

# Reflection on the Essence of Time

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## Abstract

Time is an overall attribute of being. It means one can describe through it everything in the world. This, however, leads to a formal absurd—what happens when we try to define a concept in predicative manner if it has no predicates? It is not time which forms the attributes of physical phenomena, but on the contrary—it self-defines itself in the outlines of different processes within the material world, i.e. time should have been understood in a derivative way on the background of its master—the personal mind. The paper points out that the superior position of mind in relation to time—like the set that immanently defines its elements in addition to itself—could be dropped in a cognitive sense. Just as modern physics understands time and space as a unified space-time continuum, so the temporality of the pure mind would be identified with its infinite being. The structure of the paper stipulates the application of interdisciplinary comparative analysis of the phenomenon of time aiming to define the question about its essence as a standalone scientific matter.

## Keywords

Time, Subject, Philosophy, Temporality, Relativity

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## 1. Introduction

The entire history and methodology of our civilization and culture in all their shapes, evidenceness and dimensions attempt to comprehend the matter of time—one of the meaning-bringing and anthropo-defining phenomena—as possible for situating in two aspects. In the realms of the first one, the subject tries to understand what time means, to explain its nature, to correlate it to other phenomena of its immanent experience and external manifestation. With other words, this is the sphere of religious, philosophical, artistic, or generally said—scientific-humanitarian contemplative vision about the world itself.

The other aspect of time comprises of mathematical symbols and equations,

which have a very different purpose and perhaps another source—same as the one of the ancient magic. This purpose is being limited to the instrumental and practical activity of mind. There is no intention for explanation of nature here but rather an aspiration for its exploration and utilization in a way it is. Here we observe an intention for its subordination and re-shaping, coming to a point for a vulgar mute agreement of its non-destruction within the outlines of the subjective human quasi creativity.

Having provided the above different scientific perspectives about time we will try to show below if the idea about the autonomous time-study can take place having in mind its relation to specific regional ontologies which anyways try to give a profound understand of time but based on specific scientific areas.

## 2. Aspects of Time

Generally said, the first aspect of time-making is aimed to the service of truth, while the second one—rather to a natural slavery of the benefit. Of course, in reality it is not at all as easy and clear to distinguish these both areas of civilizational acting, which by itself brings about the extremely complicated relations of their interdependability. Sometimes we become witnesses of their coexistence, especially when one of them is looking for help from the other one. By other circumstances, both stand as rivals seeking enmity and even organic intolerance. Sometimes entire scientific ages cannot calm certain researchers, who otherwise are devoted to the same scientific matter. Some of them begin their explorations as naturphilosophers and scientists trying to understand and comprehend the truth about time. They arrive to the conclusion that it consists of “primordial” mathematics as well as in axiomatic formal approach and not in the content. Others, turning their back to observations and empirical postulates, ask more cardinal questions seeking and trying to explain the nature of time-happening.

If the sphere of creating and situating time in the private scientific way of its understanding is not by itself inclusive enough, the one of its mental explication is far more productive. If we cast even a passing glance to the history of civilization and theory of science, each one of us could be assured that the same question, asked during the different stages of their development, receives totally different answers. And because the corollaries of this implication are controversial enough, there is nothing else we could do but to begin from their premises, namely—the asking what exactly is time?

By asking this question, our mind quickly constructs the deductive ratiocination that time is what could be measured by temporal intervals—hours, minutes, and seconds. However, in fact, researchers, thinking over this question in a manner St. Augustin did, make the conclusion that time as well as space are indefinable concepts (St. Augustin, 2016). If this is like that and time by itself is just an imaginary myth, how is it happening that it becomes a research object of sciences which normally are involved only by empirically “proven” quantities. The symbols “ $t$ ” and “ $l$ ” indicate time and space in every pure scientific formula.

And this is not a result of some religious illumination and not even only a personal experience of our perceptions, but rather something bordering with the concept of supreme abstraction. It seems time flow is equal for all minds, i.e. by absolutely “defined” way (Eisenstadt, 1949). Remaining by the scientific point of view everything looks quite simple—multiple disciplines exist and they all study the phenomenon of time. However, no “tempology”, “chronomy” or something like the idea for autonomation of time theories in the frames of a specific discipline could have not been formulated.

If we refer to a random vocabulary or encyclopedic source, we will definitely notice that they indirectly, but always, in the style of high impact factor edition, state the query about the concept definition in question. Reading about the concept “time” though, the definitions do not look so imperative and even on the contrary—they have the outlook of rather unclear and palliative descriptions.

If time is just some attribute, i.e. a property of objects (empirical phenomena) why is that it is an overall feature? A feature itself could have been defined only in comparison with other features, which differ from it in a quantitative and qualitative manner. On the other hand, if we deal with an overall attribute, i.e. it belongs unexclusively to everything in the world, how and to what we can compare it?

If time is an overall attribute, it means we can describe through it everything in the world. The latest, however, leads to a formal absurd—what happens when we try to define a concept in predicative manner if it has no predicates? It is not the time which forms the attributes of physical phenomena, but on the contrary—it self-defines itself in the outlines of different processes within the material world, i.e. time should have been understood in a derivative way on the background of its master—the personal mind.

Physical time is the objective time. Psychological time is the personal and immanent experience of the objective time. We rely on the immanent time when we declare that time is in a state of passing through a specific mind. On the other hand, we look for physical time when we talk about the instrumental dimensions of temporality. Under the concept “temporality” we will be understanding the attempt for substantiation of the phenomenon “time” having for a purpose the unification of both subjective and objective elements in its manifestation. When theoretical physicists describe the velocity as a defining quantity for alteration of location concerning time—this is a physical time. However, when the latest is being understood as a phenomenon, immanent to the consciousness—this is a psychical time.

This contradiction namely, arising in metaphysical manner between the anthropocentrism and rough naturalism leads the subjectively oriented researchers of temporality to the conclusion that time (physical and psychic) cannot exist outside the mind.

Having in mind the above, the first certain thing, which the immanent experience discovers describing time, is the phenomenon of its duration or passing.

We feel the ceaseless flux and even the run of time figuratively named as “river of time”. Duration is so clear and “noticeable” attribute of time that it could have been frequently identified by the very duration itself. Time, unlike its so called “attribute”—the *duration*—is a multidimensional phenomenon in the semiotic way of understanding. One of the things, which axiomatically defines us as personalities is the confidence that we always find ourselves in the middle of temporality, from where it is not at all difficult to lose perception as for its beginning and so for its duration and ending as well. We could try to imagine everything but a world, which has curdled in a state of no durational temporality.

The very duration presupposes the necessity for temporal segmentation in certain intervals utilized by our consciousness as a tool for time measurement. The segmentation of time into measurable pieces is not a novelty to anyone of us because we are obliged to do it all the time concerning the need to separate the duration in order to interrupt the graduality. These temporal pieces do exist due to cyclicity, which brings back each time the alterity to its starting point.

The abovementioned leads to the conclusion that multi-aspect time research in the empirical sense is not a sufficiently reliable method for universally defining the concept of temporality. Therefore, it is also necessary to pay attention to the so-called “immanent” time, whose phenomenon would give another perspective to the unified theory of time-perception.

### 3. The Immanent Time

Time, after the Newtonian physics has been defined as a regional ontology, is being perceived as a relative phenomenon. The physics of relativity though defining it in a non-absolute manner, still gives it a scientific sound, which makes it predictable and gives it a solid place in an ontological sense. From a cognitive point of view however, time is really more of a fiction, especially when one cannot account for any particular fluctuations in spatial terms (Barbour, 2001). It is completely subjective in terms of cognitive subject and depends entirely on his world perspective. If the change as such has no particular significance for the human mind, time will not have a different fate. If the subject was a pure disembodied being, who “observes” the world through the values and the world-view prism of a pure mind, this change as such takes on new meaning.

Just as in the experiment with photons passing through two spatial slits, they pass differently on the projecting surface according to the mode of observation, in the same way a certain consciousness deprived from body-related sensations could in such a degree relativize the changes it detects as to make them non-existent even if they have no meaning or a radically different meaning for the perceiver. Time for the desomatized subject would become so relative that the transmission of meanings in an interactive sense would require non-spatial reference points that will define change in a qualitatively different way.

Instrumental physical time, according to Bergson’s classification (Bergson, 2001), would lose its significance for the desomatized subject, since it would

reside in it, and it would no longer be a temporal subject in the theoretical sense of the concept. On the other hand, duration, which also segments alteration in a biunivocal sense, would continue to be external to the cognizing, albeit etherized, intellect and would continue to be signified by it as a co-experiencing of alteration in a cultural sense. This segmentation, however, is not atomizing with respect to time, and it does not destroy meanings by desomatizing them from one another; rather, it serves merely as a differentiating mechanism for the individual semantic units in consciousness that constitute the overall notion of duration as a phenomenon. Duration is ontologized by being exported out of the absolute empirical notion of time and thus sets the horizons of the desomatized consciousness, which by denying the temporal intervals in which its biochemical carrier has been thought up to that point, creates the simultaneous notion of a residence in a kind of sense that constructs temporal paradigms behind which every change is conceived as part of this duration or one belonging to another kind.

The extraction of temporal moments indicative of change and their consideration as discrete meaning-bearing units that might also have a common connotational pattern in the extension of the overall duration as such is usually culturally conditioned. Instrumental physical time, however, can also be viewed as an overall phenomenon composed of discrete time-units which, even if they could be measured in an empirical sense, have no particular significance in themselves, because an impermanent consciousness would no longer attach importance to discrete atomic time-units. Time in its totality is dematerialized, but not only in a cultural-social sense, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz would note, but also in a psychological aspect (Geertz, 1966). The perception of time as a sequential series of events, possessing predicates such as antecedent and consequent, is overridden by the causal relation between the individual manifestations of change in duration, which is not necessarily and uniquely defined in terms of “before” and “after,” as the detemporalized time of the desomatized intellect would have the ability to reverse the direction of change in the thermodynamic sense of the term, which also places time as such outside the trivial definitions of the existentially-bounded sense-defined mind.

In this regard, the main challenge that will confront the self-reflective subject in relation to time as an anthropological constant is how to make sense of it in relation to the new meaning-defining language created by an eventual meta-mind. If we return to the Kantian understanding of time (Kant, 2015), which defines time as present in all cognitive categories and therefore so difficult to account for, would it still be possible, under conditions of etherized consciousness, to distinguish a separate science of time which would give an unambiguous definition of its nature?

Probably yes, in case the language of the desomatized subject needs a generalized temporal representation. Such an all-encompassing notion of time, however, would obliterate cultural references in the understanding of time. This perspective is entirely plausible having in mind the assumptions that the future

development of the socium might be possible as a medium of desomatized minds. The present superior position of mind in relation to time—similar to the set that immanently defines its elements in addition to itself—could be dropped in a cognitive sense. Just as modern physics understands time and space as a unified space-time continuum, so the temporality of the desomatized mind would be identified with its infinite being. The individual notion of time, creating pluralistic world-pleasing distinctions in biochemized mind, might give way to the syncretized idea of space-time of the operative with a single meaning-bearing language disembodied one.

#### 4. Conclusion

The entire history of philosophy tries to provide as much as possible a shorter definition of time itself while inevitably falls under the dependence of two consequences. On the first place—the attempt to define time with more fundamental and primordial concepts must be understood as causal primus factor, because it is more productive as methodological approach. And, on the second place—the observation that short definitions of time are moreover closer to the truth in comparison to more complicated and systematic interpretations. The short definitions by themselves are above all trivial (e.g. *Time is what prevents the possibility everything to happen at the same time*) or too inaccurate (e.g. *Time is measuring the causality*), sometimes far abstract (e.g. *Time is a sum of spontaneousnesses*) or even mysterious (e.g. *Time is a flux of events, passing through the immobile subject*).

However, when philosophers ask what time is, they normally have in mind a philosophical theory of time, which has been constructed only to answer most philosophical questions about time. Thus, such short definitions of time, although true, can be adequate only if they have been supported by more complicated but working descriptive theories. That is why an explanation is needed about what such a theory must do. In addition, the answer is that along with everything else, it should identify if time exists objectively or it is just a construct of our imagination.

Thus, this paraphrased Plato's idea (Plato, 1990), which filled the entire history about the study of temporality, modifying itself, remains to serve as a meaningful guide for every new attempt of time-making. It is not at all obligatory though every new undertaking, mentioning temporality, to presupposes it in a causal manner. However, we believe that its eventual author should be inevitably acquainted to it.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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