. All discipline is irksome and irritating. Play is the thing. It is very significant to know that the English expressions closely connected with play are 'Time is hanging heavily', 'Have nothing to do', 'How to pass time', and 'by what pastime' and the like. These are of course merely figures of speech. We all know that without any effort on our part time is passing, passing—passing along and passing away. How pitiable indeed is the man, young or old, rich or poor, who, as the phrase

goes, cannot even kill time ! Such expressions are indeed current, we may take it, in most languages ; the more, the pity. In the verse quoted above it will be seen that there is a reference to Time as if it is a bird flying off, but which is not shot down. But unfortunately that is not the sense in which the expression 'killing time' is used. It will indeed be more correct to say that it is time that rather kills us than that we kill time.

The truth then about time will be seen to lie in the fact whether we are masters of time or whether time is our master.

Man must be man and master of his time. It is the mastery and the masterful regulation of time that distinguishes man from animals. Perhaps in this view most men are no more than animals, allowing themselves to be helplessly tossed here and there and carried down by the currents of time. If therefore the view that finds acceptance should be that time is something objective, something that exists apart from and independently of us, then of course it follows, it must be for our inestimable advantage that we should be masters of such a potent factor in existence.

To use the 24 hours of each day to the highest advantage must therefore be appreciated to be the wise rule with regard to time. The only waste in life which is irreparable is the waste of time. In the waste of money or other good things of life which one would do well to conserve for himself, there might possibly be found some good turn or return. Not so in the case of time.

I would like every man to be a kind of dacoit with reference to time. From this point of view time which is always passing along may be compared to travellers or passers on the high road. As a true dacoit we must lie in wait and attack each minute as it passes by and compel it to give up all that it can or has to give. Nothing less will do. From this point of view indeed every day for every man is even like a whole life. When we wake up in the morning from the sleep of the previous night, we may be said to be born in a very important and true sense. We live the live long day doing much or little and at night lapse again into unconscious sleep. The waking hours between,

whatever may be their number, are even out of the twenty-four hours the only time allotted to us for conscious activity. Even out of these, several hours are taken away by our having to attend to the animal wants of the body and to routine avocations. There are so many calls on our time. The remaining hours which we can call our own to do what we like or think best with it are perhaps not even half a dozen. In most cases it is much less. We are hearing so much to-day about the nations and states of the world planning for five years, ten years and so on. It is a common experience that when one builds a house according to a plan he builds properly. Even so when daily life comes to be lived according to a plan made either that morning or for longer periods of time, the life every day may be made to yield up much more profit and pleasure than otherwise. It almost seems that in the hurry and hurly-burly of modern life no one has time even to live. A planned life is a methodic life, a purposeful life, a well-directed life and it goes without saying that such a life must necessarily prove more efficient and fruitful.

Of course what the plan is for each man depends to a very large extent on his age, his conditions of life, his livelihood, his profession, his hobbies and his social and other engagements and activities. Every one therefore should after considering all these matters decide upon a general plan of life, that is to say, the daily life. This must be distinguished from what may be called the map of life. It must be said to the credit of the ancient Indians that the map of life drawn for them by their sages has been a wonderful one—the Asramas, as they are called, that of the student or Brahmacharya, householder, the retired thinker, and last but not least, that of the ascetic. This map may be claimed to be in accordance with the highest wisdom, human or divine, Western or Eastern. But though a map of life happens to be drawn on a larger scale, even the plan of daily life is required to be carefully thought out and arranged in detail.

I have often found that even on an afternoon visiting perambulations if one should start with a plan, one is able to do twice or thrice the quantity of work than would other-

wise be possible. If for instance in the case of a public man with many characters to fill and duties to perform he should be able to set apart different places and different times for each of the several interests, he will find that the machine of his daily life runs smoothly and noiselessly as every machine should. It therefore behoves every thinking man who is not anxious to live a wasted life to form and shape for himself not only a general map of life, but also a detailed plan of daily life.

In this connection a very useful aspect of time may be indicated. In the livelong day and even in the case of busiest men, there are innumerable leakages of time. All such leakages when put together may even amount to a considerable quantity. How many quarter and half-hours in the day do we not allow to run to waste, doing nothing at all, but simply yawning, waiting, gadding or thinking of nothing at all particularly, or thinking merely of what to do next? It is staggering to contemplate the sum total of the time that gets so wasted day after day. For instance in fifteen minutes let us take it that a man can read five-

pages of a book. Even assuming that he is not able to spare for study more than fifteen minutes out of 1440 minutes still at the rate of five pages a day it will work out at 1825 pages which may be taken to represent five or six books in the year. This certainly is no small gain. I have realised from personal experience that even in the case of the busiest of men, doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, officials, politicians, there are several such quarters of hours every day. Always to carry with you a book and read a few lines of it when you are waiting somewhere or even going in a conveyance is an inestimable habit. It may be said that such a strenuous life is not generally called for. It may also be charged that such a life tends to deprive one of its pleasures and enjoyments. That of course depends on what a man regards as pleasure or enjoyment. To the man who deems betting at cards the most exciting pleasure in life, even a few minutes spent on study may come to be regarded as wasted. But we are not here considering or prescribing for the invalids of life, but only for the normal man and for the man who is anxious to lead a high or ideal life.

It is in a well-regulated or disciplined life that it will be possible to provide for such economies being effected as those referred to. It is a capital mistake to fancy that life's happiness is to be found only in laziness, in ennui, and in drifting.

In this connection the biographies of great men especially of the type of those who may happen to be set up as ideals to follow would be found to be very helpful. The poet was quite right when he spoke of the "Foot prints on the sands of time."

Foot prints that perhaps  
Sailing over life's solemn main  
Some ship-wrecked and forlorn brother  
Seeing shall take heart again.

In this sense the study of biography which is a favourite study with all young men is not merely for the satisfaction of idle curiosity but mainly designed for practical guidance and inspiration. This is of course meant only for those who think life worth living. I remember an ancient song of a famous Alwar in Tamil in which after auditing life he has



furnished us with his own balance sheet. He has said that even if a person should live for the full length of a hundred years, fifty of this (according to his calculation) come to be passed in sleep, another fifteen in infancy and boyhood, and for the rest if you should deduct the periods of suffering from hunger, from illness, from old age and from evil, little will be found left over to make life worth living for. It goes without saying that this view, whatever may be its merit for those who are not worldly-minded, cannot be accepted for the common-man. What is even more, such a view is fundamentally opposed to the view of life which should regard it as a divine trust for the betterment of yourself and of the world. From this proper angle life, if not a trust, liable to be administered and discharged faithfully and most beneficently is at least an opportunity for making the most of it and it goes without saying that making good the opportunity depends upon your making good the time. He alone therefore is the greatest commander-in-chief of time who is able to direct at his own will his battalions of minutes

and the infinite resources of seconds to achieve conquest and victory on which he may have set his heart.

So far we have been dealing with time regarded as objective, but a little thought will convince us that whether the philosopher of Konigsberg was quite accurate or not, there is a great deal to be said with regard to time from its subjective point of view. We have seen that time is not the same for every one. To some it may be a burden; to others a glorious opportunity. The poet who spoke of fifty years of Europe being better and no more than better than a cycle of Cathay, had obviously some insight. Regarded subjectively the length of time may come to be estimated by the quantity of work turned out. To one who is efficient and is able to turn out thrice the quantity of work the time may come properly to be regarded as multiplied three-fold. Even as agriculturists speak of the intensive cultivation of land, those who would be economists of time may similarly speak of the intensive utilisation of time. If a person should only approach the doing of any work with a sense

of masterfulness and proceeds to do it not as a grumbling cooly, but with the spirit and joy of an artist, the quality of the work done is bound to increase immensely. That invaluable faculty of the human mind called attention and the practice of learning to concentrate will be found calculated to make for this intensive employment of time.

There is an old story of a Mohammadan mystic who wishing to impress his Emperor with the mystery of time asked the Sovereign to plunge his head into a bucket of water and take it off after a few moments. We are told that within those few seconds the king thought that while sailing over a sea he was shipwrecked, swam to a solitary shore and there lived by cutting firewood, marrying a woman, bringing forth seven children and after living many decades in that Island coming to the sea and having a bath and that when he raised his head he found himself seated on the very throne of his palace.

The significance of such a story consists in the obvious demonstration of the subjectivity of time. In this connection our sense of

time in dreams deserves also to be taken note of. It is remarkable that within a few seconds perhaps of the dream we should believe ourselves as going through long periods of various activities. Time then viewed as a subjective phenomenon must be regarded in its nature and use as directly related to the self. What is it then that a capable man cannot do with time? It is a common experience that sometimes one feels that the length of time has been as nothing or for contrary reasons when even a short period of time looks like an age. A momentary flash of genius might produce what may not be capable of being produced in centuries. It seems a continent can be destroyed in the twinkling of an eye, It is a matter of familiar knowledge that people in ancient times measured distance by the time taken to walk or travel. Today in the speedways of the worlds what might have taken six months is achieved in six hours. The time-sense of the world has already undergone a revolution. The intensity of thought and action may more than compensate for mere length of life; for stories in our puranas of individuals who were living for 60,000 years and so forth have been

a bewildering puzzle to solve, even regarded as a piece of gross exaggeration. Perhaps some day the mystery may come to be laid bare.

The proper attitude towards time is neither exclusively objective, nor entirely subjective. It is not the man who has all the time he wants to do a thing in, that is to be envied. Nor is he to be envied who has no time for anything. As usual in all such cases it is the golden mean that requires to be striven for and attained. 'Like a star unresting, unhasting' is a phrase which we will do well to lay to our minds. Become, and be master of time. You can achieve wonders.

A still another aspect of time is in the wonderful economy which we are able to achieve by training ourselves into good habits. Life may prove intolerable if all our movements and acts are required to be continuously pondered over and adjusted afresh even to the smallest detail. Habit therefore is a divine economy of time. It is significant that the term 'Kala' or time is often used to indicate death. Who knows that by conquering time one cannot conquer even the forces of dissolution and

death? In any case, it is an accredited fact of ancient Indian faith that even death can be put off by willed determination and conversely can be called in and permitted at any moment deemed to be appropriate. We of the modern generation are certainly far, very far from such perfection. But may we not hope that Time itself will help us to achieve this conquest of time?

Before concluding this small brochure on 'Time' it will not be out of place to refer to the most deplorable aspect of modern life or civilisation. The modern world is not unlike a crowded thoroughfare where every one seems intent on something and rushing forward at breathless speed panting and perspiring also it may be. The hurry and worry of modern times has already shattered the nerves of the young and old alike. By way of a contrasted picture one will do well to reflect on the Shanti or Peace which we find reiterated in our ancient books. It is only in the Sanskrit language we come across many words such as 'Atmasta', 'Atmavan' which go to emphasise the importance and indeed the necessity of our being self-

centered ; or self-poised or in other words laying your centre not in the circumference of the material world, but in the spiritual self. The farther away from that centre, the greater and the more dizzy is the whirling. Storms may rage all round, but if you should place yourself in the centre, you will be sure to find yourself in the safest place of all. This spirit of Shanti does not consist, as it is so often misunderstood, in sitting quiet and doing nothing. On the other hand it is the glorious picture of a person seated in the very centre of a whirlpool the least moved while, all around, it is raging and rushing. This will be appreciated to be the very height and pinnacle of the subjective aspects of time especially with reference to the mad and maddening rush of modern times. This ancient ideal of Shanti consists therefore essentially in a synthesis of Yoga which may best be described as active inactivity or inactive activity.

We have referred to Time as infinite and eternal. Those who truly live in Time may be said in a very true sense of that expression to belong to the infinite and eternal.

The Past is still in us.

The Present is with us.

The future all in us.

I feel that I cannot better conclude than by setting out particularly the following twelve laws of time derivable from the foregoing considerations for the benefit of the reader :

1. Time is life and waste of time is waste of life.
2. Be man and master of time, and not a slave or creature of time.
3. Make for yourself and keep to a map of life.
4. Plan for every day your work and activities from morning till night.
5. Make the most of passing time for profit or pleasure.
6. Find ways and means of utilising all leakages of time.
7. Regularity is even like oil in a machine.
8. Exalt punctuality into a religion.



9. Intensive use of time multiplies time manifold.
  10. Concentration of attention and activity make time most efficient and fruitful.
  11. To conquer time is to conquer death.
  12. Let the world whirl round, but hold your soul in peace and bliss.
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