

DAWES HICKS LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY

ACTIVITY AND DESCRIPTION IN ARISTOTLE  
AND THE STOA

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WE have two readily distinguishable notions of the end or conclusion of an activity. We can think of what actually or historically ends it or we can think of what completes it. Suppose that somebody is walking to Piccadilly. Then if he is knocked down by a cab that is the end of the activity for him, but only in the first sense of end: the process or activity is only completed by his reaching Piccadilly. How do we know what the end in the sense of completion is? Clearly once we have *identified* the activity (in whatever way the identifying is done) we have identified its end, its goal. If the walk to Piccadilly had been identified as winning a bet the end of the activity would have been winning a bet; 'growing up' means the process of becoming a grown-up, so that if growing up is recognized as what a child is doing, the end of his activity is being grown-up. It follows that this kind of end is a conceptual matter, for it is deducible from the nature or concept of the activity, where the other kind of end, which may or may not coincide with it, is accidental and a matter only of direct observation. Again, while the historical end is particular or applicable only to an individual case, the end as goal could be called universal, concerned with a type. It does not, however, follow that recognizing it in nature is *a priori*: that depends on how the identifying is done and how the concept was formed.

All this is the meaning of Aristotle's statement that the final cause of something is identical with that thing's *logos*.<sup>1</sup> For 'logos' means description or identifying label; and the way in which the logos of an activity identifies the activity is by identifying the end which would complete it. Secondly, this logos is for Aristotle not only the final cause but also the form of whatever thing's activity or production is being considered;

<sup>1</sup> *De part. an.* 639<sup>b</sup>15; 643<sup>b</sup>23.

logos in matter (λόγος ἐνυλος) is a familiar synonym for form or species (εἶδος). This represents the fact that the end as goal is universal or concerns a type. The normal end of a process in nature is a substance—a statue, an oak, a man; and seen as the completion of a process a substance is an entelechy. But some activities are completed by what we call states such as health or virtue which have the important feature for him of not being accompanied by change. The presupposition, and the foundation of Aristotle's whole philosophy of science, is that nature, including human nature, consists of processes, activities and ends in the sense of goals which complete them. It is not what H. A. L. Fisher called history, 'one damn thing after another'. And in a broad sense this is the meaning of Aristotle's assertion that the final cause is the primary cause.<sup>1</sup> His own favourite comparison of nature with art is misleading like the example of walking to Piccadilly because it suggests that intention or purpose is present in nature. Like any other sensible person he supposes that having conscious purposes is natural but confined to human beings.

One is tempted to use a more sweeping expression, to say that Aristotelian teleology has nothing to do with intention in nature. But the notion of a natural end as a completion may depend logically on the notion of a human purpose successfully achieved. At least it would be plausible to argue that the acorn which is on its way to being an oak is in the same case as a man who is on his way to Piccadilly though he may not know it. Both, if they did not become an oak or reach Piccadilly respectively, could be said in some sense to disappoint or to fail. This kind of question about Aristotle's natural philosophy is unsettled but not unfamiliar. I want to consider a different one which is, I think, logically prior to it. Instead of asking about intention in nature I want to ask about intentionality. Once the jargon were unwrapped it would have been a question of recognizable interest to more than one school of ancient philosophy. The problem is relatively implicit in Aristotle and relatively explicit in the Stoa.

It was in fact pointed out by Aristotle that thinking of  $x$  does not entail the existence of  $x$ . The same holds of many other relations named by verbs, such as being afraid of and looking for (in contrast say with being threatened by and standing in front of); and this is one feature which marks off the philosophically problematic class called intentional (whether it is spelt with an 's' or a 't') according to the jargon sense of

<sup>1</sup> *De part. an.* 639<sup>b</sup>15; 643<sup>b</sup>23; cf. *Phys.* B2.

intentionality. It is reasonable to claim that all its members involve a propositional element, that their analysis must include something which could be represented in English by a subordinate clause beginning with the conjunction 'that'. For it seems that the objects of such acts are not so much things as things qualified by concepts or beliefs or descriptions on the part of the agents. If I am standing in front of a horse painted by Stubbs that is not necessarily my description of the horse, and I may have no description because no thought of what I am standing in front of. If I am looking for a horse painted by Stubbs, that is necessarily either my description of it or equivalent to my description of it. There are evidently difficulties over the type of equivalence that is needed, but all that is to the point here is that some thought of a horse, which means some specification of a horse and so some description of a horse, is entailed. Perhaps it need only be implicit. For some people may want to leave room for somebody to be looking for  $x$  without being aware that he is; and the sort of criterion we might have of this case is that he is later satisfied on coming across something which he thinks of and to that extent describes as  $y$ , or disappointed on coming across something he thinks of as not  $y$ , where  $y$  is equivalent to  $x$ . Even if it is not the case that intentionality always involves this element of explicit or implicit description, it is at least true that where such an element is involved we have a case of intentionality.

The way in which the same object may have different properties (wicked, indifferent, disappointing) under different descriptions has been much discussed in recent moral philosophy. The possibility of just this dependence is at once suggested by Aristotle's account of nature when we notice that he calls the completion of a process its *logos* and that *logos*, etymologically 'what is said', means description or identifying label. But I do not think that the necessary distinction has always been observed between a trivial and a non-trivial use of the expression 'under a description'.<sup>1</sup> Roughly speaking, the trivial use claims that if  $x$  is described as  $D$ , then  $x$  is  $\phi$ ; and it assumes, though often tacitly, that the description is true, for it is not thought that the act of uttering a lie could endow  $x$  with the property  $\phi$ . Sometimes the 'if' will be an 'if and only if'. But since ' $x$  is truly described as  $D$ ' entails ' $x$  is  $D$ ' the claim was misleading, for the dependence of  $\phi$  is not on a description at all but on another property or fact about  $x$ . The 'if' in 'if  $x$  is described

<sup>1</sup> The phrase was Miss G. E. M. Anscombe's in *Intention*, Oxford 1957.

as D, then  $x$  is  $\phi$ ' is not logical but rhetorical like 'that was an extraordinary thing to do if you remember he has a weak heart'. Roughly speaking the non-trivial use of ' $x$  is  $\phi$  under the description D' differs by assuming that the description is *believed* to be true. Since this does not entail that the description is true, reference to description is indispensable and an intentional element is integral. 'Seen as the act of a man with a weak heart it was alarming to his family' is intentional because it implies belief by his family that the man is or would be truly described as having a weak heart. It is not that one cannot drop the 'described as' by saying it implies belief by his family that the man has a weak heart: what matters is that the that-clause which is required to express his family's belief, and which indicates a form of description or proposition, cannot be dropped. 'Seen as the act of a man with a weak heart it was alarming' may or not be intentional: if it corresponds to the trivial use of 'under a description' and only then, 'alarming' is evidently being taken to mean something like 'dangerous'.

A process in nature must according to Aristotle have a logos. Does it depend in a real or a trivial sense on a description? I have been more concerned to raise the question in this form than to answer it. I think in fact that a comparison with cases whose logical properties are less obscure shows that it depends on a description in a real sense, that it contains an indispensable propositional element. To be brief, if an acorn is on its way to being an oak it is like a man who is on his way to Piccadilly, without knowing it—but with the proviso that this man would not be disappointed by not reaching Piccadilly, for at no time would he formulate or accept a description such as 'my not reaching Piccadilly' and *a fortiori* a description of it as failure, and *mutatis mutandis* for satisfaction and success. Belief, description, proposition, and attitudes to or second order descriptions of any of these must be on the part of the speaker, the man who attributes the action to such a man or the process to an acorn. This is a peculiar, not to say suspect form of implication on which to rest a claim that the process is logically dependent on descriptions. But I think that a sentence of the kind 'the logos of this acorn is to be an oak' logically implies a sentence of the kind 'for some  $x$ ,  $x$  . . . that  $p$ '. But I repeat, if I may, that I am concerned to pose the problem in this form rather than to solve it.

The same question arises if one reflects on Stoicism, which even for the diminishing number who are not attracted by its

intrinsic interest casts light on Aristotle because so much of it comes from reflecting on Aristotle. In a way the answer is likely to be easier. Like Heraclitus the Stoics offer us a more glaring case of logos in the natural world, for as I would put it logos is no longer disguised as form or as final cause. And it cannot help showing through the disguises of translators—‘ratio’, ‘raison séminale’, ‘right reason’. In Stoic ethics the importance of the correct description of a situation and of an act is explicit; ‘correct description’ is the normal meaning of the ὁρθὸς λόγος required by the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as by Stoics, or at least closer to it than ‘right reason’ and similar tendentious versions. Situations and acts must be seen as so and so, seen for what they are. In Stoic psychology action is linked to the interpretation of appearances and depends on it.<sup>1</sup> ‘Count sacred the faculty of judgement’, says Marcus Aurelius. We are to formulate some definition of whatever appearance presents itself to us, or rather the cause of the appearance, so that it can be seen in its bare substance and we can tell ourselves its proper name and the names of its component parts. Then we shall know what type of response is called for. In short we acquiesce in the correct description of what is present—not past or future—and act on it.<sup>2</sup> These are all technical terms of the original Stoic epistemology. ‘God has brought man into the world’, says Epictetus, ‘as a spectator of God and his works, and not merely a spectator but an interpreter of them.’<sup>3</sup> Certainly the sage is among those philosophers who have interpreted the world and not recognized a task of changing it. For ‘Know thyself’ is equally the Stoics’ theme; and in the two I have quoted the rational life appears as a continuous self-adaptation to a world we never made. But it is judgement and interpretation that it rests on, and that is knowledge.

Seeing first the importance of acting with a description in mind but not the implication that this implied knowledge, and aware secondly of the attack on consequences as final causes, historians have mistakenly or at least exaggeratedly and misleadingly presented the Stoics as anticipating Kant in placing the moral worth of an act only in its motive. The consequences of our acts, according to the Stoics, depend on causal conditions for which we are not responsible; but it does not follow, and they did not infer, that all we are responsible for is what we intend.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. V. Goldschmidt, *Le Système stoïcien et l'idée de temps*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1969, § 60.

<sup>2</sup> iii. 9–12 summarized.

<sup>3</sup> *Diss.* i. 6, 19.

What is more directly my concern, it does not follow from the dependence of right action on having a description in mind that we have a case of non-trivial dependence or intentionality, as we should if in a Kantian sort of way the action were an intention. For the relevant factor may be the objective truth of our beliefs about ourselves and our environment. Of course we can say, as Aristotle said, that action is restricted to thinking or language using creatures. But as it stands that is uninteresting—no more than analytically true, and recognized as such by the Stoics.<sup>1</sup>

But the world in which we live does have one inescapable and fundamental property for which it depends non-trivially on description, or as we can now say language. All processes and actions take place in time; they are earlier and later than other events, and most if not all contain an earlier and a later, that is, have duration. But unlike Aristotle, Stoics from Chrysippus onwards held time to be a creation of language; and this view had a close connection with their attack on final causes.

It is the view that past, present, and future are tenses not times. This is not the meaning of Chrysippus's much discussed assertion, although it may, I think, imply it. Chrysippus wrote that the present actually belongs while the past and the future do not actually belong but subsist.<sup>2</sup> It is commonly taken for granted that he was asserting the comparative unreality of past and future: but it is far from obvious that he did not mean the opposite. For he claimed—and in the same context—that because any stretch of time was infinitely divisible any so called present was really a bit of past and a bit of future; and he expressed this by saying that what *subsisted* was something represented by the colloquial 'a moment ago' and 'in a moment', while 'now' represented nothing at all.<sup>3</sup> In fact the word translated literally as 'subsist' (ὑφίστασθαι) is the usual Stoic word for 'exist' in a quite general sense.<sup>4</sup> The word used of the present that I have translated 'actually belongs' (ὑπάρχειν) is explained by Chrysippus himself: the present actually belongs, he went on, in the sense that verbs are truly attributed—'attributes like walking actually belong to me only when I am walking: when I

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Eth. Eudem.* 1222<sup>b</sup>18–21; cp. Alex. Aphr. *De an.*, p. 80. 2 ff.; O. Rieth, *Grundbegriffe der stoischen Ethik*, Berlin, 1933, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *S.V.F.* ii, nos. 509, 518.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 519.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. H. Dörrie, "ὑπόστασις, *Nachrichten der Akad. der Wiss. zu Göttingen*, 1955, pp. 48 ff.; P. Hadot, 'Zur Vorgeschichte des Begriffs "Existenz": ὑπάρχειν bei den Stoikern', *Archiv f. Begriffsgesch.* xiii (1969), pp. 116 ff.

am lying down or sitting they do not actually belong'.<sup>1</sup> If he was thinking of the specious present he was saying that presentness is something conveyed by a predicate in a proposition about a present state of affairs, conveyed in fact by the tense of the verb. (He was not referring to the predicate 'walking', but the attribute signified by it; for the predicate would belong in a false proposition. But Stoics used the same term for verb-predicates and attributes because *sub specie aeternitatis* their attributes were predicates.) The real state of affairs was not present but partly past and partly future, only the pastness and futurity were not what was attributed or meant to be conveyed by anything in the proposition. On the other hand there is an obvious sense in which what is past and what is future do not exist while only what is present exists, and the Stoics are known to have made plentiful use of this fact. If Chrysippus was thinking of this and not of the specious present when he contrasted actually belonging and subsisting we cannot twist 'subsist' to mean 'doesn't really exist'. But we can suppose he was saying that although the present both belongs actually and subsists, i.e. exists, past and future only subsist, i.e. exist; and the explanation can be supplied from other contexts, namely Stoic determinism which required the present to contain both the past and the future as a coil of rope contains the whole length of straight rope.<sup>2</sup>

On the first interpretation Chrysippus was saying nothing about past and future as such, what we mean to refer to when we do not use the present tense. But if he had in mind fate symbolized by the coil of rope, although he was *saying* only that past and future had as much existence as the present, the paradox had point just because it could be *assumed* that in some sense they were unreal compared with the present. In fact the theory of determinism which allowed the paradox did so by explicitly making their existence depend on language. You may already wish to object that it was not a paradox but only a metaphor: what is contained in the present is not the past and the future but their effects and causes, in Stoic theory, their signs. But in that theory, sign and what it signifies are *propositions*. It is not the wound which is a sign of death in the future, it is the proposition that he is wounded which signifies that he will die,

<sup>1</sup> *S.V.F.* ii, no. 509, ll. 28–30, where I have supposed a colon after λέγεται, though von Arnim's punctuation may be right.

<sup>2</sup> This is the supposition of E. Bréhier, *Théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme*, Paris, 1962, and P. Hadot, loc. cit.

to the extent that the two rest on a valid implication. 'A sign of something', the slogan ran, 'is something present of something present.' This, which has been misunderstood, meant that the consequent of the implication must be true at present. It did not mean, and Stoics did not think, that 'will die' meant something in the present like 'is about to die'.<sup>1</sup>

There is one more complication in Chrysippus's assertion which I must look at. The word ὑπάρχειν which he used of the present and which he said applied to predicates or attributes is familiar from Aristotle's logic where predicates and subjects are terms of a proposition and the first are said to belong to or (in the older jargon) inhere in the second. But according to a Stoic definition it is a necessary condition of a true proposition that it should 'actually belong', though it is not said what to.<sup>2</sup> This has always been found puzzling. I mention it because it can be used to cast doubt on the meaning of the word, and would suggest that for Stoics propositions were predicates and attributes: 'Walking' is said of Dion and therefore when truly said is an attribute of him, and so is 'this man is walking'. Indeed the proposition may be the only complete predicate according to their logic.<sup>3</sup>

More to the point, it may be asked, 'Why translate "actually belongs" instead of just "belongs"?' Certainly if 'belongs' is in the present tense, as in 'wisdom belongs to Socrates', rather than 'virtue belongs to wisdom', nothing is added: but that is because 'actually' means 'at present'. But it is also a synonym of 'really' as in 'Socrates is actually clever rather than wise'. And whatever else he intended, Chrysippus's point was that the present tense conveys this combination of real and present, or rather the fact that the two notions are one. All this is readily translatable into Aristotelian Greek, from which of course the word 'actual' derives. What Stoics disliked was the idea that there were things which everybody would certainly call real in our sense but were not actual in Aristotle's sense (but only potential) like walking, or not present (but incomplete) like walking to Piccadilly.<sup>4</sup>

This clearly implies a dislike or rejection of all propositions which are not categorical or not equivalent to categorical propositions, and no doubt has to do with their well known truth

<sup>1</sup> Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.* viii. 255-6, *pace* Goldschmidt, *op. cit.*, §18.

<sup>2</sup> Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.* viii. 85.

<sup>3</sup> This could be inferred from Diog. Laert. vii. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. *Simpl. Cat.*, p. 307 *in*. Kalbfleisch.



functional interpretation of compound propositions. But it seems also to imply that propositions in the past or future tense were objectionable. They did not, as I have mentioned, deal with these by paraphrasing them into the present tense, like 'is about to die' instead of 'will die'. There is a good reason for this. Not all propositions can be so paraphrased: for example 'I ate' when it does not have the force of 'I have already eaten, thank you'. And if we remove the past tense by referring to the present, for example by substituting 'for some value of  $t$  I eat at  $t$  and  $t$  is earlier than now', then we do so at the price of introducing a third tense, or rather absence of it, or a predicate or use of the verb which is untensed and therefore leaves the Stoics with a coin as counterfeit as the one they were trying to change.

They did not have an adequate or consistent solution to their problem. For all we have learnt so far we might translate 'is present' instead of 'actually belongs'; it would be less awkward where the word is not used as a relative; and the circularity of Stoic definitions which used the term was complained of in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> But they did have a theory about it; they linked it to the problem of truth. This was not novel. But they linked the problem of truth to the theory of reference or designation; and this was novel. I shall be very brief about it. But once more none of this contains an argument for the unreality or rather lack of objectivity of the past and the future. It is a group of philosophical positions which is thought to be coherent with that position and to systematize it.

A true proposition of the form 'Dion is walking' was held to entail one of the form 'this (or this man) is walking'.<sup>2</sup> It must be remembered that according to Stoics 'Dion' is not a purely referring expression, for it connotes a description which is contingently but not analytically or formally unique; the function of a demonstrative however is to imply or be accompanied by a pointing gesture so that it at least corresponds to the modern notion of a referring expression. This is the notion of an expression whose function, whether or not it can be its sole function, is to designate an identifiable and (by convention) existing object; for instance 'this man is walking' contains one referring expression, 'this man is walking to Piccadilly' contains two except on the Stoic account of proper names, and 'some man is walking' contains no referring expression. For a test whether 'X' in 'X is  $\phi$ ' refers is whether it renders the question, 'Who or what is  $\phi$ ?' otiose. The Stoics examined this important

<sup>1</sup> Sext. Emp. *Adv. math.* viii. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *S.V.F.* ii, no. 202a.

function in the part of their dialectic which laid the foundations of what later became traditional grammar. This is the source from which I propose to confirm the plausible impression that they denied the objectivity of past and future. What that denial amounts to can be left for the moment.

When they classified what they called the times of verbs and what we should call tenses and aspects they did so in respect of the presence or absence of three properties.<sup>1</sup> These are the property of being continuous (e.g. I was eating, I shall be eating), of being perfect or perfective (e.g. I have eaten, I had eaten) and of being indefinite or literally aorist. Their names of course have provided the names of the traditional tenses of Latin and Greek. I have not found any grammarians, including our authority, to say anything interesting about the third class, aorist; the few modern writers who have bothered to notice its Stoic origin have correctly observed some features of it.<sup>2</sup> But what is surely remarkable is that these Stoic philosophers who were nothing if not systematic used this distinction of 'definite' and 'indefinite' quite regularly when they were constructing their form classes or parts of speech from a functional or semantic rather than a morphological point of view. Here are three cases of it (paralleled and authenticated by similar divisions which I do not mention). In Varro a general name such as 'scutum' is *ut infinitum*, a proper name such as Romulus is *ut finitum*.<sup>3</sup> In Varro 'someone' is a *provocabulum* which is *infinitum*, in Stoic grammar according to Apollonius an indefinite article, while 'I' or 'this' is a *pronomem* which is *finitum*.<sup>4</sup> In Stoic theory according to Sextus Empiricus propositions such as 'someone is sitting' which are 'governed by an indefinite (aorist) expression' are indefinite; definite propositions are those 'expressed demonstratively, e.g. "this (or this man) is walking", for I indicate some particular man'; 'Socrates is walking' (where 'Socrates' is connotative and what we should call a description) is 'intermediate', for 'the kind is distinguished but the individual person is not pointed to'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This part of the theory is clearly vouched for by the Scholia in *Dionys. Thrac.*, pp. 248–51, Hilgard.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. M. Pohlenz, 'Die Begründung der abendländischen Sprachlehre durch die Stoa', *Nachrichten zu Göttingen*, phil.-hist. Kl. I, n.f. iii (1939), p. 177; K. Barwick, 'Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik', *Abhandlungen zu Leipzig*, phil.-hist. Kl. xlix (1957), pp. 51 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Varro, *De lingua lat.* viii 45; cp. *Dion. Thrac.*, pp. 24 ff., Uhlig.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* viii. 44 ff.; Apollon., *De pronom.*, p. 5, Schneider.

<sup>5</sup> *Adv. math.* viii. 96. Cp. Chrysipp., *S.V.F.* ii, p. 220, ll. 20–1.

The cases speak for themselves. The common element indicated by the words 'definite' and 'indefinite' is the presence or absence respectively of *referring*. Now take the case of verbs. Here the division between definite and indefinite is in respect of times, whereas just now we were concerned with persons and things. Therefore we should expect those verb tenses which are classed as definite to designate or refer to a time and those which are classed as indefinite or aorist not to. This is what we find. The tense which took its name from this Stoic theory, the aorist 'I ate' does not refer, in the technical sense, to a time because it is not otiose to ask 'When?', i.e. 'at what time?' The same goes for 'I shall eat', the future tense. The present 'I am eating' cannot raise the question 'when?' since it means 'now'. And the aorist or preterite and future are the only two tenses which we know were classed as indefinite.

I stress 'tense', for not only schoolboys but logicians may want to count 'I have eaten' as a past tense. It may be said that the truth conditions of 'I have eaten' are the same as those of 'I ate', so that the difference is rhetorical not logical. But the Stoic theory of the naturalness of language committed them to believing that a morphological difference indicated a semantic difference, which would be a truth-conditional difference. In fact whatever the casual English or Greek usage it is fairly easy to imagine a perfective aspect such that 'I have eaten' is not even truth-conditionally equivalent to 'I ate'. Suppose a guest arrives at night who has had nothing since breakfast and forestalls an anxious question by saying 'I have eaten' and it turns out he has had nothing since breakfast; his sophisticated host may reflect, 'He said nothing false, but it was misleading'. But it is easy to imagine a grammar which would make the guest a liar. It would extend the dictionary concept of the verb: but this is something familiar in linguistics. In short 'I have eaten' can be classed as referring to the present, which is incidentally what the Stoic name for it implies.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the pluperfect, 'I had eaten', can be regarded as referring to a *then*; for it would be a solecism to use it unless some past time to which it referred had already been designated.

The upshot of this would be that verbs in a genuine past or future tense did not refer, in the technical sense, to things or events in the past or the future. Therefore, unlike verbs in the present tense, they did not imply the existence of any particular in the sense of identifiable time. In this respect they were

<sup>1</sup> παρακειμένος.

exactly like a general proposition of the form 'for some  $x$ ,  $x$  is walking'. But Stoics saw a fundamental difference between the two cases. 'Somebody is walking' can be true, that is can actually belong to some existing body, because there can be a proposition of the form 'this man is walking'. 'So and so walked', even where 'so and so' is replaced by 'Dion' is incapable of this kind of verification because a demonstrative can only point or be accompanied by pointing to the present, and 'Dion walked' does not entail 'Dion is walking' and *a fortiori* not 'this man is walking'. If someone is tempted to object that this does not imply that 'Dion walked' cannot be true, it must be repeated that Stoics did not suppose it did.

Does it however imply a non-trivial dependence of past tense and future tense statements on propositions or language? Aristotle's processes which structure the world we live in were likely to be intentional, I suggested earlier, in the sense that they depended on somebody entertaining propositions. Such processes, or such teleology, were rejected by the Stoa. But a process or activity which has no goal as part of its definition—a physical movement—still involves a before and an after. If we have a before and an after we have a past, present and future, or to be precise a possible future. If Stoic theory allowed statements about the past and the future to be true, but forebade them, as past or future, to be referring, does this make the past and the future in Stoic theory intentional notions, dependent on somebody entertaining propositions?

The answer is yes, and can be seen from another comparison of two indefinite propositions. Suppose 'somebody is walking' is true and you or I assert that this man is walking, the existence of the object pointed to, which is the value of the variable represented by 'somebody', is prior to our pointing; the real world contains, according to Stoics, such bodies. But suppose that we try to do the same with 'this man walked': being indefinite it has to be equivalent to 'for some time earlier than now, this man walks'. We can ignore objections about the tense of 'walks' and about the fact that we cannot point to the time in question but only could have pointed to it. We can understand the proposition as 'there is some now which is earlier than this now and at which this man walks'. The *intentionality* of the earlier now is not due to any peculiarity about the 'is's but to a peculiarity about the present now, on which the earlier now depends in order to be earlier. The present now is not independent of the proposition's

assertion.<sup>1</sup> If time were absolute or Newtonian it would be, but according to Stoics it is not. There is thus no container to contain, or rather consist of, nows or instants in the way that there is for bodies. Aristotelian time was more or less a logical construction out of events; so was Stoic time, but complicated by the fact that Stoic events were a logical construction out of bodies. Although they could follow Aristotle in working with a physical time based on an arbitrary set of events, namely cosmic motions, this was not possible for time in a general sense; for motion presupposes time.

It may be said that the argument for the linguistic character of past and future shows even more the linguistic character of the present. But as the Stoics saw it the difference is this. If we say 'he is now walking' we have a proposition-dependent term on our hands. But we can say instead 'he is walking'; and we give the meaning of this proposition by its truth conditions in terms of pointing and the use of a demonstrative, but without mentioning a time or tense. In other words the present tense is logically primitive—but by not being taken as a tense.

To give the meaning of 'some' it was necessary to use a proposition but not to mention one; to give the meaning of 'did' and 'will' it is necessary to mention a proposition. This puts them on a level with what seemed likely to be the Aristotelian notions of walking to Piccadilly or growing into an oak; and this is what was involved in the succinct claim that past, present, and future were tenses not times. If any such notions must figure in our description of the world we live in, then language is a necessary feature of that world. In Stoic philosophy it is easy to see an understandable if perhaps inconsistent tendency. Stoic materialism led the theoretical exponents of dialectic to make logos part of the physical world, a natural and causally necessary development of the pneuma. No doubt if this was supposed to explain how activity—motion and change—was logically possible for matter the explanation would have been holding the world up by its own bootstraps. But it must not be thought that they were unaware of the problem raised by any monistic philosophy, how to introduce a distinction of type corresponding to that between subject and predicate in language. They made the fascinating attempt to identify it with the linguistic distinction. No wonder their critics failed even to recognize the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Etymologicum magnum*, 820 (quoted by Hadot, loc. cit., p. 19): 'the present is instantaneous and its existence is simultaneous with the utterance.'

theory that a proposition was an attribute. Quite consistently even motion could be called a predicate.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand a combination of materialism and aversion from Aristotelian processes led the moralists to emphasize the importance of the present instant and the unimportance, even the unreality, of the future. A concern with the future and the past is logically entailed by many of the passions or emotions, so that to remove the concern is to remove the emotions.<sup>2</sup> 'Circumscribe the present' is Marcus's advice.<sup>3</sup> 'Remember that each of us lives only this instantaneous present.'<sup>4</sup> The past, he says, is what we have lived,<sup>5</sup> and 'have lived', we recall, refers to the present in Stoic grammar. At one point he argues that only the present is real and infers that all lives are equal in duration, namely momentary; when we die we are not deprived of the past or of the future, for we cannot lose what we do not have.<sup>6</sup> I do not know whether readers have noticed the wonderfully effective use Marcus makes of tenses and aspects. ('When you are a well doer and another has benefited . . .', *ὅταν σὺ εὖ πεποιηκῶς ᾖς καὶ ἄλλος εὖ πεπονθῶς . . .*)<sup>7</sup> In translation they even overreach themselves: 'even now you will have died, and not yet single-minded nor untroubled . . .', where the adverbs try to get the better of grammar by making the reference to a now instead of a future then.<sup>8</sup> He is influenced, it is clear, by a different climate of opinion; and he is conscious of the notion familiar in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as the Stoics of those activities that are not processes but complete at every instant. But his terminology shows that he has the original Stoic theory of time and tenses in mind. And the two conclusions he draws from it are invalid. It follows neither that the past and the future are unimportant, nor that they are unreal. All that follows is a philosophical thesis which lends no support to Kantian morals or Platonic metaphysics—that the past and the future depend on the existence of language.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Paris, 1968, pp. 464–6.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Marcus Aurelius, vii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> vii. 29; viii. 36.

<sup>4</sup> iii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> ii. 14.

<sup>7</sup> vii. 73.

<sup>8</sup> iv. 37: ἤδη τεθνήξῃ, καὶ οὐπω οὔτε ἀπλοῦς οὔτε ἀτάραχος. . .