

Essay

Time: A Dimension of Consciousness or of Actual Reality?

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ABSTRACT

Many experiences suggest that it might be best to think of time not as of an objectively existing dimension of reality but as of the limited way in which our normal waking state of consciousness can perceive the overwhelming whole of true reality in its timeless 'all presence'. (1) Direct experiences of unification with all encompassing presence (in altered states), (2) time reversals (effect preceding cause) observed in parapsychology, (3) time transcending features of quantum effects (time-reversed waves, temporal holism): these and other experiences suggest that a holistic, non-local timeless 'background' may lie hidden behind outer reality.

Key Words: time, dimension, consciousness, reality.

Several remarks made at this meeting have already pointed into the direction mentioned in the abstract. In his opening presentation BRIAN SNELLGROVE said: 'Time was invented to stop everything happening at the same time,' and 'we slip out of timelessness into time.' PETER FENWICK quoted CHRIS CLARKE saying: 'Time? - There is no such thing!' Chris Clarke quoted Heidegger: 'There is only one event,' (rather than a chain of events). HORACE REGNART formulated: 'All times are a unity.'

EXPERIENCED TIME IS EMBEDDED WITHIN TIME-TRANSCENDING WHOLENESS

Our normal wakeful consciousness cuts reality into a string of moments, spread out in temporal sequence. This is the normal experience of time.

However, in states of mystical union it is as if separate times were united into undivided all-presence: Past, present, and future reveal themselves as undivided whole. This seems to be the deepest and absolutely most convincing experience of reality accessible to human consciousness. Those who have been blessed with such a direct experience of union with the Ground of Being consistently testify that in Truth there are no divisions but there is only unity - in time as well as in every other respect.

'Before Abraham was, I am.' (John 8: 58).

AMRIT SORLI, who regretfully had to cancel his attendance, sent me his paper in which he

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describes 'a practical way towards a non-dualistic state of consciousness' in which 'the subject (the experiencer) and the object (the experienced) become one' and in which 'the past, the present and the future do not exist as physical reality but only as a rational part of the mind.' (Amrit Sorli: Hidden Logic of Zen and Non-dualistic Approach in Psychotherapy)

EXAMPLES OF TIME REVERSALS: WHEN 'EFFECT' PRECEDED 'CAUSE'

1) The American Doctor Larry Dossey has published his studies of the effect of prayer on the healing process in best-selling books like *Healing Words* (Harper 1993) and *Prayer is Good Medicine* (Harper 1996). He has also studied cases where the healing effect preceded the prayer, and he quotes: 'Before they call, I will answer' (Isaiah 65:24).

Note: If I should have missed a critical moment, belated prayer can still help - particularly when I don't yet know the outcome of the critical event. Cf. ANNE MILLER's contribution to the PERSONAL EXPERIENCE section of this issue of Network.

2) In mental transmissions of information the messages are sometimes received before they are sent. In a typical experiment a picture is randomly chosen from a collection of hundreds of them. The sending person now simply concentrates her attention onto that picture for maybe half an hour, while another person in a far away place also concentrates until she begins to see the picture and draws it onto paper. Later the receiver learns that she has drawn the correct picture before the random device had chosen that picture and before the sender had seen it. (Such experiments are carried out under rigid controls to exclude fraud.)

3) Data stored in the past but not yet consciously inspected can be changed by mental activity. E.g. there are many experiments in which long strings of random numbers are generated and stored without immediately inspecting them. Later these data are subjected to the influence of either human or animal mental concentration, whereon it is possible to detect, using strict criteria, that the numbers are no longer random. It is as if later mental influence acted back onto the past. However, we may also adopt the view that the time sequence of these events (generation of the random numbers, their storage, their later use in an experiment, and their being changed by mental activity) actually represents a timeless undivided whole. The wholeness is broken only when an act of conscious perception enters the process.

The past is open to the extent to which it has not yet been consciously inspected. (Cf., e.g. Larry Dossey, loc. cit., or Dean Radin: *The Conscious Universe*, San Francisco 1997).

A typical demonstration of this kind is provided by the famous

CHICKEN AND ROBOT EXPERIMENT

reported by Peter Fenwick in NETWORK (December 1996). Network members know this so well that I recount only the final phase in which the random walk done by the robot is governed by a random code generated and stored, without inspection, six months before the experiment

with the chicken. The chicken passionately wishes to attract the robot into its proximity, and the robot no longer does a true random walk but makes more steps approaching the chicken than steps away from it. The random code used here as well as a corresponding code stored for control purposes are inspected after the experiment and it is found that the set actually used shows non-random structure, the control set is still perfectly random. These are the observations. Now let us look at possible interpretations and their implications.

INTERPRETATION A

The emotional concentration of the chicken acted backwards in time; It influenced the generation of that part of the random code that would later be used to move the robot while it ignored the code used as a control. It is as if the random number generator was under the influence of the chicken that hatched six months later. This is time reversal: the effect (the generation of anomalous random code) precedes the cause (the mental activity of the chicken).

INTERPRETATION B

The effect of mental concentration is strong enough to change the code, or the stepping motion of the robot, even if the code had been inspected before its use and had been perfectly random. This would be a case of stronger mind-matter interaction, not involving any time anomaly.

INTERPRETATION C

Before the consciousness of the chicken and of the experimenter enter the scene it is not meaningful to speak of events separated in time. The entire span of six months (generation, storage and use of the random code, motions of the robot and 'prayer' of the chicken) represents an undivided whole. Throughout that time it is not meaningful to think of an already fixed random code. The code only manifests itself in a definite way when a conscious act interrogates it. This is the holistic world view: temporal separations are generated when consciousness divides the whole into time sequences.

Experiences of this type and experiments in atomic and relativistic physics show that reality has properties that contradict normal logic and reason. They also contradict our intuition which, after all, is based on logic and reason.

IS TIME GENERATED IN OUR CONSCIOUSNESS ?

In its true essence reality appears to know only unbroken wholeness and all-presence. To our consciousness it shows itself in temporal succession.

PHYSICAL TIME IS RELATIVE

Einstein's theory of relativity (1905) has predicted that rapidly moving clocks appear to be slowed. Meanwhile, this prediction is daily confirmed thousands of times in physics laboratories. The vibration of a moving object appears to be slowed even though it stays tuned to its own constant frequency.

SIMULTANEITY IS RELATIVE

Two simultaneous events may occur at separate times for a moving observer; Two separate events may appear in reverse temporal order to a moving observer: The moving observer may see our later event before he sees our earlier one. There is no absolute order from past to present to future. What we see as an orderly sequence of cause followed by effect, a rapidly moving observer may see in reverse order: For him effect precedes cause; our time for him runs backwards.

CONCLUSION FROM RELATIVITY THEORY

The objective world simply is; it does not happen. Only to the gaze of my consciousness, crawling upward along the life line [world line] of my body, does a section of this world come to life as a fleeting image in space which continuously changes in time.

HERMANN WEYL

in: *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science*
(Princeton University Press 1949)

May the universe in some strange sense be "brought into being" by the participation of those who participate? On this view the vital act is the act of participation. "Participator" is the incontrovertible new concept given by quantum mechanics; it strikes down the term "observer" of classical theory, the man who stands safely behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without taking part. It can't be done, quantum mechanics says. Even with the lowly electron one must participate before one can give any meaning whatsoever to its position or its momentum. Is this firmly established result the tiny tip of a giant iceberg? Does the universe also derive its meaning from "participation"?

Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne, John Archibald Wheeler
in: *Gravitation* (Freeman N.Y. 1973, 20th printing 1997)

PHYSICAL REALITY IS EMBEDDED INTO SPACE- AND TIME-TRANSCENDING WHOLENESS

Direct experiences of inner and outer unity in holistic states of consciousness find parallels in the holistic nature of physical reality. Properties of molecules and also of light waves reveal that physical reality is whole and not composed of separate parts. Chris Clarke has explained experiments designed to prove this property in *Reality through the Looking-Glass* (Floris, Edinburgh 1996) and in the new Network book *Wider Horizons*. It is as if widely separate objects 'knew' each other's behaviour without time delay before physical signals could have had time to inform them of each other.

INTERPRETATIONS

Physicists account for the described phenomenon by ascribing no independent reality to individual objects but by treating them as parts of an unbroken whole. It is as if the parts were guided by a timeless 'shared knowledge' that needs no transportation from place to place nor

from event to event by physical signals. The parts simultaneously 'know' each other at distant locations.

An alternate possible interpretation requires the unpopular assumption of physical signals that run backwards in time.

OF COURSE THE FUTURE IS OPEN. - BUT SO IS THE PAST!

Most people, while admitting that the future is open, firmly believe that the past is fixed and that neither present nor future action or thought can change it.

However, various experiences, experiments, and observations suggest that the past be not absolutely fixed.

- In psychotherapy this insight may set free much helpful healing power.
- In physics, too, certain aspects of the past, or of what we think is past, are still open. These are still free to manifest themselves in various ways, particularly when they have not yet been noted or archived.

Past, present and future are not neatly separated: What we think - and we are free to choose what we think - may change the outcome of events that seem to have been definitely predetermined in the past.

The past is intimately entangled with the present (and with the future): There is no strict separation between (fixed) past and (open) future. It is only through conscious registration that reality is forced to choose one definite way among its various possible ways to show itself. Implication: Never underestimate the non-locality, timelessness, and potential of thought.

IN THE BEGINNING: TIMELESSNESS. BEFORE THE BEGINNING? WRONG QUESTION!

In the beginning there was unity into which the pluralities of consciousness, forces, energy, space, and time were indistinguishably enfolded.

'Unity was in the beginning and not in the beginning: because there was no time - there was eternity, all-presence'

(Herbert Pietschmann: *Die Welt die wir uns schaffen / Eine Vision*, Wien 1984).

Any question concerning a temporal or spatial 'beyond' is empty and without meaning. In the beginning there is neither space nor time, but unity - nothing but unity, into which the infinitely rich manifold of our whole universe is enfolded. It is the aim of science to fill this idea with mathematically and physically meaningful contents: a project that has not yet reached its end but gives research a sensible direction.

HOW WILL THE END BE?

'Beginning' and 'end' are concepts invented by our time-bound consciousness.

'Time is a dimension of the soul, not of the outer world'

(Augustinus, *Confessions*, Book 11).

The disciples said to Jesus, 'tell us how our end will be.' Jesus said, 'have you discovered, then, the beginning, that you look for the end? For where the beginning is, the end will be. Blessed is who will stand in the beginning; he will know the end and will not taste death.'

(*Gospel of Thomas*, logion 18. Brill, Leiden 1959).

Who consciously lives in all-presence partakes in eternity and is aware of the timeless ground of her/his true being.

'TIME is TOO SLOW for those who wait,
TOO SWIFT for those who fear,
TOO LONG for those who grieve
TOO SHORT for those who rejoice,
BUT TIME IS ETERNITY FOR THOSE WHO LOVE.'

(Henry van Dyke)