

PART II

TEMPORAL DISCOURSE

Meaningful discourse has both a linguistic and an ontological component. In the preceding part of this book temporal *structures* have been at the focus of attention, rather than the temporal *languages* used to describe them. In the second part, that perspective will be reversed. Even so, the change is mainly one of emphasis and presentation. No simple separation of the two components is possible, or desirable. Indeed, the subject of logic could be said to be the offspring of a marriage between *mathematics* and *linguistics* (with *philosophy* presiding at the wedding), producing the typical dual ‘logical point of view’.

That language is involved in any study of temporal structures is almost a tautology. Even the ontological studies in Part I needed ‘working languages’, such as first-order or second-order predicate logic with a suitable vocabulary. And linguistic awareness was explicitly present in sections like I.2.1., where the relative expressive strength of such logics was compared. (This is not what a linguist would call ‘linguistic awareness’, of course.) It is also true, though less enlightening, to say that the language of set theory was involved throughout – being the mother language into which the technical core of this text could be translated (it is hoped). Nevertheless, these languages were kept in the background, so as to allow full attention to the structures embodying the range of conceptual alternatives.

When language moves into focus, another range of alternatives appears, this time as a hierarchy of regimented formal languages ascending to the full wealth of natural language. The present logical approach is partial to the former, although matters of natural language will be taken up now and then. Like temporal ontology, temporal language can hardly be studied in complete isolation. One need not be a Quinean in order to realize that temporal discourse carries ‘ontological commitment’, in the sense that some picture of Time is presupposed, no matter how vaguely. Therefore, the studies in this part will be *semantical*, rather than purely syntactical.

The proviso about vagueness of commitment is important. In practice, the problem is not so much that people refuse to honour their ontological

commitments (that again is a theme for philosophical dramaturgists), but that they find it hard to express *just which* commitment they are actually making. Most people are rather hard-pressed to produce the temporal entities underlying their discourse – and hence the need for the ontological clarity provided in the preceding part.

The same observation explains the order of presentation. Some philosophers would prefer to have the language part first, looking for linguistic clues as to the underlying ontology, rather than engage in mathematical theorizing. The problem with such an approach is the above vagueness in ordinary modes of speech, already noted in Chapter I.1. For example, a historian writes about ‘the turning point’ in Napoleon’s career, presupposing that there must have been such a point marking the ascent until the Russian campaign from the subsequent decline. Does this mean that he is operating with a point view of Time; indeed one in which Dedekind Continuity is valid? Such an inference would be preposterous: that level of precision is never attained (nor desirable) in actual discourse.