TIME AFTER TIME

THERE is an argument (was it Smart who started this ?) that goes like this : Time cannot really flow or pass, for if it did it would make sense to ask at what rate it flowed or passed, and this would require a super-time for it to flow or pass in. I want to argue here that this argument, though it was worth trying once, is really either pedantic or perverse—pedantic if it is meant to show only that all talk of time's flow or passage is figurative, which everyone knows ; perverse if it denies the truth which this figure is plainly intended to convey, which everyone also knows.

A year ago Johnny celebrated his eleventh birthday, now he is celebrating his twelfth, and in a year's time, if he's spared, he will celebrate his thirteenth. The date of his birth, in fact, is receding all the time further into the past, just as a leaf on a river flowing past us is all the time receding further into the distance. Would anyone wish to deny this ? And was ' time's flow ' ever intended to mean anything more ?

But is getting older to be called a ' change ' (however invariably it may be accompanied by changes) ? I do not see why not. To begin with it is the case that no more than ten years have passed since X was born, and then this is not the case ; to begin with it is not the case that eleven years have passed since X was born, and then this is the case. What was the case ceases to be the case, and what was not the case comes to be the case ; if this is not change, what is ?

But at what rate does this change, if it is one, occur ? How fast does one get older ? Surely the answer to this question is obvious. I am now exactly a year older than I was a year ago ; it has taken me exactly a year to become a year older ; and quite generally, the rate of this change is one time-unit per time-unit. Nor does any mysterious ' super-time ' enter into this calculation. It has taken exactly one year of ordinary time for my age to increase by exactly one year of ordinary time, and that is all there is to it.

But is this a ' rate of change ' at all ? How this question is answered is unimportant ; it is a question like ' Am I my own sibling ? ' If by ' sibling ' is meant ' other child of same parents ' I am not and cannot be my own sibling ; if what is meant is just ' child of same parents ', I am and must be my own sibling ; and I am and must be the child of my own parents whether I call this ' being my own sibling ' or not. If a ' rate ' of change is a ratio between something else and a time-interval, there is no rate at which my age changes ; if it is just a ratio between something (whether a different something or the same something) and a time-interval, my age changes at the rate stated above ; and in any case I become a year older every year (there are such things as birthdays), whether this be called a ' rate ' of a year per year or not.

A subtler difficulty has been hinted at by Pears, interpreting McTaggart. If X's birth ' is ' an event now ten years past, must it not somehow be present in order to have this present property, and must it not have been present a year ago to have at that time the different property of being nine years past ? Pears rightly rejects such suggestions, and shaves this new Platonic beard in the time-honoured way, scrapping those systematically misleading abstract nouns and replacing them by verbs. Discard ' X's birth is now ten years past ' for ' It is now ten years since X was born ', and how the pseudo-problems flee away ! It is clear now that what I am talking about is not really X's birth but X, and just as the pseudo-noun ' X's birth ' disappears, so does the pseudo-adjectival phrase that pseudo-qualifies it—' ten years past '—and instead we have an introductory phrase that is quite clearly not adjectival but adverbial in force.

This is exactly how I myself would solve the Pears-McTaggart problem ; I do not quarrel with the least bit of this solution (or dissolution). I would only not have it forgotten that adverbial introductions like ' It is now ten years since— ' can modify, beside verbs like that of ' I was born ', verbs like that of ' It was two years since— '. For ' It is now ten years since it was two years since I was born ' (' I had my second birthday ten years ago ') has nothing wrong with it whatever ; nor would longer chains of prefixes of this sort be in any way vicious (a man can perfectly easily commemorate not only his birth but one of his birthdays). This repetition is in order precisely because we have to do here not with a predicate, forming statements out of names, but with an auxiliary, forming statements out of statements, like ' not '. Add a predicate to the statement formed by adding a predicate to a name, and you get nonsense (like ' John runs runs '), but you can pile up ' not's until your arm gives in, and so it is with these others.

This means, too, that the ' is now ' in ' It is now ten years since— ' is not entirely nugatory ; it is a genuine present tense, for there might have been something else there instead (like ' was a year ago ') ; so that if one cares to reify one can say, not that X's being born, but that his having been born ten years ago, is now present, and one can also, if one pleases, call this an ' event '. Or, if one pleases, not. Having been born ten years ago is a logically parasitic kind of event (birthdays presuppose births and not *vice versa*), and one might want to reserve the term ' event ' for the labouring classes ; but (1) it is not a noxious parasite (what harm does it do ?—and what harm is done even if this flea also has smaller fleas upon its back to bite it, etc. ?) ; (2) all events, as Pears in effect shows, are logically parasitic in a measure (the problem ' Where is my birthday when it is past ? ' is no less teasing that ' Where is my birth when it is past ? ', but no more teasing either) ; (3) it is something that comes to pass in time (that I was born ten years ago comes to be the case and then to have been the case, exactly as my birth comes to be the case and then to

have been the case, and there is no more need with the one than with the other to go out of time into a ' super-time ') ; and (4) not only births, and not only birthday-parties, but also birthdays, are ' events ' in common parlance (a twenty-first is also a ' happy event ' to be celebrated, and a different event from the celebration).

To put my point a little more polemically : Pears talks of truths as the ' timeless shadows ' of events, and I don't think I believe in these timeless shadows (such talk seems to me a strange inverted Platonism—instead of time being the moving shadow of eternity, eternity is the still shadow of time) ; but whether or not events have timeless shadows, they do have shadows that are not in the least timeless but follow them through time exactly as ordinary shadows follow those who cast them through space.   These shadows, though not the others, I think I understand ; and Plato, if I am not mistaken, understood them quite well too.   Their law of projection is ' It is m years since it was n years since p $=$ It is m $+$ n years since p '; and this simple additiveness is the first premiss of the tortuous but not at all mystical or mysterious reflections on age-comparison in the *Parmenides* 154B-155D.

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