EXPERIENTIAL TIME AND THE RELIGIOUS CONCERN

by Charles M. Sherover

In the midst of crisis Augustine propounded the famous question which compels us to face the central dilemma of any attempt to comprehend the human situation in the world. "What, then, is time?" he asked. "Who can find a quick and easy answer to that question?" Time is central for each of us. Its presence pervades and structures every process in which we engage, everything we can know. It bounds every activity of life and indeed life itself. Yet we usually discuss important issues of life and thought without even noting their intrinsic temporality.

We do not hesitate to use temporal terms; we freely employ the tenses of our language. We read of our history, plan or bemoan our future. We take time and its meanings for granted. We may regard it as a burden or as a source of hope, but we know that we cannot avoid its inexorable sway. Yet we cannot define the word "time." "What, then, is time?" Augustine asked. "I know what it is if no one asks me what it is; but if I want to explain it to someone who has asked me, I find that I do not know."[1] Time pervades everything we think and do; yet just what it is, how it is, remains a mystery, the mystery of ultimate reality, the mystery of being itself.

What then is time? I believe Augustine was correct: We are not equipped to answer this question. But I think we can fruitfully explore a related question: How does time appear to work in the temporal structure of human experience, in animating our fundamental concerns and the meanings we find in life?

A straight line does not always define the shortest journey. Rather than seeking to see time, or the world, as each might be in itself, we might better try to make sense of our pervasively temporal experi-

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ence, of our temporal ways of dealing with the world in which we find ourselves. Rather than trying to see over the horizon, I invite a look at the way in which the horizon of the human outlook is itself formed. By making some sense of the pervasive temporality animating us, we might be better equipped to face the fundamental concerns which propose the specific questions we seek to answer, the specific deeds we seek to do.

If every hope and thought and fear is temporally structured, to ask about the structure of human temporality is to ask about the relation of experiential time to our deepest religious concerns. A religion, a religious outlook, Paul Tillich pointed out, is not simply a matter of theological doctrines—often resultant from abstruse disputations long forgotten and often mouthed without being understood.[2] Whether the religion be sacerdotal or secular, spiritual or materialist, based on revelation or inspiration, a religious outlook is a particular response to the fundamental concerns of human beings as they wend their ways in their world. The doctrines of any particular religious tradition are answers offered to the basic questions men ask. To face the facts of experiential time then is to face the fundamental concerns that are expressed in whatever religious tradition we choose to adhere to.

These fundamental concerns, Immanuel Kant had already suggested, are but three in number and each, let me suggest, is concerned with the meaning of temporal experience. As Kant summed up the matter: "All the interests of my reason, speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions: (1) What can I know?, (2) What ought I to do?, (3) What may I hope?"[3]

The first asks about the capability of systematic inquiry, of science, in trying to understand the physical environment and the possibilities it offers; it depends upon the temporal structure of finite human reason. The second asks about moral obligation and moral knowledge; it depends upon the temporal structure of freedom and its responsible use. The third asks about immortality; looking beyond human time, it depends upon a conception of the governance of the world, the possibility and the nature of God.

These three fundamental questions are *the* three questions of man's religious concerns, the ground questions concerning the human place in the world, human capability, human destiny. They are each asked from *within* the temporal constitution of the human outlook and are each concerned with the meaning of experiential time.

Some radical implications ensue from an explicit understanding of the human way of being temporal and responding to these three questions. However, it is first necessary to unveil some salient features

of the temporal logic incarnate in human experience. Then we can turn to the temporal nature of the three concerns that mold the time of human experience.

Experiential Temporality

Our ordinary ways of talking about the things and events of our experience provide a clue to the structure of our experiential time.

When we describe the sequence of two events, we say that the first came before the second, the second after the first—and we describe the temporal "distance" between them by dating them. The American Revolution came before the French; the French Revolution started fourteen years after the American began. Such statements present unalterable facts that do not change with the passage of time. Once true, always true—even a thousand years hence. And it does not matter whether we measure the temporal distance between them from the "before" or from the "after"; in whichever way we go the answer remains the same.

There are three remarkable things about this: (1) the remarkable lack of change, for, if time and change betoken each other, it seems odd that a true statement about time and change can be both timeless and changeless, that a statement about dynamic change can freeze time and change into a timeless truth; (2) the remarkable disregard of direction, for, if time and change move from the earlier to the later, if time is unidirectional, it seems odd that a true statement about time and change can be equally true regardless of whether we go forward or backward; (3) the remarkable disregard of the "between," for our concern with an event is what is transpir*ing*, but a terminal dating ignores what is transpiring and only marks its outer limits, the "point" before which and that after which it is no longer in existence.

Fortunately we have a radically different way of speaking that is much truer to the way in which we experience events. We describe an event as past or present or future. The truth of a statement, when expressed in this way, changes radically with the tense, acknowledges the unidirectionality of time and the continuity of process. Statements about the French and the American revolutions are true only in the past tense when spoken by their historians and in the future tense when spoken by their prophets. Statements made in terms of past or present or future thus depend for their truth upon the temporal perspective of the speaker; the same statement may be true in one tense and false in another.

In common parlance we may be tempted to say that statements made in terms of before and after are more "objective" just because they focus on the objects being discussed regardless of the "who" of the speaker. Their truth claims can be tested without reference to the

speaker or the "when" of their utterance—but being at least one step removed from the concrete dynamic of temporal experiencing, they are more abstract; they also depend upon having first been experienced in some person's past or present or future stance.

All observations, to which reports of objects observed must ultimately be traced, originate in the outlook of a particular person in a particular temporal situation and must originally be reported in the time tenses of his language. Suppose a packet is now falling; two minutes ago it was not falling; two minutes hence it will not be falling. Change the time of each statement and its truth changes. Tensed reports reflect the essential dynamic quality of concrete experiencing; to test the truth of such a statement one must know the "when" of its being spoken.

Any concrete experience is a tensed experience. It arises in the moving outlook of an individual who is experiencing his own experiential activity as a moving present that does not stand still. Only after I seek to objectify the description of my experience can I sever my description from my experience out of which it arose, translate the continuity into supposed points of beginning and end that are marked by a metric which measures off the between, the extent of the occurrence; I do this, if I wish, by a set of numbers which I can diagram as two points on a line. But when I render my observation in terms of a numbered sequence between T1 and T2, I use a spatialized abstraction that detemporalizes the crucial temporality of my experience. Useful as this may be, it is not experientially true just because it is not true to the dynamic nature of my experiencing observation itself.

All experiencing transpires in a dynamic field of movement within a moving present. Yet somehow we often tend to diagram this too as a line on which we can plot the precise point of the present "now" with past and future on either side. This practice does not accord in any authentic way with the way in which experiencing transpires. A now point on a diagrammatic line represents no extent of time but an artificial boundary, instituted for a purpose, between two allegedly independent parts of the continuity of time, as the precisely marked boundary, say, between the past and the present. Experientially this is fiction. As William James noted, "say 'now' and it *was* even while you say it."[4] We experience neither perceptual objects nor our own selves as moving from one sovereign moment to the next. Rather we experience our selves and events in an ambiguously delineated present without sharp boundaries between what was and what is not yet. As Alfred North Whitehead pointed out, we are living in a moving "ill-defined present in which past and future meet and mingle."[5] The experiential present is not a point but a field, a field of perceptual and

rational activity in which what-is is continually running off into what has been and is being continually refreshed by what is not yet but is coming to be. The continuity of experiencing depends then on the continuity of futurity entering into the dynamic present and being transformed by it.

In the dynamic of actual experiencing, past and future are not evenly balanced by a mythic midpoint we call the present. They are radically different in kind. For one, the past is determinate, unchangeable, and without options. What has been has been; it cannot be changed, although our understandings of it may yet change; it cannot be repeated or undone; it is not subject to choice, experiment, decision. It has become determinate, though not always determinable, fact. It can be investigated; it cannot be altered.

By contrast, the future presents itself to us as a range of often-conflicting possibilities. We have certain expectations, but they have yet to be confirmed. We may mark out areas within which choice and decision may be selective, single out some possibilities for actualization in a future-present and other possibilities for oblivion. We conduct experiments to see what can be reasonably expected henceforth. We make decisions as to how we want to shape what is not yet but may be. We act as if we are free beings who can, by virtue of our choices, responses, and decisions, indeed determine which possible future will be realized and which not. If there is any efficacy to human activity, it is directed only to what is not yet but yet may be. Human experiencing activity is oriented not to the past but to the future. We seek to preserve the continuity of what is deemed good and terminate what is deemed bad. We may seek either continuance or change. But all deliberate activity is necessarily directed only to what is not yet, in the hope or expectation that we may mold its transformation into an actual present that will yet be.

This activity of always facing the future constitutes the field of present activity, whether on a trivial or a sophisticated level. Even a rudimentary perceptual act is already selective and thereby future oriented. I cannot possibly report all the myriad detail appearing before me. In any perceptual act some features of the landscape, some aspect of my room, will stand out from its background and attract attention. Like a focused camera that centers the entire scene on some element of it, my perception responds to some aspect of the presentation before me, selects some aspect of it for focus, as expressive of my present state, what I want, what I need, what interests or excites me, even if not consciously manifest. I walk into someone's living room and immediately notice a chair in which I want to sit, the bar which promises refreshment, a painting that delights the eye—and I see the room as centered on that object of focus. The object of

my focus serves some instrumental need I bring with me. Any focused glance is constituted by some possibility which I see it as suggesting to me.

Any act of thought is likewise goal oriented. It concerns a problem to be solved, a task to be done, a joy to be had, an end to be attained, a dilemma to be resolved, a decision to be made. Any acts of living, as Plotinus suggested long ago, are but a "continuous process of acquisition; eliminate futurity, therefore, [and] at once they lose their being."[6]

I do not believe that perceiving and thinking are truly separable, but however that may be, we find that any conscious present is structured in terms of what is not yet but conceivably may be. The presence of memory does not belie this. I cannot possibly remember everything that has happened. I could not possibly recall it in any present time. I do remember, seek to recall to present mind, those aspects of past experience which seem germane to the task at hand. We build the lessons of past experience, whether as conscious thoughts or habits of thought, into the present, focused, directed activity.

If the prospect of futurity is what pulls us onward, if particular remembrances are brought into the present because they are needed for the present uncompleted task, then the three phases of experiential time are organized in the present under the tow of the future. If futurity presents itself in terms of possibilities which are built into present activity so that they may be actualized, we can say that the present is constituted as a future-retrieving activity, as bringing conceived possibilities from a conceived future into the present so that they can be used again in carrying the present forward.

If this sketch of the way the present is constituted holds, if the present itself has no sharp boundaries but indiscernibly passes into what is not yet actual and what is already done, then experiential time cannot be conceived as strictly linear. It cannot be authentically diagrammed as a line; it cannot be reduced to spatial representation; it cannot be reduced to nontemporal points without duration; it cannot be described without regard to whether we start from the before or the after. Because it retrieves futurity as reasonable anticipation, because it retrieves memory as instrumental to the task at hand, it is essentially unidirectional. Human activity might be likened, perhaps, to the activity of a shallow brook, not one which flows straight and direct but one which eddies, gurgles, and curls back on itself around rocks and stones while it is continually wending its way downstream. To treat of human experiential time authentically then is to recognize its continual forward thrust, from a determinate past into an unresolved future.

However one resolves the speculative question of the nature, extent, and degree of human freedom, human activity is experienced as

free; if this freedom is an illusion, so is the free argument of the determinist who belittles its reality. Human freedom is manifested in the selectivity of focus which guides it, the acknowledgment of specific problematics for attention, the evaluation of evidence, the decision concerning possibilities for actualization, the resolve to act, the honoring of our habits or our resolutions to reform them. But this is to say that deliberate behavior is goal oriented in every aspect of its being; this, in at least the Greek sense of the term, is the mark of rationality. To be goal oriented is to be future oriented and to build the commitment to the goal into the structure of present activity.

This then is a sketch of the phenomenological analysis of human temporality.[7] In many ways, we might note in passing, it is very close to that developed by American pragmatism. With it in mind we can now turn to see the implications it suggests for each of the three fundamental concerns underlying human questioning that, taken together, constitute a person's religious outlook.

"What Can I Know?"

Much of modern intellectual history has been seen as a war between science and religion, as though each was monolithic and as though their interests and concerns were antithetical. This view represents a misunderstanding of both and does a disservice to each. No one will deny the conflicts between the world picture of the inherited theology and those of the newly emerging sciences. But just as organized religion gives rise to perspectival doctrinal formulations which change with the passage of time, so the sciences have announced doctrinal formulations that have changed even more radically.

The doctrinal dispute focused on the work of Galileo and Darwin. We may rightly condemn the Catholic Church for the persecution of the Catholic Galileo; but we have no right to condemn its concern for what he had to say. We may rightly condemn the general Protestant reception of the doctrine of the Protestant Darwin but can only applaud the legitimacy of the interest. In due course the theologies were redrawn to accomodate the doctrines once opposed—more rapidly, interestingly enough, with regard to the second which struck perhaps more deeply into emotional issues.

One problem seems to be not with organized religion or organized science but with the recurrent attempt of well-meaning people to try to freeze a particular expression of historically developing human thought into an allegedly eternal dogmatic statement. To do so is to belie the essential historicality of all human activity and to transgress on the authenticity of those commitments from which any particular doctrine of belief emerges.

If religion is the human voicing of ultimate human concerns, it needs to be concerned with the nature of the physical world in which

men find themselves and spend the days of their lives, raise their questions, and seek out meaningful answers. From the beginning religious concern has been manifested in seeking to comprehend man's place in nature, nature's effect on man, and the history they share. We might note, as but one example, that the opening text of the Book of Genesis presents no call to worship, no admonition, no ethical injunction but rather a purported history of how the physical world, as men knew it, came to be.

The natural sciences first arose in ancient Greece as the work of philosophers who did not believe in any temporal beginning but who did have an unproven faith in the power of human reason to penetrate the secrets of natural phenomena. They did not ask about origins as much as about the continuity of change in the physical world. These sciences historically developed by using the developing methods of human reasoning that philosophic thought provided equally for science, for theology, and for other expressive forms of human questioning activity.

It is perhaps ironical, but the two traditions, supposedly separate and antithetical, have flourished only in common dependence. Unto the present day the legacy of Greek philosophy and science has prospered only in those places where the inheritors of biblical religion made themselves regnant. Largely in the inheritance of the Roman Empire—which venerated Greece while persecuting the heirs of the new Biblical religion—and only after the religionists had declared and taken Rome as their own did the sciences begin to flourish to the point where their technological achievements threaten or promise a revolution in the affairs of men beyond any fantasy of early prophets.

Perhaps it seems strange that the sciences developed only in Christendom; but the fact is that modern science is uniquely the product of one Christian civilization. Just why this is so can be debated, but that it is so cannot be lightly dismissed. The way to the rise of modern science was cleared by Thomas Aquinas, whose theology gave a new dignity to human reason. Modern science was itself developed by religious men who set themselves the task of comprehending the complexities of the Creator's creation. Conceived in piety, awe, and wonder from within a theological commitment by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, its methods were refined by René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, and Kant by reaching back to Augustine's christianized platonism. Their common stance was perhaps best exemplified by Isaac Newton who insisted that his theological writings were more important than his *Optics*.

Whether then or now, the scientific endeavor is a systematic investigation of physical nature which seeks to unveil sequential connections in natural phenomena and to develop techniques for control and

redirection of these temporal ties in accord with human needs. By unveiling and enhancing man's possible interaction with the phenomena that constitute the physical environment, scientific activity is thus serving, whether explicated or not, an essentially religious concern.

For this kind of activity its methods were designed and validated; for this its competence has been established. We can then see the activity of science as itself arising out of the larger context of human questioning, as a method of meeting one of these prime concerns of human questioning of human nature, context, and destiny.

But some apostles of the scientific experience, sustained by an enthusiasm that scientific method cannot justify, seek to universalize its authority by usurping all other areas of human concern and foreclosing the truth of any but its own current conclusions. This is not science but scientism, a new and competing theology. Scientism cannot explain the activity of science; it uses a methodology validated only to address physical nature in order to respond to very different concerns. As such, as Kant for one already warned, it thus becomes a new and uncritical dogmatism which reaches beyond its own finite competence and ends by confounding itself.

The reason for this is not far to find. Scientific activity is an activity of men and is rooted in the nature of human time. As such it is but one expression of the human way of being, the human way of thinking, and of expressing the human temporal outlook.

Science does not present a new revelation of transcendent origin. It is a human activity arising out of the outlook of this historic culture. It uses a man-made methodology, which has a history of its own that is still going on. It uses a man-made logic by which to reason and to validate its thinking, and that logic is itself historically developed and still controversial. It has proceeded, as Thomas S. Kuhn for one has pointed out, by a succession of hypothetical and conflicting paradigms, metaphysical assumptions and discordant explanations in a history of intellectual revolutions and regroupings.[8] Its doctrinal history is not that of the progressive unfolding of a panoramic vision but rather more like political history in twistings, turnings, repudiations, and new beginnings. In even its purest sense, it has been dependent on new technologies, the accident of invention, the politics of financial support, and the interests of both economic and military need. The history of its doctrines is but part of the broader expanse of human social historical development.

The cognitive force of its doctrines, however validated, should not be read for more than they are. The laws of nature the sciences announce are not necessarily the laws of nature as such; they are but the currently successful rules by which men are able to correlate selected phenomena; they are explanatory statements of a finite

human outlook, express the human point of view and are, in each case, the answers secured to questions asked. Human science cannot be a god-like observation of nature as a whole just because its questions and its activities are always within the whole of nature. Scientific probing and questioning is always in specific terms and always from a human perspective within the capabilities of individual human thinking. Just as the sciences have historically provided diverse explanations for the same kind of phenomena, it is conceivable that another creature, thinking in a different way, would ask different questions from those we ask, organize its probing and questioning by different categories than those we use, and emerge with explanatory answers different from those which, at any particular time, serve to satisfy us. Human science, in its cognitive reach, is limited at the outset to the ways in which humans are able to look at the physical world about them, the ways in which that world may appear to the peculiarities of human vision. The activity of science then, as the doctrines that ensue, is a human activity defined in its capabilities and limitations by the human way of temporal thinking as well as by the historical cultural matrix in which it happens to be functioning.

The individual human scientist is a human being who works within a community of other similarly dedicated human beings. Leaving aside the specific animating motives for the individual investigator (which, I suspect, are primarily esthetic), we may still expect to find at least three personal qualities in any serious investigator: existential commitment, meaningful freedom, and moral reason. These are each manifestations of experiential time.

The individual investigator commits himself to a certain way of thinking; he must, by an exercise of subjective will, determine to bracket the subjectivity of his individual wants. He must aim at objectivity, dispassionate judgment, disregard of purely personal perspective; he must restrict himself in the kinds of questions he allows himself to ask and the kinds of answers he will accept. By seeking repeatability in experimentation, mathematical description in formulation, and public accessibility to data, the individual scientist, in a real sense, makes an existential commitment to sublimate his individuality. And, in reducing temporal description to the measured temporal distance between a before and an after, he has necessarily used his own temporal perspective to deal with time in abstract, spatialized, nonperspectival terms.

To achieve even these abstract time statements he necessarily utilizes the structure of human temporality: He considers possibilities before him in formulating his project; he asks questions, retrieves information from past work or from his colleagues guided by a judgment of purposive relevance. The structure of his investigatory activ-

ity is itself a paradigm of the existential nature of experiential time at work, for his present is defined for him as a spread of time, a field of present, in which futurity enters to direct, attract, pull onward, and to do so by injecting a vision of alternate possibility for him to choose. And his own past enters into his present activity not as a mechanistically conceived causality but as lessons to be retrieved, skills that have been mastered, a legacy to be used in selective form in the light of where he sees himself headed.

The effective depersonalization that the scientist requires is a very highly personal kind of commitment, a deliberate willful decision about how to utilize his time. In order to do this he cannot be an automaton; he necessarily exercises his capacity to focus, to decide, to commit himself to act in the specific way the scientific endeavor demands, the instances when it shall be pursued, the instances—such as his continuing personal life—when it shall be put aside. He must be able to evaluate his own skills in manipulating his equipment, control his time allocations, build or reform habits of work and thought, subject himself to the discipline he accepts in order to realize the goals he sets. And he does all this within a time frame explicitly defined by futurity, for his criterion of predictability brings the possible future into his existentially committed present.

The scientist *qua* scientist demonstrates the ability to utilize practical reasoning: He chooses proximate goals as means to longer-range goals and he chooses the means along the way. He demonstrates the ability to make discriminations of what he regards as good and bad, right and wrong, and to adapt his own conduct in the light of these value assessments.

Scientific activity is not, as the cliché phrases it, "valuefree." Without the ability and commitment to continuing value judgments of a procedural kind, without a commitment to the value of truth itself science could not be. Scientific activity then depends on the moral reasoning of the scientist who necessarily adapts standards of moral reasoning for application within the particular context of his concern.

Scientific activity is directed in a human way to the ultimate concern defining the religious outlook—the understanding of the sequential connections within the world in which we find ourselves and the possibilities they offer. Scientific activity proceeds by employing the structured value-laden temporal outlook of human beings. It points beyond itself, in its own activity, to human moral reason in at least two ways. The first I have mentioned—the necessity for employing moral value judgmental criteria of good and bad, right and wrong, in defining methods and focusing on goals.

But it does so in another way as well. The results of scientific investigation continually lead to new practical employments in reshaping

and guiding everyday life. The technological revolutions, which scientific achievements made possible and which in turn have fed into redirecting scientific studies, have continual repercussions for all other human activities. Contemporary science, for one, presents human society with new opportunities and dilemmas which can be settled only in terms of moral judgments and the sorting out of moral values. The discrimination among them—the possibility of being accepted or avoided—is dependent on moral reason, which indeed needs the knowledge of what it can do in order to make responsible decisions about what it ought to do.

Scientific activity rests upon the activity of moral practical reason and feeds back into it new problems for resolution. We are thus led to the second of the ultimate concerns, that of moral obligation and the responsible use of freedom.

"What Should I Do?"

The quest for knowledge, as we have seen, depends on (1) an active personal involvement with tools and equipment in the environment, (2) our ability to seize possibilities we see being offered in terms of goals we seek to achieve, (3) moral fidelity to standards of truth and integrity of method, and (4) recognition that no solution is final, that each solution achieved creates new problems for resolution. Just so, moral reason, in its explicit exercise, finds itself in situations that are temporally structured, involves us with the world of other persons and of things that are temporally operative, and reaches beyond its own questionings, in which new problems are continually being exchanged for settled ones.

Moral reason arises out of problematic situations. It arises out of value conflicts, conflicts between alternate desires and alternate goals. As long as no conflict is discerned, no decision to be made, no moral dilemma presents itself and no moral decision has to be made. My moral dilemmas arise when I want to do two things but can do only one—which one should I choose to do? Or when I experience a conflict between a desire and a feeling of obligation, I want to do this but think I should do that instead.

Moral philosophers have argued about the relative value of different judgmental criteria—whether pleasure or happiness, stoic resignation, hedonistic indulgence, esthetic satisfaction, or moral self-development is to be taken as a guide to decision. They have argued about the values by which decisions should be made and also about the method to be followed in resolving value conflicts. Some, for example, have urged that we acknowledge a supreme good to be achieved and then appropriate means to achieve it. Others, citing the aphorism that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, have

urged instead a rigorous standard of right and wrong that does not take account of anticipated future effects which may ensue from present action.

However such disputes may be and however our sympathies may be directed, one thing seems clear. Moral decisions are not about the past, which cannot be changed, or about the present moment which is fleetingly actual, but only about the future.

All moral decisions presuppose the irreversibility and the onward march of time. We may condemn an evil deed, but we cannot undo it: We can either ignore it or seek to atone for it henceforth. To accept a moral responsibility, in any serious sense, means to resolve a solution henceforth, to read the situation as offering a possibility for development that I undertake, to try to build a value judgment into its future course. A moral decision activates a hope or belief that my decision can indeed alter the development of the future, can make a difference in how things will yet be. All my moral decisions are temporally structured decisions that relate to a future regarded as in some degree open to my intervention. My moral decisions are decisions about what ought to be that I might help bring to pass—with regard to others and my own self.

All moral decisions then are temporal decisions in two distinct senses: They relate to the future by means of possibilities which presently seem to offer themselves for realization—and so they exemplify the structure of experiential time. But they also embody action-commitments to the use of oncoming time in specific ways, for the realization of specific values, for the creation of a future deemed to be different in the absence of my active involvement. Not only are moral decisions temporally structured; they are also decisions about the use of time, about how a forthcoming temporal situation in which I find myself engaged shall be altered from what it otherwise would be. A moral decision—regardless of its specific reference, the values built into it, or the number of persons involved—is a decision about time-use; it presupposes the reality of temporality, the presence of responsibility in determinate situations that are yet open ended. A moral decision decides how the future of the world, in this particular regard and using the materials at hand, is to be created.

Not only is a moral decision temporally structured and directed to the use of time. It also is forced by time. I cannot do all the things I want to do; I cannot do all the things I feel myself obliged to do. Most of my decisions are not between blatant evil and incarnate good but between alternate goods. In the dynamic press of the continuity of change I must decide between approvable alternatives. And I cannot refrain from decision—just because not to decide is a deciding.

Time thus forces decision because time "finitizes." It forecloses all conceivable possibilities into just these few; it forecloses my pursuing

all my values or goods into just these few among which I must still choose. It makes any specific finite choice a largely blind one just because I cannot see all the repercussions which will flow from it. And it makes my choice an irrevocable one as it closes off this particular situation and rechannels the direction of what comes after. Friedrich Nietzsche to the contrary, there can be no recurrence of the same just because the continuity of temporal development introduces novelty into what seem, at first glance, to be identical situations.

Not only are my choices finite. My life of choosing and deciding is itself finite. Behind every decision I make lurks the knowledge that all deciding as such will pass away, that there will come an end to my facing choices and resolving dilemmas. The time for all deciding is intensely finite, for death is the eclipse of life. The knowledge of impending death is indeed a part of life, but the experience of death is beyond life; we can experience the process of dying but death itself is beyond all possible experience. Death, the ultimate possibility we each will actualize, as Martin Heidegger pointed out, is absolutely incommensurable. We cannot fathom it, for our only experience is with the activity of being and not with the complete negation of being.

Yet death is not an unfortunate misfortune without present meaning. Its hovering promise is what forces choice, decision, moral reasoning, commitment upon us; it compels us to define our interests, our values, our pursuits, and thereby our own selves. I cannot investigate everything and so must decide what knowledge to pursue and what ignorance to accept. I cannot try out all values but must decide which I shall build into my self. Just because my time is inherently finite, I am continually compelled to decide just how my biographic becoming will be directed and defined.

Time then is exemplified in moral reason in at least three ways: (1) My moral reasoning is temporally constituted. (2) It is concerned with temporally fluid situations. (3) It is pervasively limited by its irrevocability, by the range of presented possibilities, and by the extent of time available to function. My temporality pervades the opportunities and the limitations of the possibilities I may make my own. And it is this ultimate temporal limitation on all that I can think and do and be that most prominently brings us humans to face our most ultimate concern, the mystery and abiding and pervasive reality of temporal finitude.

"What May I Hope?"

Time is, within human experience, the mark of reality and of being. The hope for life after death, for immortality is the hope for continuing reality, the hope for the ongoing of the temporal. The prospect of the end of individual time has induced men in all cultures and levels

of civilization to nourish the hope for life after death; even when this has been couched in terms of a somehow nontemporal eternal present, this is still but the hope for more time.[9] The hope for immortality thus underlines the fundamental import of time for us.

Whether we may have life after death depends on the nature of the universe, the structure of ultimate reality, the operational moral logic of its continuing functioning, for time is not only the mark of change but also the mark of continuity. It seems somewhat irrational and indeed wasteful that the individuality cultivated through life does not in some way continue. The quest for immortality is not only a quest for more time; it is also a quest for deeper rationality in the moral economy of the reality of the world. If rationality is, in any sense, goal-oriented behavior, the hope for immortality is the hope for purpose or goal justification in the struggles of life, the hope for an abiding rationality in the constitution of the universe.

The hope for continuance after death has been a prime impetus behind the postulation and conceptualization of a transcendent order and, in the biblical religions, of one supreme being, of God as the creator and conserver of order and rationality and meaningfulness in the scheme of things. If God is indeed a living reality, then the functioning of the world has a director; it is then reasonable to believe that purposive rationality is built into the fabric of things, that the governance of the universe is such that moral economy may prevail, that life is not a meaningless waste but has some transcendent destiny.

Just because a life after death is beyond all possible experience in experiential time, one cannot prove or disprove the truth of any assertion concerning immortality, one cannot truly judge the validity of any such hope. Just because the reality of God is likewise beyond any verification or conclusive denial, neither theism nor atheism can be demonstrated by finite human reason.

With regard to traditional theology, one must make a strong distinction between alleged proofs of God's existence and good reasons reaching beyond what reason can establish which yet justify a belief accordant with reason. Indeed this is the outcome of Kant's deliberate destruction of the traditional attempts to prove the actuality of God's being. Human reason, Kant argued, cannot make cognitive statements that extend beyond the bounds of possible human experience. But knowledge is not enough for the living of life (or even for science). In a way that leads to the pragmatism of both Charles Peirce and James as well as to the existentialism of Heidegger, he insisted that knowledge is not enough, that to live, indeed to develop and use knowledge in living, we must employ rational beliefs, beliefs which go beyond what knowledge has established because their claims cannot yet be verified but which are accordant with knowledge and seem implicit in reason even if reason cannot establish their truth.

Knowledge can only tell us of what is determinate; we may have well-grounded hypotheses or expectations, judgments of probability and tentative claims to factual description, but until such cognitive claims have been verified they qualify as perhaps justifiable opinion but not as known fact. Knowledge also can only be of what has been established; to the extent that the future is open, to that extent any possible cognitive claim goes beyond its evidential justification. But in any action, decision, or commitment, in any act of living we are stepping into a future which is not yet completely determinate, not yet reduced to fact; we are thus stepping beyond what knowledge, in any strict sense, can establish. Without a living commitment to beliefs which cannot yet be proved but which must yet be acted upon, we could not make a single rational decision. To live into the future, into what is not yet but still may be, is to live into the existentially unknown; to the extent that the future is still open and unresolved it is to live into what is presently inknowable. Reason's only reasonable demand for rational beings is that their belief and value commitments to unverified and unverifiable beliefs be in accord with what reason has demonstrated and within the limits of what reason leaves open. What James called the necessity of the "will to believe" is the necessity to will to live, to commit myself into the unknown, the will to act and thus make a difference in the ongoing history of the world.

A belief in God's reality then has nothing irrational about it. Indeed it would seem that the irrationality is rather on the side of disbelief. The possibility of belief as such is necessitated by the fact of futurity. And indeed three of the prime motives justifying such a belief come out of the forward-looking human stance: the hope that the end of individual life will not prove meaningless, the belief that the principles of morality will be validated, and the faith upon which all science must rest—that the order of physical nature and of human thought will be conserved and maintained.

Indeed the fact that belief in God cannot be proved has been seen to be a point in its favor, for theistic religions usually regard the commitment to a belief in God as itself carrying with it moral virtue. We generally do not applaud the moral character (as distinct from scholastic diligence) of the schoolboy who learns his multiplication tables. But precisely because the reality of God cannot be proven, the commitment to belief is judged as any moral commitment is judged—as a sign of the commitment of the self to something beyond the self and thereby a moral virtue.

But this is to say that a belief in God, in any religiously meaningful sense, is not a merely intellectual or conceptual matter. In contrast to a merely intellectual judgment, a commitment to a belief in God should make a profound difference in the way one approaches the

business of life. If one truly sees oneself as living in a God-governed universe, the context of one's every act and decision is radically different from the existential context of the committed atheist who believes himself to be living in a godless universe. As an existential matter then one must conduct one's life as in one kind of universe or the other; agnostic disavowal is an intellectualist evasion and is not existentially viable. For the commited theist the statement "God is" becomes a first premise, beyond all possible proof, of every vital consideration. The moral import of a belief in God is that the belief should make a moral difference to the believer. The existential belief in God is then itself redemptive.

But if we believe in God's reality, in what kind of a being can we believe? We have generally taken God to be, in Saint Anselm's words, that "being than which nothing greater can be conceived."[10] But the theological tradition by a logical jump has generally transmuted this to mean that God is absolute in power and in knowledge; when so conceived as not merely supreme but as absolute, the concept of God, by a further logical jump, is held to have no touch of our temporality but to be somehow timelessly eternal. So conceived, the idea of God is so exalted beyond all human attributes and predicates that one concludes that God is beyond all description by us, that God can be described by us only in negative terms.[11] This view, known as negative theology, poses very serious problems for a living religion (as distinct from a merely speculative exercise of thought), for, if the God of religious commitment is beyond all possible attributes by us, an uncrossable gulf has been posited between God and man. We are then asked to believe only in a denial of all we know ourselves to be; such a belief, though perhaps intellectually intriguing, is religiously irrelevant. If our conception of God may have no positive attributes that are commensurate with ours, then any ethic of an "imitation of God" is meaningless.

We can only speak of, believe in, emulate, or even be aware of beings having something in common with us. Whatever its place in speculative thought, negative theology has not been taken seriously by lived religion even if some of its phrases have been thoughtlessly iterated. The God of religion, as Blaise Pascal insisted, is not the conceptual abstraction of philosophers or theologians. The concept of God that functions in religion is of the God to whom one prays, in whose will one hopes, a being who has purposes and reasons and judgments. But this implies that the only concept of God that is relevant for religion is that of a finite transcendent being commensurate with our own temporality.

Exploring the ramifications of the idea of divine finitude would take us into issues of metaphysics, epistemology, and value and would

thus lead us far afield. Let me focus, rather, on two considerations directly emerging from the present discussion of human temporality.

First, if the pervasive temporality of our experience is not merely illusion, then it reflects something of the nature of the world, for our experiencing (even if somewhat illusionary) is itself still as much a part of the ongoing world as the objects of which we have experiences. But this says that, in at least some sense, time is real. If time is real, then God is necessarily neither omnipotent nor omniscient; if time is real, then God is necessarily a finite being. On several levels Aristotle seems to have seen this; specifically in terms of time he noted that at least this "is lacking to God, to make undone things that have once been done."[12] If the time order is real, then God can neither know how to reverse it nor be able to do so; unable to cancel or annul it, God is thereby bound by it. God may see more clearly and wisely than we can, but he cannot see any way in which to negate the factuality of what has been.

It is remarkable how often these superlatives of power and of knowledge have been insisted upon while specific reservations were simultaneously entered in. It is not clear from just where this notion of an absolutely all-powerful being comes. The pages of the Bible are replete with stories about God's problems with men and the consequent necessity of divine intervention in order to rearrange forthcoming events in order to resolve them. Even the creation of the universe, according to Genesis, required six full days of divine laboring. In the philosophic tradition Plato's deity was not even a creator but an architect who put preexistent matter into a temporal order.[13] And Aristotle's was seen to be necessarily passive and thereby ignorant of all change. Anselm did not speak of absolute power or knowledge but of the ultimate reach of the human understanding. Descartes, who regarded God as absolute and perfect, did not believe God capable of deceiving the proper use of the human intellect. Leibniz, who defended the notion of the absolute nature of the deity, still maintained God's inability to transgress the laws of mathematics and logic. Most wisely, Kant saw that the dogmatic ascription of positive, as well as negative, predicates to God as he may be in himself beyond the reach of the human outlook has no warrant just because it violates the discipline of finite human reason. As James urged, it is not God's power or knowledge but the belief in his goodness that is of religious concern: Only when taken by us to be finite in knowledge or power or both does God meet "the terms in which common men have actually carried on their active commerce with God."[14]

Indeed we generally speak of a divine "plan" and a divine "will"; but "plan" and "will" refer to a time order, to futurity, to the reality of alternative possibilities, to finite options, to tasks yet to be ac-

complished and goals yet to be won; they imply a distinction between ends and means and the temporal distance between them. A truly omnipotent being, as John Stuart Mill cogently argued, would have no need for means; his wish alone, much less his pronouncement, would suffice.[15] The use of terms such as "plan" and "will" thus serves to confirm the thesis that the God of religious relevance is a being conceived by us to be bound to the consequences of temporal order.

But let us go to the second consideration—from the hypothesis that time itself is real to the encompassing temporality of human existence. If all human thinking is time-structured, if all cognitive claims concern temporal existents, if human thinking functions by focusing on temporally available possibilities, then human thinking cannot possibly attain any meaningful conception of that which does share its temporality. Even if human temporal dimensions, as we understand them, do not strictly apply to God, even if God is somehow beyond the human understandings of time, nevertheless, as Kant pointed out, we first must think of God not as strictly timeless but as a durational being; second, we must acknowledge that "time is the only possible means available to us to represent this [divine durational] existent [*Dasein*] . . . to us."[16] And Heidegger, whose examination of the structure of human temporality is the most exhaustive, has followed Kant in this by arguing "if God's eternity may be 'construed' philosophically, then it only can be understood as a primal and unending temporality" (with the explicitly stated consequent that the whole tradition of negative theology is thereby reopened).[17]

The implications of these considerations for a reconstruction of the traditional theological theodicy are far-reaching. At the very least they set aside, as indeed spurious, that problem which has occupied the theological imagination, the problem of evil—the task of reconciling the goodness of an all-powerful being with the reality of misery, disease, evil, and tragedy. It is not God's power but God's goodness that is of religious concern. If God is discerned not as all-powerful but as a finite being concerned with the good or the right, a being bound by the conditions of time, then religion becomes, as William Ellery Channing urged, a matter of transcendent friendship and allegience with a deity who works in and with time.[18] Indeed Kant had already suggested that what joins man and God together is that both are bound by the moral law. God, conceived as a transcendent moral being, bound by time, is a deity whose struggle is concerned not with the reconciliation of evil to power but with the problem of the good, the problem of helping us recognize it so that we may help in achieving it. If there be any plausibility to this way of thinking, then the morality a religion urges, as a central message to its adherents, takes on a transcendent meaning and gives rational meaning to the condition of time.

The point here is a simple one. The God in whom we claim to believe can only be conceived by us in temporal terms, operating in time and with time by means of a time order commensurate in some ways with ours and thereby bound to the finitizing consequences of involvement in temporal order. In contrast to any notion of an absolute timeless being, a view such as that suggested here is immediately accordant with the scientific portrait of nature as a historical process, with the thesis of biological evolution, and with a developmental view of human history. By the principle of conceptual economy (of Ockham's razor), it would seem that such a conception is rationally preferable.

If then God, as the focus of our religious concerns, is to have a religious meaning for us, if life itself is to have a religious meaning, we must be able to conceive of God in the only terms by which we can discern meaning, terms commensurate with our own temporality and accordant with whatever little knowledge we may already have attained. Whatever God may be beyond our temporal way of seeing and understanding and acting, God can only be meaningful to us insofar as his being, his activity, and his will can be seen by us to have relevance to our temporal ways of seeing, understanding, and being.

The Unity of the Three Concerns

What God may be beyond our horizon of temporality we cannot comprehend. What ultimate reality is beyond our temporal horizon we have no way of knowing. What time itself may be beyond our horizon of temporality we cannot say. The mystery of God and of reality are then equivalent for us to the mystery of time. We cannot define them as they may be in themselves; we can only come to work with them as they are able to enter into the temporality of the human outlook. Our approximating conceptions of them must be temporal conceptions. To the extent that we acknowledge the temporality of our working and approximating conceptions of them, we are enabled to work with them within our human framework, for doing so gives voice, and thereby meaning, to the kinds of beings we are, beings whose every way is to be pervasively temporal.

What God, reality, time may be in themselves is beyond our capability to comprehend just because we cannot transcend the inherent limitations of the human point of view. Like futurity, they remain unknown; but just as we delineate futurity, in terms of necessities and still open possibilities providing clues for action, as we recognize the temporal nature of the futurity that enters into us, so we may attain some partial understandings as we recognize their entrance into our own temporality. And just as with futurity, so with God's reality and that of time itself, we have no choice but to proceed forthrightly with

conviction beyond actual or possible knowledge and commitment beyond known fact. Life, it has been said, is an adventure of the spirit; it requires a conviction of freedom, conviction in courage, and a readiness to go forward into the unknown.

Our basic concerns on every level, trivial or profound, are concerns about the future. As we enter into futurity, as futurity enters into us, our knowledge and ignorance, fears and hopes, intelligence and faith join together to prescribe the tasks to be accomplished, the goals to be won, the hardships to be endured, the triumphs to anticipate. Futurity is the form of our concerns and of the meanings we see in the days of our lives. The character of futurity then provides us with the ways in which we define our ultimate concerns and fundamental convictions.

Our ultimate concerns and convictions are concerns and convictions about the meaning of the temporal. Whether we speak about science, freedom, morality, mortality, or deity, we are speaking of the temporal. When we ask about significance or meaning beyond the momentary present, we are asking about the meaning of life and so about the meaning of future time. The ultimate questions we ask, the convictions which guide us, are but expressions of our one fundamental concern. This one ultimate concern expressed in our three basic questions, the ultimate concern of all religious questioning and conviction is for the meaning, the significance, the nature of the temporal—the nature, within the human perspective, of time itself.

NOTES

1. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 267.

2. See, e.g., Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), esp. chap. 1.

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), A805-B833, p. 635.

4. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), p. 254.

5. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 73.

6. Plotinus *The Enneads* 3.7.4.

7. This sketch is largely based on the analyses of temporal experience by Martin Heidegger in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962) and in his *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). For a more detailed elucidation, see my *Heidegger, Kant and Time* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), esp. chaps. 7 and 8.

8. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

9. From the standpoint of a phenomenological examination of human temporality it is difficult to see how the notion of an eternally timeless present—with neither pastness nor futurity entering into it—can be rendered meaningful in any human sense. Its postulation seems to be an instance of negative theology: Heidegger, e.g., in

Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, argues that the Greek postulation of this idea can only be explained as an inverse projection of a protest against temporality; see p. 249.

10. Saint Anselm, "Proslogium," in *Basic Writings*, trans. J. S. Deane (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 7-8.

11. The classic statement of this view is that of Saint Thomas Aquinas: "Now because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not" *The Summa Theologica*, trans. A. C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 25 (part 1, 3). The philosophic question of course is how we may be able to have knowledge of negative attributes if we are unable first to know of any commonality. To seek to do this by means of analogic reasoning does not appear to overcome the problem, for one cannot judge the validity or legitimacy of an analogy unless one already has separate knowledge of each of the entities that the analogy compares in terms of a presumably common, or similar, quality.

12. Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 1139b. One might consult the *Metaphysics*, esp. 1074b-1075a, where it is plainly suggested that were God to have knowledge of change, this "would be change for the worse" and would destroy God's self-sufficient perfection. One could add one other temporal consideration to the attack on omniscience: If the future is constituted of genuinely open possibilities, it is thereby unresolved, and if in principle unresolved, then even divine foreknowledge cannot be complete.

13. The pragmatic force of Plato's famous dictum that time is but "the moving image of eternity" is to make sequential time the principle of order in the world of nature. See my *The Human Experience of Time* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 15-20.

14. James (n. 4 above), p. 311.

15. See John Stuart Mill, *Theism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1957), esp. chaps. 1 and 2. This generally ignored essay presents an important analysis of the concept of deity. In many ways, it anticipates some of the issues developed in the writings of Charles Hartshorne, particularly in *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941), which suggested several themes I touch on here.

16. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. J. Kopper, (Stuttgart: Phillipp Reclam, 1966), pp. 217-18.

17. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 8th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1957), p. 427, n. 1; cf. Heidegger (n. 7 above), p. 499, n. xiii.

18. See William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," in *The Works* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1888), pp. 291-301. Channing's essay presents a cogent criticism of the *via negativa* of traditional theology and argues for the necessity of a concept of God commensurate with human predicates, a view that is very close to that expressed by Alfred North Whitehead in his King's Chapel lectures published under the title *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926) and, from a quite different philosophic perspective, by the Russian religious existentialist Nicolas Berdyaev.