

TIME AS GOD AND DEVIL ¹

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TIME is one of the most familiar, and yet one of the most mysterious, of the basic concepts of the human mind. St. Augustine perceived this long ago, and he defined the enigma in memorable words: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not: yet I say boldly, that I know, that if nothing passed away, time past were not; and if nothing were coming, a time to come were not; and if nothing were, time present were not. Those two times then, past and to come, how are they, seeing the past is not, and that to come is not yet? But the present, should it always be the present, and never pass into time past, verily it should not be time, but eternity."²

The enigma, which Augustine here describes in terms of its curious paradoxes, is, however, but one of the aspects of Time as experienced by man. There is another aspect of it that is not enigmatical; indeed it makes its meaning clear with a ruthless unmistakable logic. It is the fact that Time manifests itself in change, decay and death. The dawning mind of the child soon grasps the fact he is living in a world where all things do not continue the same, and that change in his circumstances will often affect him personally, for good or ill. But this is not all: the child soon learns that people grow old and die. And he quickly perceives the significance of this knowledge for himself. His consciousness of Time causes him to envisage a future, in which, he knows, his own death will inevitably occur. Hence, for him, as he grows older, the passage of Time appears

¹ A lecture delivered in the Library series of public lectures. The subject of this lecture, with fuller documentation and illustrations, is incorporated in a book by the author entitled *History, Time and Deity* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

² *Confessions*, xi. 17 (trans. E. B. Pusey).

increasingly menacing ; for it threatens his sense of security and well-being in the most absolute manner, namely, by bringing ever nearer the extinction of his very self.¹

The experience of the child, which we have briefly sketched here, represents, of course, the experience of us all. Now, since the experience is common, we might well expect that reaction to it will show a common pattern. And, indeed it does ; although the forms in which that reaction has most naturally found expression, namely, in religion have varied considerably. The pattern, that underlies this variety reveals itself in a seeking for security from the effacing flux of Time ; in an endeavour to find a safe refuge from Time's menace of decay and death. Thus, to give three examples for illustration : the ancient Egyptians believed that they would be eternally safe after death if they could join the sun-god, Rē, in his unceasing journey through the heavens² ; in Buddhism security from Time has been sought by identifying it as the inexorable law to which all become subject who mistake this phenomenal world for reality³ ; Christianity, through its doctrine of baptism, promises a new transcendental life through incorporation in Christ, its *summum bonum* being the eternal Vision of God.⁴

This common quest for security from Time's menace, which has found such various expression in the religions of the world, naturally suggests that Time must be imagined in correspondingly different forms, and that these forms will indicate the estimate of Time's origin and nature held in each of the religions concerned. To examine and evaluate some of these conceptions of Time will be the object of the rest of this lecture.

It will be most convenient to begin our task by considering the interpretation of Time that finds expression in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the great religious epic of Hinduism. By so doing we shall at once become acquainted not only with a most impressive

¹ Cf. S. G. F. Brandon, *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions* (Manchester University Press, 1962), pp. 6-7, 384-5.

² *Pyramid Texts*, 167, 775, 1453, 1477 1466d. Cf. Brandon in *The Saviour God* (Manchester University Press, 1963), p. 19.

³ Cf. *History, Time, and Deity*, chap. IV.

⁴ Cf. *op. cit.* chap. II.

image of Time, seen in one of the great world-religions, but we shall be afforded insight into one of the most significant traditions concerning the nature and status of Time.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which was probably composed in the third or second century B.C., is concerned to present the god Vishnu, in his form of Vāsudeva, as the supreme deity.¹ The poem takes the form of a dialogue between a prince Arjuna and his charioteer, who is Vishnu in disguise. The occasion is the eve of a battle, when Arjuna hesitates to commence the action, being appalled by the prospect of the slaughter that must result from so doing. In the course of the long dialogue, which follows, the subject of human duty is discussed in terms of the doctrine of “saṃsāra”, or the transmigration of souls. As the dialogue proceeds, Arjuna becomes aware of the identity of his companion, and he beseeches him to reveal his true self. Vishnu consents, and Arjuna sees a vision of deity as the beneficent Creator of the universe. Arjuna is profoundly impressed by this revelation of the immensity and multiplicity of the divine creative power. But he feels that he has not seen all; that there is yet another side to the supreme deity. He asks that this might also be shown to him. He is warned not to ask for this; but he persists and the revelation is given, and it is terrible. In profound terror, Arjuna beholds all forms of being passing swiftly to their destruction in the awful mouths of Vishnu. Horrified, he cries out: “Thy mouths with many dreadful fangs beholding, Like to Time’s universal conflagration, I know the quarters not, I find no shelter. Be gracious, Lord of gods, the world’s protector.” Then Vishnu answers: “Know I am Time, that makes the worlds to perish, when ripe, and brings on them destruction.”²

¹ On the significance of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* see R. Garbe in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. J. Hastings), ii. 535b-538b; J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens* (Stuttgart, 1960), i. 267; R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 13-14; S. Radhakrishnan, *La Bhagavad-Gītā* (Paris, 1954), pp. 15-18; S. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1932), ii. 549-52.

² *Bhagavad-Gītā*, xi. 25, 32; trans. E. J. Thomas, *The Song of the Lord* (London, 1948), pp. 85, 86. Cf. Radhakrishnan, op. cit. pp. 289-90, 292; Dasgupta, op. cit. ii. 528; F. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (Harvard University Press, 1952), ii. 51.

Thus, in the culminating vision of this great spiritual epic of India, the supreme deity is revealed as being of ambivalent nature, manifesting himself as both the Creator and Destroyer of all that exists. To those of us, nurtured in the Christian tradition of deity as being wholly the beneficent Creator, this Indian theophany appears strange and disturbing. Yet, on reflection, we have to recognize that it connotes a realistic evaluation of our experience of the universe ; for we see therein the unceasing operation of two contrary processes, namely, of creation and destruction, of life and death. But the intuition that inspires this Hindu conception of supreme deity goes deeper ; for it equates this deity with Time.

This deification of Time in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is not unique when seen in the tradition of Indian thought, and to appreciate its full significance we must look at it in this wider context. The earliest traces of it are to be discerned in the liturgical hymns, known as the *Rig-Veda*, of those Aryan tribes who invaded northern India about the middle of the second millennium B.C. Many of these hymns are addressed to a god called Varuṇa, whose name suggests that he was originally connected with the heavens and regarded as the universal lord.¹ This deity was of an ambivalent nature. He was associated with Yama (death), and he was the guardian of “ ṛta ”, the fundamental law or order of the universe. By virtue of his control of the basic pattern of things, Varuṇa was regarded as comprehending Time and so determining the destinies of men.² This early instinct to deify Time, or to associate it closely with the supreme deity, finds further expression in later Indian literature.

Thus, in the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*, the god Rudra, who personifies the destructive powers of nature, is exalted as the supreme deity, and is significantly associated with the process of cosmic creation and destruction which all existence in Time

¹ Cf. C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (London, 1954), i. 60-62 ; Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 35-42.

² On the ambivalent nature of Varuṇa see G. Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna* (Paris, 1948), pp. 83-85 ; Gonda, i. 73-79, 227 ; R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961), pp. 66-68, 133, *Hinduism*, pp. 34-42 ; M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols* (London, 1961), pp. 92-103.

entails. For example, he is described as the power that, “ after creating the worlds, withdraws them at the end of Time”.¹ He turns the “ Brahma-wheel ” of the cosmic process, for he is “ kākāra ” “ the author of Time ”, although he also transcends (empirical) Time.² In the later *Maitrī Upanishad*, this last distinction is given a more philosophical presentation by invoking the concept of Brahman, the impersonal principle of reality. Thus it is stated : “ There are, verily, two forms of Brahman, time and the timeless. That which is prior to the sun is timeless, without parts. For the year, verily, are these creatures produced. By the year, verily, after having been produced, they grow. In the year they disappear. Therefore, the year, verily, is Prajā-pati, is time, is food, is the abode of Brahman, is self. For thus it has been said : ‘ Time cooks (or ripens) all things, indeed is the great self. He who knows in what time is cooked, he is the knower of the Veda ’.”³

It is interesting to note that, in subsequent speculation about the nature of reality, Indian thinkers sought to reconcile or harmonize its various aspects in terms of the concept of Tri-murti (the “ Triple Form ”), according to which the gods Brahma, Śiva, and Vishnu severally represented the principles of creation, destruction, and preservation. The attempt, however, appears to have been something of an intellectual *tour-de-force* that never succeeded in catching the imagination of the peoples of India ; it would seem that their experience of the teeming but destructive power of nature demanded a more vivid imagery.⁴ Scope for such imagery they found particularly in the various manifestations of Śiva, as Rudra came later to be more commonly known as he gradually acquired, together with Vishnu, the chief place in the pantheon of Hinduism.

¹ *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad*, iii. 2, in *The Principal Upaniṣads*, trans. and ed. S. Radhakrishnan (London, 1953), p. 725. On Rudra see S. Konow in *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, hrg. A. Bertholet u. Edv. Lehman (Tübingen, 4 Aufl., 1925), ii. 29-30.

² *Śvet. Upan.*, vi. 1.

³ *Maitrī Upan.*, vi. 15 (trans. Radhakrishnan, op. cit. p. 828). Cf. P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads* (E.T., Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 153-4 ; Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 72, 96.

⁴ Cf. Eliot, ii. 164-5 ; S. Konow in op. cit. ii. 66 ; Gonda, i. 354 ; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (London, 1954), pp. 310-11.

It is in Śiva that the ambivalence of deity, according to Indian notions, is seen in its most impressive form. Thus, in the omnipresent symbol of the “lingam”, the mighty generative organ of the deity, Śiva is seen as the embodiment of the dynamic persistence of life, in all its teeming abundance and complexity of form.¹ The other side of Śiva finds expression when he is represented at Bhairava, “the terrible destroyer”, the ghoulish being that haunts cemeteries and places of cremation, and appears wearing serpents about his head and a necklace of skulls.² Significant also are some of his titles, e.g. Mahā-Kāla (“Great Time”), and Kāla-Rudra (“all-devouring Time”).³ In the famous caves of Elephanta he is portrayed with a terrible symbolism. Having many arms, according to the sacred iconography of India, in one hand he holds a human figure; in another a sword or sacrificial axe; in a third, a basin of blood; in a fourth, a sacrificial bell; with two other hands he extinguishes the sun.⁴ Significant, too, is the manner in which he is represented in a series of South Indian bronzes, which date from the tenth and twelfth centuries A.D. In these Śiva appears in his rôle of Natarāja (“King of Dancers”). In this guise he performs the cosmic dance, symbolizing the energy of the universe in its unceasing process of creating, sustaining, and destroying every form of being in which it manifests itself.⁵

From this deification of Time in the person of Śiva there stemmed an even stranger imagery which is shocking to the Western mind, but which it is necessary to seek to understand, if we are to grasp something of the religious significance of Time. This imagery took its rise from speculation about the name of Śiva. By a curious process of thought the god's activating energy, his “śakti”, was hypostatized as a goddess.⁶ In the

¹ Cf. Gonda, i. 256; H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York, 1962), pp. 126, 128-30.

² Cf. Gonda, i. 256; Eliot, ii. 145; J. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (London, 1950), pp. 45, 298.

³ Cf. Dowson, p. 193; Zimmer, pp. 135, 155.

⁴ Cf. Zimmer, pp. 148-51, 155; Gonda, i. 261.

⁵ Cf. Zimmer, pp. 151-7; Basham, pp. 375-6; Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, plate II.

⁶ Cf. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 112-15; Gonda, i. 182, 258-9; Konow in op. cit., ii. 175; Zimmer, pp. 139-40.

consequent conception an ambivalence of the creative and the destructive, similar to that manifest in the character of Śiva, shows itself. However, interest has been concentrated on the grimmer aspect, with the result that a being has been conceived that is truly daemonic, although venerated as divine. It takes the form of the goddess Kālī, who personifies Time, “kālī” being the feminine form of the Sanscrit word “kālā” (“Time”).¹ The appearance of this goddess is horrific: she is black, and wears a chaplet of severed heads; in her many hands she holds the symbols of her nature—the exterminating sword, scissors for cutting short the thread of life, and the lotus-flower of eternal generation. She is often depicted trampling on the corpse-like body of Śiva, from whom she has emanated. The late Professor Zimmer graphically describes her: “She is black with death and her tongue is out to lick up the world; her teeth are hideous fangs. Her body is lithe and beautiful, her breasts are big with milk. Paradoxical and gruesome, she is today the most cherished and widespread of the personalisations of Indian cult.”²

In such a hideous and repulsive figure those nurtured in the Christian tradition must surely see a demon, a thing of pure evil. But Kālī, as we have just noted, is a goddess, the object of a popular devotion. The fact has a profound significance; for the cult of Kālī is clearly not an isolated phenomenon in the long tradition of Indian culture, but reflects a deeply rooted evaluation of existence. From the Vedic period the universe has been seen as the product of a force of ambivalent character, according to human estimate, but as such by an intrinsic logic that links creation with destruction, life with death. In India the creation of life, in all its diversity of forms, has been seen instinctively as involving a correspondingly destruction of these living forms, so that the rhythm of existence might be maintained. This process, viewed in terms of unceasing birth, growth, decay and death, is the “dharma” of the empirical world, and every living being is implicated in it.³ The process is essentially counterbalancing:

¹ Cf. Zimmer, pp. 211-12; Eliade, pp. 64-65.

² Zimmer, p. 215. Cf. Dowson, pp. 86-87; Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 191-2; Brandon, op. cit. plate III.

³ On the concept of “dharma” in this connection see Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 3, 134-63; E. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (London, 1962), pp. 92-106.

creation against destruction, life against death. However, since the destructive aspect is the more emotionally disturbing, it has been that side, conceived in terms of Time, that has tended to predominate in the religious imagination. Hence Time has been equated with supreme deity or separately hypostatized in the form of Kālī, and in such forms it commands a widespread popular devotion.

This deification of Time in India, inspired as it has been by a realistic evaluation of experience, and expressive as it is of a fatalistic acceptance of the necessity of decay and death, has not, however, resulted in a religion of hopelessness and despair. A way of salvation has been elaborated through a metaphysic which distinguishes this empirical world as the product of a primordial "avidyā" or ignorance. By mistaking this world for reality, the soul becomes enmeshed in its processes, of which the most fundamental and comprehensive is that of Time. Consequently, it suffers old age, decay and death; and, since Time is cyclic in its movement, the unenlightened soul is doomed to a never-ending series of births and deaths, with all their attendant pain and suffering. Thus, so long as the soul continues to regard this world as real, it remains subject to Time and its grim logic. However, enlightenment can be achieved by a rigorous discipline of mind and body. Then the soul, knowing at last its true nature and destiny, frees itself from the desire for existence here, and, thereby, passes beyond the power of Time.¹

We have noted that the Aryan invaders of northern India worshipped a deity called Varuṇa, who was a high-god of ambivalent nature: he was closely associated with "ṛta", the basic order of the universe and with death. Now, there is reason for thinking that this Varuṇa was the Vedic version of an ancient high-god of the Aryan, or Indo-European peoples, because there are traces of such a deity in the religion of the ancient Iranians, who were also of the Aryan race. The detection or identification of the Iranian counterpart of such a deity is a task for highly specialized scholarship, and, although considerable research and discussion have been devoted to it, there is still much conflict of

¹ Cf. Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, chap. IV.

opinion among the authorities concerned. Since, however, the issue is highly relevant to our subject here, it is necessary that we should try to understand something of its nature.

In 1938 a Swedish specialist in Iranian studies, Professor Geo Widengren, set forth a case for believing that the ancient Iranians had a high-god in a deity called Zurvān.¹ The name Zurvān means Time, and its use can be traced back to the twelfth century B.C. Unfortunately, however, all the information that exists about the conception and cult of Zurvān comes from later Iranian sources, and some of it relates to a kind of Zurvanite heresy during the Sassanian period, and is, in consequence, suspect as evidence for the earlier form of the belief.²

The earliest certain evidence of the Iranian deification of Time comes, curiously, from a Greek writer, Eudemus of Rhodes, who was a disciple of Aristotle. Referring to the beliefs of the Iranians, he states: "both the Magi and the whole Aryan race . . . call by the name 'Space' (τόπον) or 'Time' (χρόνον) that which forms an intelligible and integrated whole, and from which a good god (θεὸν ἀγαθόν) and an evil daemon (δαίμονα κακόν) were separated out (διακριθῆναι), or, as some say, light and darkness before these. Both parties, however, postulate, after the differentiation of undifferentiated nature, a duality of superior elements, the one governed by Oromasdes and the other by Areimanios."³

According to the witness of this statement, it would appear that by the fourth century B.C. information had reached the Greek world to the effect that the well known deities of Iranian

¹ G. Widengren, *Hochgottglauben im alten Iran* (Lund, 1938), pp. 266-310, in *Numen*, i (1954), 21-22, 40-41, ii (1955), 91; *Mani und der Manichaismus* (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 28.

² Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvān, a Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 20, 88; U. Bianchi, *Zamān i Ōhrmazd* (Torino, 1958), pp. 15-16; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 58, 61, *Symbolik des Parsismus* (Stuttgart, 1961), pp. 36-40; H. Sasse in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, i. 194-5; Brandon, *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions*, pp. 261-2.

³ Cited by Damascius (*Dubitaciones et solutiones de Principiis*, c. 125 bis), in J. Bidez et Fr. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés* (Paris, 1938), ii. 69 (15)-70. Cf. Zaehner, *Zurvān*, p. 447, *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 182; Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, chap. III.

dualism, Ohrmazd (Oromasdes) and Ahriman (Areimanios) had been derived from what is termed an "intelligible and integrated whole" (τὸ νοητὸν ἅπαν καὶ τὸ ἡνωμένον), which was equated with Time or Space.¹ In the light of what is said about Zurvān or Time in the native Iranian sources, as we shall see, this statement of Eudemus could equally relate to a personification of Time as the progenitor of Ohrmazd and Ahriman or to metaphysical speculation about the primordial nature of Time.

The earliest indication in Iranian sources of a personification of Zurvān seems to be a passage in the *Vidēvdāt*, which, though part of the later *Avesta*, certainly incorporates much earlier traditions. The passage reads: "(The soul) of the wicked and the righteous alike proceeds along the paths created by Zurvān (Time) to the Cinvat bridge created by Mazdāh (Ohrmazd)."² Such a brief reference, without any explanation, to Zurvān in this eschatological context must surely imply that the deity and his significance were well known to those who would read the book. It suggests also that Zurvān was closely associated with both the death and the destiny of men.

That the primordial nature of Time was an inference from metaphysical reflection is attested by a late Persian writing entitled *Rivāyat*; whether it relates to a tradition of philosophical speculation reaching back as far as the fourth century B.C. cannot, however, be determined. The passage concerned, nevertheless, merits quotation, since it shows a considerable preoccupation with the nature of Time. Thus, it is argued, "it is obvious that, with the exception of Time, all other things have been created. For Time no limit is apparent, and no height can be seen nor deep perceived, and it (Time) has always existed and will always exist. No one with intelligence says: 'Time, whence comes it?' or 'This power, when was it not?' And there was none who could (originally) have named it creator, in the

¹ Cf. Bidez-Cumont, i. 66; Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 20, 49. Bianchi, p. 101, suspects the integrity of Damascius's report of Eudemus: "Evidentemente, Damascio, che non riproduce il testo de Eudemo, ma lo interpreta e lo espone liberamente, ha dato una interpretazione neoplatonica al contesto . . ."

² *Vidēvdāt*, 19. 29, in Zaehner, *Zurvān*, p. 275 (A.1), cf. pp. 87, 203-4. Cf. Bianco, pp. 101-2, 245. On the Cinvat Bridge see Brandon, *Man and his Destiny*, pp. 268-71.

sense that is, that it (Time) had not yet brought forth the creation. Then it created fire and water, and, when these had intermixed, came forth Ohrmazd. Time is both Creator and the Lord of the creation which it created.”¹

The derivation of Ohrmazd and Ahriman from Zurvān, which Eudemus relates, would seem to indicate the existence of some ancient myth in which the derivation was set forth in an anthropomorphic imagery of creation or generation. Such a myth does indeed exist, but the evidence of it is very late and it is chiefly recorded by Christian and Islamic writers. According to these sources, Zurvān was conceived as the original god. Desiring to have a son who might create the universe, he offered sacrifice to this end for a thousand years. However, before the period was completed, Zurvān was assailed by doubt as to the efficacy of these sacrifices. The doubt was momentary, but it had fateful consequences. From it was generated another son, who partook of its dark nature. Eventually two sons were born to Zurvān. The one, who was Ohrmazd, was good and beautiful, and all that he created reflected his character. The other, Ahriman, was evil and ugly, and his creation was of the same nature.²

According to this myth, therefore, Time, deified as Zurvān, was the progenitor of the two opposing cosmic principles: good and evil, light and darkness, creation and destruction. Zurvān, thus, although not himself ambivalent, was the source of that basic dualism, so clearly apparent in the cosmic process and so disturbingly evident in the experience of men. Just how ancient is this myth is unknown. There is no sign of it in the teaching of Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, as that teaching has been preserved in the *Gathas*. However, it is significant that Zarathustra represented the two opposing cosmic principles, personified respectively as the Spenta Mainyu and the

¹ See Widengren, *Hochgottglaube*, p. 274. Cf. Zaehner, *Zurvān*, p. 410(8), see also p. 409.

² See the texts relating to the Zurvanite myth given by Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 419-37; cf. *Dawn and Twilight*, pp. 211-13, 227-8. Cf. Biancho, pp. 222-35; Duchesne-Guillemin, *Western Response*, p. 58, *Symbolik*, pp. 38-39; M. Molé in *Sources Orientales* (Paris, 1959), i. 301, 303-4; Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1963), pp. 204-5.

Angra Mainyu, as the creation of Ahura Mazdāh, the “ Wise Lord ”, as he described the supreme deity.¹ There is also some evidence for thinking that the conception of Ahura Mazdāh may have derived ultimately from an original Indo-European sky-god, of whom the memory survived in Vedic literature in the form of Varuṇa, as we have seen.² Such a derivation would explain Zarathustra’s presentation of Ahura Mazdāh as the creator of the two principles that unceasingly oppose each other in the universe. It would also help to explain the statement of Eudemus, writing in the fourth century B.C., that the Persians regarded Time as the ultimate source of cosmic dualism personified in Oromasdes (Ohrmazd) and Areimanios (Ahriman).

In view of the nature of the evidence, at this point we must content ourselves with leaving the problem of the origin of the Iranian deification of Time. However, we have further evidence of how the Iranians did conceive the nature of Time, and it is of the highest significance. They distinguished two forms or aspects of Time. The one they named Zurvān “ akarana,” i.e. Infinite Time; the other they designated Zurvān “ dareghō-chvadhāta”, which meant the Zurvān “ who for a long time follows his own law ”, or “ Time of the long Dominion ”.³ In other words, they conceived of a Time that is boundless, without beginning or end, and a Time, which, though of long duration, was definitively limited. These two forms of Time were subjects of much speculation, the most notable results of which, from our point of view was that Zurvān “ dareghō-chvadhāta ” was derived from Zurvān “ akarana ”, and its dominion was set at twelve thousand years.⁴ This form of Time, i.e. Finite Time, was regarded as that under which mankind lives in this world. Thus it is described in the *Bundahishn*: “ through Time must the decision be made. By Time are houses overturned—doom is through Time—and things graven shattered. From it no single mortal man escapes, not though he fly above, nor though

¹ Brandon, *Creation Legends*, pp. 193-7.

² Cf. Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, pp. 60-70.

³ Cf. Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 57, 87, *Dawn and Twilight*, pp. 236-7; H. Sasse in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, i. 193; Duchesne-Guillemin, *Symbolik*, p. 37; Biancho, pp. 99-100.

⁴ Cf. Brandon, *Man and his Destiny*, pp. 287-8.

he dig a pit below and dwell therein, not though he hid beneath a well of cold waters".¹ It is this form of Time that brings old age, decay and death to all men, as another Pahlavī text graphically depicts its activity: "As to him whose eyes Time has sewn up, his back is seized upon and will never rise again; pain comes upon his heart so that it beats no more; his hand is broken so that it grows no more, and his foot is broken so that it walks no more. The stars came upon him, and he goes not out another time: fate came upon him, and he cannot drive it off."²

In this division of Time into two separate personifications, namely, Zurvān "akarana" and Zurvān "dareghō-chvadāta", we may perhaps discern an originally ambivalent conception of deity such as we have noted in Hinduism in the gods Vishnu and Śiva. Now, it would appear that in later Iranian thought, Ohrmazd, i.e. the Ahura Mazdāh of Zarathustra, came to be identified with Zurvān "akarana" ("Infinite Time"), while Ahriman, the evil principle, was equated with Finite Time, i.e. Zurvān "dareghō-chvadhāta".³ These equations were destined to have a significance far outside the land of their origin, for they were carried into the world of Graeco-Roman culture by the cult of Mithra.

Evidence of this transportation of so essentially an Iranian concept of Time to the West is found in a most impressive form. In many Mithraic sanctuaries there have been discovered statues of a monstrous being, having a lion's head upon a human body.⁴ Most of these images are horrific, for the hideous appearance of the lion's head is accentuated by a huge serpent that coils about the monster's body. The figure is winged, and holds in its hands a long staff and keys; sometimes the emblem of a thunder-

¹ In i. 25 trans. Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 239, 315; cf. pp. 57, 95, 96-100, 106.

² In Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 240-1, 398-9; see also in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XVII/2 (1955), 233. Cf. Biancho, pp. 99-100.

³ Cf. Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight*, pp. 175-84.

⁴ Cf. Fr. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, i. 74, nn. 2 and 3; M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (The Hague, 1956), Figs. 29a, b, 35, 36, 86, 89, 90, 109, 116(?), 125, 144, 152, 153, 156, 157, 188, 197, 210, 211, 227, 230; R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions* (E.T., Leiden, 1954), pls. VI-IX, XII. The statues appear to have stood outside the adyton, cf. Duchesne-Guillemin in *Numen*, ii. 191. Cf. Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, plate IV.

bolt is shown on its breast, and the signs of the zodiac upon its body. Such symbols evidently denote that this fantastic being had some astrological significance, particularly in connection with fate or destiny.¹ The identity of this monster is not indicated by any inscription on the statues concerned ; but their symbolism had already led the Danish antiquary Zoëga, in the eighteenth century, to suggest that they were representations of the Greek concept of Aiōn. A more accurate interpretation was made later by Franz Cumont, the great Belgian authority on Mithraism. Seeing in the symbolism evident reference to Time, he identified the figure with Zurvān “akarana”, since this was the Iranian personification of Time and Mithraism was of Iranian origin.² Cumont was certainly correct in thinking that the monster represented Zurvān but it would seem that he was mistaken in identifying it with Infinite Time, with Zurvān “akarana”; for the lion’s mask surely indicates ‘Time that devours all’, in other words, Zurvān “dareghō-chvadhāta”.³

That this form of Zurvān should figure in the iconography of Mithraism may, at first sight, seem surprising, especially since it has no apparent connection with Mithra in his characteristic act of slaying the Cosmic Bull. A clue to the mystery may, however, be provided by what Plutarch tells us of Persian dualism. According to his account, Mithra was connected in a mediating rôle with Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and votive offerings and thank-offerings were made to Ohrmazd and “averting and mourning offerings (ἀποτρόπαια καὶ σκυθρωπά) to Ahriman.”⁴ This means that Ahriman was venerated or, at least, propitiated in rites in which Mithra was recognized as the ‘Mediator’ (ὁ μεσιτήης). Now, since Ahriman was thus recognized, and images of Zurvān “dareghō-chvadhāta,” with whom Ahriman was associated or identified, were placed in Mithraic sanctuaries,

¹ Cf. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (E.T., New York, 1956 reprint), pp. 105-9; Pettazzoni, p. 181.

² *Textes et Monuments*, i. 78, cf. p. 301. Cf. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (Paris, 1939), pp. 140, 277, n. 46.

³ Cf. Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. viii-ix, *Dawn and Twilight*, pp. 129-30; Duchesne-Guillemin, *Ormazd et Ahriman* (Paris, 1953), pp. 126-8, in *Numen*, ii (1955), 190-5, *Symbolik*, pp. 86-89; Brandon, *Man and his Destiny*, pp. 291 ff.

⁴ *De Iside et Osiride*, 46. Cf. Bidez-Cumont, ii. 70-74.

it would be reasonable to suppose that Mithraism took account of this aspect of Time. What this signified seems reasonably clear: the dominion of Zurvān “dareghō-chvadhāta” extended over all who lived in this world, and they were subject to his inexorable law of old age, decay and death. If Mithra was the Mediator, as Plutarch says, between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, he, therefore, mediated in some manner between the two forms of Time which these two deities severally personified. In what manner he did this is not known; but his slaying of the Cosmic Bull was undoubtedly regarded as providing new life or immortality for those who were initiated into his mysteries. And such provision would surely have been tantamount to salvation from the dominion of “Time the Destroyer”; in turn, the endowment of immortality would mean that the initiates were brought into communion with Ohrmazd, who was Zurvān “akarana” or Infinite Time.¹

Evidence of the deification of Time in ancient Greek religion is problematical except where Orphism is concerned, and here signs of Iranian influence seems to be very evident.² The most notable instance occurs in a bas-relief, now at Modena, depicting Phanes, a key figure of Orphic mythology. The deity is shown as a nude male figure, standing on an inverted cone from which flames shoot forth, with a similar object above his head—these cones undoubtedly represent two sections of the cosmic egg from which Phanes, the personification of light emerged at the beginning, according to Orphic cosmogony. The figure of Phanes, however, is entwined about by a serpent, and is winged; the feet, moreover, are not human but bestial in form. On the breast the heads of a ram, a lion and a goat are depicted, while the emblem of a thunderbolt is held in the right hand and a long regal staff in the left. Thus, except that the head is human and not that of a lion, the figure is strikingly reminiscent of the Mithraic images of Zurvān “dareghō-chvadhāta”. The similarity of the iconography is reinforced by an obvious emphasis

¹ Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin in *Numen*, ii. 194; Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight*, pp. 127-30, *Zurvān*, p. 312, cf. pp. 231-2, 234.

² See the survey of the relevant material in *History, Time and Deity*, chap III.

upon the symbolism of Time ; for, in an oval band about the figure of Phanes, the signs of the Zodiac are represented in high relief, while the proportions of the cosmos are indicated in the corners by images of the four winds.¹

The syncretism, which thus finds expression in this Modena sculpture, is not unique ; it is in effect a particularly eloquent example of that complex fusion of ideas and imagery, current in the world of Graeco-Roman culture, which became embodied in the various esoteric cults or pseudo-philosophies known as Gnosticism. The nature of Time constituted an important aspect of the basic problem with which the Gnostics were concerned, namely, to account for the involvement of spirit with matter. The general line along which they formulated their solution was that of the primordial descent or fall of some spiritual entity from its transcendental status and its imprisonment in the physical world. But this solution necessarily required that some explanation should be given of the origin and nature of this lower physical world. This was provided by representing the world, in which mankind finds itself living, as the creation of a power, a Demiurge, of lower status than God, and generally regarded as hostile to the Supreme Deity. Since this daemonic creator was lord of the world which he had made, men were subject to him and his laws determined their destiny, until by initiation into the true "gnosis," or knowledge of their situation, they acquired the means of escape from his dominion. Thus a dualistic "Weltanschauung" was propounded, comprising a higher and a lower world, each with its own lord, which is very reminiscent of Iranian dualism. In fact so close is the parallelism that it is not surprising to find in some Gnostic documents that the "prince of this world" is clearly identified with Zurvān "dareghōchvadhāta," i.e. "Time of the long Dominion", as in Mithraism, as we have just seen. Thus, in the recently discovered Coptic writing entitled the *Apocryphon of John*, it is related that Sophia (i.e. Wisdom) gave birth to a monstrous being which had the

¹ Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London, 1952²), pp. 254-5 ; Pettazzoni, pp. 186-7 ; R. Eisler, *Orpheus the Fisher* (London, 1921), plate IV, also p. 6 ; M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, ii (München, 1950), 500, n. 4 ; Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, plate V.

form of a serpent and a lion ; its name was Jaldabaoth.¹ In turn this Jaldabaoth created a number of beings, including the seven planets to rule the heavens.² He is also described as proclaiming that he was the sole lord of the universe : this claim strikingly recalls that made by the Devil in the Gospel account of the Temptation of Jesus.³ It is also related that Jaldabaoth took counsel with his daemonic assistants, and “ they caused ‘ Heimarmenē ’ (Destiny) to come into being, and they bound the gods of the heavens, the angels, daemons, and men by means of measure, epochs and times, so that all came within ‘ Heimarmenē’s ’ fetter, who is lord over all ”.⁴ In other words, this Jaldabaoth is represented as controlling the universe, including mankind, by the time-process. This identification, or association, of the evil Demiurge with Time found expression also in the doctrine of a Gnostic sect called the Marcosians. According to the account of their teaching given by Irenaeus : “ In addition to these things, they declare that the Demiurge, desiring to imitate the infinitude, and eternity, and immensity, and freedom from all measurement by time of the Ogdoad above, but, as he was the fruit of defect, being unable to express its permanence and eternity, had recourse to the expedient of spreading out its eternity into times, and seasons, and vast numbers of years, imagining that by a multitude of such times he might imitate immensity. They declare further, that the truth having escaped him, he followed that which was false, and that, for this reason, when the times are fulfilled, his work shall perish.”⁵

The references which we have met to the planets and signs of the Zodiac in the course of our brief survey of the relevant aspects of Mithraism, Orphism, and Gnostic beliefs, reflect the immense influence which astrology had on Graeco-Roman society. The subject, however, is too vast even to attempt to outline here⁶ ;

¹ Cf. W. C. van Unnik, *Evangelien aus dem Nilsand* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1960), p. 195, cf. p. 86. Cf. J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (E.T., London, 1960), pp. 174-5.

² *Apocryphon of John*, 39.6-42.10, in van Unnik, op. cit. pp. 196-7.

³ *Apocryphon of John*, 44.14-15. Cf. Luke, iv. 5-6.

⁴ *Apocryphon of John*, 72.3-10, in van Unnik, op. cit. p. 198, cf. pp. 88-89.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, i. 17.2 ; trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut.

⁶ Cf. *History, Time and Deity*, chaps. III, IV.

but we may note that the stars, or the daemonic powers associated with them, were believed to control the destinies of men, while their movements through the heavens determined times and seasons. It is significant, therefore, that in the Christian forms of Gnosticism it was taught that the advent of the Saviour disrupted the courses of the stars, thereby breaking the pattern of their control over the lives of men.¹

The career of the Iranian concept of Infinite Time, Zurvān "akarana", in the Graeco-Roman world also affords a fascinating subject of study. Here we must content ourselves with noting some of its more remarkable features. At Alexandria the concept appears in early Ptolemaic times under the name of Aiōn, and, in a personified form, it was associated with the state-gods, Sarapis-Helios and Agathos-Daimon.² This association of Aiōn with Sarapis is particularly interesting, since Sarapis was a chthonian deity, connected with or derived from Osiris, the ancient Egyptian mortuary god. Sarapis was also associated with the Greek god Kronos, who was often identified with "Chronos", i.e. Time. It is significant, therefore, to learn, on the authority of Macrobius, that the statue of Sarapis at Alexandria was accompanied by the image of a three headed monster. Each of these heads had, according to Macrobius, a temporal significance. The central head, that of a lion, represented "Time present" ("praesens tempus"), because, situated between the past and the future, by its immediacy it constituted reality. The head to the left was that of a wolf; it signified "Time past" ("praeteritum tempus"), since the memory of past events is swallowed up and destroyed. The head on the right side was that of a fawning dog, and it represented "future Time" ("futurum tempus"), which lures men forward with vain hopes.³

How far such esoteric imagery was understood, and reflected a widespread preoccupation with the significance of Time, may

¹ Cf. H.-C. Puech in *Man and Time (Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks)* (ed. J. Campbell, London, 1958), pp. 60-61, n. 28.

² Cf. Sasse in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, i. 195-6; Pettazzoni, pp. 171-3.

³ Macrobius, *Sat.*, i. 20, 13. Cf. Pettazzoni, pp. 164-70; *Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte* (9-11 Lieferung, hrg. J. Leipoldt), Abb. 13, pp. iv-v.

be doubted. This estimate seems also to be necessary in connection with the concept of Aiōn, when it found its way to Rome, where it was easily assimilated with the old Roman idea of Time as the double-faced deity Janus.¹ The best known representation of this form of Infinite Time is that on the base of the column of Antoninus Pius in Rome. Aeternitas, to give the concept its Roman name, is here visualized as a heroic male figure, nude, with the majestic wings of an eagle, and holding in its left hand a globe encircled by serpents.² However, it may well be questioned whether such an allegorical figure really conveyed more than a rather artificially constructed interpretation of Time.

Christianity, true to its Hebraic heritage, could not deify Time, but only regard it as an aspect of divine activity. Consequently, in the iconography of early and medieval Christianity, Time acquired no recognized form of representation. By the sixteenth century, however, as some of the scenes in the Holbein version of the "Dance of Death" attest, Time was identified with Death by representing this grim figure with an hour-glass. In Renaissance art the figure of Father Time appears, conceived as Time the Destroyer, being an aged man, winged, and bearing the baleful scythe and hour-glass. This conception seems to have derived from the classical representation of Saturn or Kronos.³ However, although the figure of Father Time has established itself in Western tradition, it remains essentially an allegorical creation, lacking the emotive power of the Iranian figure of Zurvān "daregho-chvadhāta," or that of Śiva in Hinduism, or that of the medieval personification of Death.

We may perhaps fittingly bring to a close this survey of the manner in which Time has been conceived as both God and Devil by quoting a passage from the medieval Persian poet, Firdausi. It is a description in which is clearly intermingled the imagery of many traditions: "Concerning the desert and that man with the sharp scythe, and the hearts of moist and dry are in terror of

¹ Cf. Sasse in op. cit., i. 197; K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (München, 1960), p. 136, n. 2.

² See G. Bendinelli, *Compendio di Storia dell'Arte etrusca e romana* (Milan, 1931), p. 324, Fig. 249; Brandon, *History, Time and Deity*, plate VI.

³ See *History, Time and Deity*, chap. III and plates VII, VIII, IX.

him ; moist and dry alike he mows down, and if thou make supplication, he hears thee not. This is the wood-cutter Time, and we are like the grass. Alike to him is the grandson, alike to him the grandsire ; he takes account of neither old nor young ; whatever prey comes before him, he pursues. Such is the nature and composition of the world that save for death no mother bore a son. He enters at one door and passes out through another : Time counts his every breath.”¹

¹ *Šahnameh*, trans. J. Mohl, in Zaehner, *Zurvān*, pp. 445-6.