

TIME

Dealing with questions of time is tricky. JGB cites St Augustine: “If you do not ask [what it means] I understand.” a feeling many share. When we come to look at time we might focus on *the present moment now* as obviously its most immediate and prime manifestation. But as we strive to grasp it better we find we have nothing. As the philosopher Locke put it, “Time is a perpetual perishing”. Looking into now it narrows and becomes so ‘thin’ as to be nothing at all. Surely this vanishing stuff is pure illusion?

The ‘now’ received a blow from Relativity Theory, which denies there is any such thing. *All* space and time is equally existent. Physicists lay out a map of space-time in which all ‘points’ are present. Past and future have no meaning in this scheme. It was then concluded that our sense of ‘now’ was illusory, rather than that the map was questionable. There is a big problem in science around the notion of ‘illusion’ based on the fact that our organisms (including our brains) are very active in producing the experiences we have of the world. The inventor Land even managed to produce total colour experiences from sources that were only a few wavelengths in range. It is then concluded that something like colour is illusory because it arises only in our sensate world, though this is probably a throwback to Descartes et al. Colour is to wavelength as now is to spacetime?

To afford substance to the now is a big deal. Instead of treating it like a two dimensional surface dividing past and future on its two sides and therefore of no thickness, it can be endowed with *being*. That’s just to say it *is* something but has major implications in JGB’s scheme of things.

Our sense of time is very much influenced by something that is very different from the sense of ‘here, now’, namely the ticking of a clock. A clock is here simply a characteristic of any mechanism or machinery which has repetition and counting. Our lives are governed by clocks and our psyche conditioned into what Eliot called the “trammelled ways of time past and time future”. That is to say, our *thinking* influences our *perceiving*. One major attempt to reverse this influence is called *phenomenology* which can be roughly understood as ‘starting from how things appear in our experience’ instead of starting from some scientific model of what is supposed is ‘really happening’. Phenomenology goes back in a way to Goethe who, amongst other things, considered colour to be real and substantial – the “deeds and sufferings of light”.

The elusive now of the passing moment that vanishes into an infinitesimal abstraction, a now of zero duration, is of the nature of pure *actualisation*. It’s difficult to grasp on its own terms. One of its characteristics is *irreversibility* as in the famous saying of Pontius Pilate, “What I have written I have written”. It is the throwing of the dice in a gamble or the placing of the bet. Another important characteristic is that it is

singular in that 'only one thing can happen at a time'. This might have to be qualified as 'only one thing can happen *at one place* at a time'.

Pure actualisation is an abstraction because a moment or event involves all three dimensions of time. By a 'moment' we mean something like the equivalent of a solid body in space but in time. We feel that actualisation 'lasts a certain time' because of the dimension of eternity (here imagine a surface of time as a step towards the full three-dimensionality). There are various orders of duration of this kind. In reading the eye rapidly scans and halts a few times within every second; at each halt a group of about ten characters is absorbed. Then there is the 'specious present' as it is called by psychologists of a few seconds. Sometimes we can feel a whole afternoon or day as a whole presence or simply sense an 'everlasting' scene in which we are embedded.

The time we are used to thinking about comes in mechanical units like the ticks of a clock, which we can count because they are all the same. This counting comes from *hyparxis*, along which we register 'the same again'. This time is pictured in a line and this line is the mark of causality or what is called 'thermodynamic time' because it has only one irreversible direction.

Two influences appear to hold over actualisation. One of them is just this causality where whatever happens comes from what has happened 'in the past'. The other is the potential in eternity.

Now we come to an awkward matter. In the scheme we have been roughly outlining and trying to understand there are a multitude of possibilities at every moment. Out of these just one is actualised or 'selected'. When we use the latter word we are obviously invoking some aspect of will or choice, things that are usually regarded as psychological and subjective. The concepts of 'chance', 'causality' and 'conscious choice' are being thrown together in a melee. Chance relates to quantum mechanics and also to gambling. Causality we have mentioned before but we must also think of 'chaos theory' in which subtle patterns emerge from simple laws. Conscious choice – what we call 'will' - is what we presume, but JGB following Gurdjieff would regard it as exceptional.

Selection or choice only makes sense if there really are equitable alternatives in the line of causality. We have to picture an entity as having multiple possible versions of itself, rather on the lines of the 'multiverse' speculated about in modern physics. In respect of ourselves, if we have no awareness of our multivalence then no choice is possible. This is the state JGB called 'eternity blindness'. In this state, we are bound on the track of time past and time future which, as Eliot put it, "allow but a little consciousness". What some report as the touch of conscience is a manifestation of contact with an alternative reality in eternity.

But what *makes it so*? This is in the third dimension of time, *hyparxis*. Obviously then *hyparxis* can take a range of values and might in principle be measurable.

For Neo-Platonists such as Proclus, there were three possible modes of becoming: causal, hyparchic and participative. In the causal, one is governed by externals and time past. In the participative, one is governed by higher principles that lend themselves to one. The hyparchic is what is *one's own power to be*. Eternity only governs what is allowed or possible. The power or *ableness* to bring higher possibilities into effect comes from hyparxis. Hyparxis being of a nature that includes both time and eternity *can embrace change to achieve greater permanence*.

We have hinted that actualisation along the line of thermodynamic, irreversible, causal time uses up potential. Wound springs run down. Coal once burnt will not re-constitute itself. In the simple pendulum there is an oscillation between kinetic or actual energy – as the bob swings – and potential or stored energy – maximum when it pauses momentarily. But this does not last.

But there are also processes that build up potential such as forming heavy elements in supernovae. As living organisms we take in potentials as food. The oscillating pendulum provides an image of the role of hyparxis in regulating between time and eternity.

“Only through time, Time is conquered” T. S. Eliot again.

If there were only time and eternity, all potentials would be lost in actualisation, just as Lord Kelvin supposed in the late nineteenth century that the universe would undergo a ‘heat death’ and end up dispersed and inert. This may have been Gurdjieff’s idea in proposing that God’s dwelling place, the Sun Absolute, was diminishing in the flow of the Merciless Heropass (actualisation time).

Hyparxis enables the game of the universe to be played again!

“What might have been and what has been/ Point to one end which is always present”