LIFE'S PRIMOGENITAL TIMING

Time Projected by the Dynamic Articulation
of the Onto-Genesis

INTRODUCTION

The question of time preoccupied philosophers already in Antiquity and in its various interpretations in history it has known several culminations. Strangely enough, time does not fall into any ontological category, for all of them depend upon it. In fact, the various modes of existence (e.g., reality, ideality, fictive existence, absolute existence) are to be distinguished fundamentally by their relation to time which their respective ontological structures indicate as being either necessary (real existence, which allows change and action) or inadmissible (ideal existence which does not comport the possibility of change), etc. The question thus emerges – in virtue of what does time play such a basic role with respect to ontology?

In a different way, we may presume the same crucial role of time with respect to metaphysics and philosophy of mind. But what about the role of time in culture and social life, that is, in “practical” philosophy, on the one hand, and the specifically human vocation of seeking a transcendent personal destiny, on the other? Yet it is not time but life which comes first to be seen at the ontopoietic ground-work of existence.

From the end of the nineteenth century to our day, we have witnessed a distrust of speculative thinking as the spinning of overall theories or “systems” of philosophy in which illegitimate connections are made between and among various facets of questions for the sake of projecting an all-encompassing context for all philosophical inquiry.

And yet, when we turn to the interpretative approach prevailing at present, we find that no single piece of the “text” may repose in itself; its interpretation is referred to its “deeper” layers of meaning, and in the last analysis, we should pursue it in a regression through the entire development of culture.

This shows that philosophical issues cannot be formulated or pursued adequately other than within a context which, if this be at all possible, does not call for further justification or explanation. Thus, we propose
here to treat the question of time, that of chronos and kairos, as it appears in its original mode, that is, squarely within the context of my "phenomenology of life and of the human condition." This is a context of the ontopoiesis of life, which reposes in itself without turning to further points of reference.

CHRONOS AND KAIROS IN THE ONTOPOIESIS OF LIFE

Setting the Issue

Contrary to the established phenomenological tradition, according to which we begin by asking questions and then through painstaking effort seek an answer that may yield a definition of the factors involved, I will begin my inquiry by proposing a definition of time and will only then reveal the analytic context within which it receives its determination and proceed to its exfoliation.

I propose that time, in both of its modes - chronos and kairos, as differentiated long ago in Antiquity - is the grand, infinitely complex, flexible artery-in-progress of the constructive advance of life, encompassing its relevant cosmic links, on the one hand, and its reach for a portal to the transcendent aspirations of the human being, on the other.

This definition situates time amid all the infinitely changing modalities with which the simplifying human mind categorizes the innumerable ways in which processes, events, functional units, etc. advance life (chronos) toward its nodal points of accomplishment (kairoi) as well as amid the specific circumstantial, as well as essential, strivings (and the crowning significance of their accomplishment) at the very heart of the poiesis of life. Time is the main artery through which life's pulsating propensities flow, articulating themselves, intergenerating.

By situating time and temporality (together with space, but about this later in another study) within the framework of the phenomenology of life, or, more precisely, of the ontopoiesis of life, we are radically shifting away from the classical and modern contexts in which time has been envisaged and within which its conception has been situated. (See my "The First Principles of the Metaphysics of Life," Analecta Husserliana, vol. XXI, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1986, pp. 3–9.) And it has to be remembered that philosophical conception always occurs, whether deliberately or implicitly, within a framework, within the "context" of a larger conception that determines its bearings