

SPACE, TIME, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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Intent and Purpose

I want to make it clear from the outset that this paper is intended as a piece of creative metaphysics, not as a defense of any particular historical conception of space, time, or consciousness. Although the insights have their foundation in such philosophers as Pythagoras, Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel, Bergson, and Samuel Alexander, this paper is in no sense either an analysis or a justification of any particular one of their views. In fact, it may even be objected that the use to which I should like to put their ideas is incompatible with their over-all philosophy; nevertheless, their ideas have their effect in the general philosophical position which I am about to espouse.

Time, Space, and Consciousness

Pythagoras is said to have claimed, in an enigmatic statement, that time is the soul of the world.¹ This tacit identification of time with consciousness may be unpacked in the following way. First, what is true about Ultimate Reality is its unity, for behind the well-known Pythagorean Table of Opposites lies the Monad, the One. As Plotinus understood, all emanates from the One, the first movement occurring when the One thinks of Itself as an Object: in this first stage of self-consciousness, the Subject-Object Unity becomes aware of Itself in its bipolar aspects, as Subject considering Itself-as-Object.² It is the movement of Consciousness which constitutes the necessary condition for the existence of Time. Time, as Augustine reasoned, comes into being with the creation of the world.³ The world, then, is that which manifests in Space: Space is but the *outside* of Consciousness, or Consciousness projected as Other within its Field of Self-Consciousness. As Hegel would say, the Idea becomes *objectified* or *externalized* as nature within the movement of *Geist*.

When one passes beyond the Parmenidean "gates of the ways of Night and Day,"⁴ one enters into that realm of reality of the One, which, according to Plotinus, "is not a thing, nor quality, nor quantity, nor intellect, nor soul, nor in motion, nor at rest, nor in space, nor in time, but is the absolute 'monoform,' or rather formless, prior" to all things. It is this highest level of reality which one might describe by the Latin *plenum* (fullness) as well as by the Buddhist *sunyata* (emptiness). For the fullness is without form, hence empty or void, yet it contains the possibility of all things, which, when made conscious to the self-conscious One, results in the ema-

nation of Intellect: a vision of the One knowing itself. From Intellect is emanated World Soul, from which individual souls are formed and from which eventually comes Matter, the Receptacle of Plato. The world, then, can be seen as a *vision*, thrice-removed, of the One: Space, accordingly, is but the *outside* of self-conscious Consciousness, filled with matter which, too, is but the *externalization* of Thought. As Parmenides said, "the same thing can be thought as can be."⁵ The Hegalian Idea becomes Nature; the Christian Logos becomes flesh.⁶ World Soul and World Body are but two sides or aspects of a Single Reality: the "*Deus sive Natura*" of Spinoza. Or in Leibniz's conception of the windowless Monad: what appears to be external is but the reflection of consciousness upon its own mirror.

If Consciousness emanates and spreads itself throughout its external vibratory field manifesting as Space, then, as Plato suggested, Time would have come "into being with the Heaven"⁷ or Body of the World; and there would have been "no days and nights, months and years, before Heaven came into being."⁸ To *measure* time requires the movement of bodies; but if the *external* is but a reflection of the *internal*, then the movement of *bodies* is but the outside of the movement of *thought*. Duration becomes synonymous with persistence unchanged in consciousness, which is tantamount to persistence "in time" or "through time." For without consciousness there would be no time.

Henri Bergson recognized that "duration and succession belong not to the external world, but to the conscious mind" only.⁹ For him, time first is identified as "the continuity of our inner life." "It is memory, but not personal memory, . . . a memory that prolongs the before into the after, keeping them from being mere snapshots appearing and disappearing in a present ceaselessly reborn."¹⁰ Without a sense of "the continuity of what precedes into what follows and the uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation,"¹¹ there would be no notion of time. In short, duration is a necessary ingredient of consciousness and the very basis of time.

Consciousness endures: such is its nature. But when Consciousness projects its Thoughts upon the screen of its own Self-Awareness, a world of objects is formed. The inner life has become externalized, extended into an external world with objects and in which internal and external time can correspond. For the universe to endure or persist, there must be, in the words of Bergson.

an impersonal consciousness that is the link among all individual consciousnesses, as between these consciousnesses and the rest of nature. Such a consciousness would grasp, in a single, instantaneous perception, multiple events lying at different points in space; simultaneity

would be precisely the possibility of two or more events entering within a single instantaneous perception.¹²

Like Bergson and many other philosophers, I think that "we cannot speak of a reality that endures without inserting consciousness into it. It is impossible to imagine or conceive a connecting link between the before and after without an element of memory and, consequently, of consciousness."¹³ Or, to put it otherwise, "without an elementary memory that connects the two moments, there will be only one or the other, consequently a single instant, no before and after, no succession, no time."¹⁴ In conclusion, as Bergson states: "we cannot conceive a time without imagining it as perceived and lived. Duration therefore implies consciousness."¹⁵

Mystics have long maintained that time is an illusion, that what the normal consciousness perceives as past/present/future is, in truth, a single Eternal Now, an immeasurable duration, given all at once and once and for all in the "Mind of God."¹⁶ Hence in the vision of the Divine, all that has been, is, and shall be are simultaneously given. Here, perhaps, is the metaphysical justification of Divine Foreknowledge, the *fatum christianum* of Leibniz, according to whom the "certain destiny of every thing, regulated by the foreknowledge and providence of God" is pronounced or decreed.¹⁷ In the Eternally Present, cause and effect, beginning (*arche*) and end (*telos*), are the same.¹⁸ But how is it, then, to man's finite consciousness that this is not so, that cause precedes effect, that beginning comes before end, and that the past is earlier than the present and the future later? If there is an Eternal Now in which all divisions of temporality are dissolved, how is it that human consciousness can so segment the Eternal? To answer these questions, we must turn to an analysis of past, present, and future.

Past, Present, and Future

It is obvious that when we talk about consciousness, two sorts must be distinguished: Divine Consciousness for Whom duration is the Eternal Present, and finite consciousness for whom the focus of attention changes in both space and time. Now, what I want to maintain, briefly and succinctly, is this: time arises with the moving focus of consciousness, and consciousness moves in its field of ideas and objects as it successively becomes interested or disinterested, attached or non-attached.

Between the two levels of consciousness, Divine and finite, lie various degrees, levels, or ranges of mind, to which may be affixed labels such as "conscious," "subconscious," "unconscious," "superconscious," and "Universal Unconscious." Kinds of consciousness may also be discerned: sensation, impression, or perception; conception, thought, memory, imagination; precognition, intuition, and so on. What distinguishes these levels and kinds of consciousness is their relation to time.

Sensations, impressions, and perceptions are normally confined to the *present*; memories, to the *past*; precognition, to the *future*. That which is confined to the subconscious is that which has happened in the *present* lifetime, whereas that which may be apprehended by the superconscious or from the Universal Unconscious may refer to either *past* or *future*. Intuitions, too, range widely over time; so that one may have an immediate intuition of what is happening in another spatial location or of what is going to happen either immediately or in some distant time. Through meditation, the usual temporal sequence may be suspended; and past, present, and future open up to consciousness through what is commonly called "time traveling." This kind of consciousness, though uncommon in the West, has a long, time-honored tradition in the East, references to which occur in the ancient and venerable *Yoga-sutras* of Pantanjali.

Bertrand Russell, in his *History of Western Philosophy*, criticizes the notion that the past somehow survives in the present through memory. That, Russell quips, is to confuse the memory of an event in the past with the event itself, the present thought with that about which it is a thought.¹⁹ From a materialistic metaphysical stance, the criticism may be justified, for memory would be identified with brain states. But how can such a metaphysics account for memories of past lives or the ability to remember events which one has not encountered and to speak languages which one has not learned in his present lifetime? Pythagoras and Krishna are two authorities who claimed to be able to remember their past lives, and the evidence from psychiatry and psychotherapy for remembering past lives and for speaking foreign and antiquated languages is increasing daily. How can such data be explained? Perhaps a reductionistic material identity theory is less plausible than those philosophies which take consciousness itself as irreducible. In such metaphysics, there are levels of awareness in which one is already in touch with the past and the future. Both can be known, as present to consciousness; both exist, in some sense, eternally.

If one imagines or visualizes the entirety of Time (Past, Present, and Future) by a spatial metaphor of a beam of light, within which are individuated foci of consciousness, he can see that the *past* is that which the focus of individuated finite consciousness has *passed*; the *present*, that upon which the consciousness is *now* focussed; and the *future*, that upon which the focus has *yet to fall*. Whatever memory may actually be associated with brain processes, that memory can be found in the brain only because a higher level of consciousness is aware of it as an idea or event: the brain process is, in the language of Plato, but a *reflection*, an image, of that eternally existing reality in which it *participates*. To remember is to *be present*, at some level of consciousness, at a space-time of an event or idea which the focus of the individuated consciousness has *passed*. "As

above, so below," reads the ancient wisdom. And as man contains in his genetic code the entire physical past of his species and, perhaps, of all evolution, so too in his vehicles of consciousness he contains the entire history of his species and, perhaps, of the cosmos. In biology, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," and in metaphysical psychology, "man is the microcosm of the macrocosm."

Consciousness and Space-Time

"Time is the mind of Space and Space the body of Time," so wrote Samuel Alexander.²⁰ And although he seems to have meant something very different from the view which I am presenting, still Alexander intuitively grasped that "space and its Time are . . . not two things but one, and there is no Space without Time nor Time without Space."²¹ Leibniz, too, held that space and matter, time and motion, "though different, are inseparable."²²

It would be interesting to point out some of the parallels of this conception of time with concepts which have emerged in contemporary physics. For just as in physics the entire structure of the space-time continuum is dependent upon the distribution of matter in the universe, so, too, the entire structure of consciousness-time is dependent upon the vibrational distribution of consciousness in its field or universe. Moreover, just as the notion of empty space has become devoid of empirical meaning in physics, so, too, "empty time" becomes equally devoid of meaning, empirical or metaphysical, according to this analysis. Finally,

as we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated "basic building blocks," but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between various parts of the whole. These relations always include the observer in an essential way. The human observer constitutes the final link in the chain of observational processes, and the properties of any atomic object can be understood only in terms of the object's interaction with the observer.²³

Similarly, according to our analysis, time cannot be divorced from consciousness. There is not time *and* an observing consciousness. Rather, time becomes an *aspect* or *quality* of the *participating* consciousness.

Another parallel between consciousness and space-time is their *curvature*. The curvature of *space-time*, due to the gravitational attraction of bodies, is the *external* side of the curvataure of *consciousness*, due to its attraction for objects. Or conversely, as consciousness is drawn toward objects, so space appears to be warped in the direction of objects. In physics, light is affected by the gravitational masses, yet light is but a manifestation of consciousness. Indeed, consciousness is light! Accordingly, space

should appear as consciousness does, for the *outside* and *inside* are but *sides* of a single whole, space-time or space-consciousness.

Still another interesting parallel between physics and the metaphysics of space-time presents itself. In relativity physics, the greater the velocity, the slower the processes of time. This apparent physical phenomenon may find an analogue in what is called "psychological time": the more one is aware of doing an activity, the more one is aware of time; the more one can lose oneself in the activity, the less aware of time's passing one becomes. Finally, as one loses oneself and hence one's self-consciousness and "becomes" one's activity, as the Zen koan suggests, the work gets done but there is no doer! Nor would there be, relatively, an awareness of the passing of time: time would have slowed down, or even have stopped, for such a *participator*. Perhaps this will help us to understand how, in certain process-metaphysics, the Eternal can participate in Creative Evolution. For the paradox of the Eternal becoming the temporal may find its experiential solution in the dissolution of self-consciousness of a participator who becomes one with his activity.

Finally, one more brief parallel on the One and the Many. According to the Field Theory of contemporary physics, everything can be conceived as a whole, a unified field, in which what was formerly thought to be separate objects and individuals now appears, more correctly, as aspects or qualities within the field, the field constituting the only "reality." So, too, if Consciousness be conceived as light and the individuated consciousnesses as foci of that One Light, broken into its multitudinous lengths, as though by myriad prisms, so the One which is ever One may appear, *in* and *to* its different lengths, to be Many. As Parmenides and Plotinus, among others, understood, the Many or Plurality *appears* to exist separately, yet *is* a whole, *appears* distinct, yet *is* One.

Consciousness and the Ethics of Non-attachment

An ethic is implicit in the conception of space-time and consciousness here presented. According to this idealism, consciousness creates its world. Each person creates his own personal reality through his beliefs, feelings, expectations, and thoughts, conscious or unconscious, in a word, through his *judgments*. Altering the state of consciousness automatically alters the world. But what of *the world which is*? How can one encounter the Real? The answer is quite simple: only through a *non-attached consciousness*.

The most important virtue for man's spiritual odyssey has long been recognized: the *apatheia* of the Stoics, what the yogi calls *vairagya*,²⁴ the central theme of the entire *Bhagavad Gita* within the Hindu tradition, and the remedy for the cause of suffering, within the Buddhist heritage. As Goethe correctly comprehended, Faust would be lost the very moment his

consciousness became so attached as to say to the passing moment, "Linger a while! Thou art so fair."²⁵

"Virtue is knowledge," such is the Socratic dictum, whose truth was echoed in the famous words of the Delphic temple, "Know thyself, and thou shalt know the gods and all things." But what is it to know? And what does it profit a man to know? Pythagoras established a mystery school to answer this query, and his influence has been felt to the present time. To know, according to this tradition, of which Plato stands as an eminent spokesman, is to journey in consciousness into that region beyond the Cave, past the stages of the Divided Line, there to apprehend in a single unified state of *noesis*, where knower and known become one, that which alone is true. As William Blake said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." Yet, Blake continues, "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."²⁶

Knowledge, according to Plato, is remembering or recollection. But remembering, in its true and full sense, is *reliving* or *re-experiencing*, which is tantamount to *transferring the focal point of consciousness* to a level of reality beyond the space-time of the physical world, to the Astral Plane of Beauty, or the Mental Plane of Truth, or ideally to the Spiritual Plane of Goodness. Only there lies *episteme*, knowledge: all else is illusion, the *maya* of the Hindus, "the Magic Theatre" of Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. To truly know is to be conscious at the noetic levels of Reality, to be conscious in the Eternal Present.

But to see everything as it is, is to be non-attached to any particular datum of consciousness. "Yoga is the inhibition of the modification of consciousness," so begins Patanjali's *Yoga-sutras*. Timelessness requires non-attachment or thought-lessness. To be wise is to *love*, to love is to *accept unconditionally*, to accept unconditionally is to *be satisfied with what is*, to be satisfied with what is is *not to judge*, not to judge is *not to thirst or cling*, not to thirst or cling is to *be detached*, and to be detached is to *have cultivated and attained non-attachment*: to be *wise* is to be in the state of *non-attachment*.

Only through non-attachment can one love. It is said that one should hate the sin but love the sinner. Impossible! For to *see* a person as a sinner is already to have judged, and with that judgment comes the feeling attendant to it. Thus only in a state of detached non-judgment can one love. Love requires a vision higher than with the physical eyes; it requires a vision of the infinite and eternal. To love is to *know*; to know is to *remember*; to remember is to *see*; and to see is to *be* in the Eternal Present, the Consciousness of God, where everything is seen in its shining perfection and completion. This, then, is the ethics of non-attachment.

One cannot love unless he can forgive, and one cannot forgive if he remembers. One cannot forgive and not forget! As Nietzsche apprehended, *resentment* is a most pernicious fault; and resentment has its origins in the *past* through an *attached* and *clinging* memory. To live in the past is never to see what *is*, but only what was. It is to confine consciousness in such a way as to preclude growth: the ultimate folly. Such a consciousness cannot love; and, as Plato wrote so beautifully in his *Symposium*, love is that which, if one but let it, will lead him to the Absolute. Ultimately, non-attachment will free consciousness to ascend to the highest state of consciousness, beyond God-Manifest or Self-Conscious God, beyond both Space and Time, where Unity alone exists, where fullness and emptiness become one: *Sunyata*, *Nirvana*, bliss, *Satori*, *Samadhi*. Here alone is freedom; for from this vantage, in unity with the Source, one can be at any time, space, level, dimension of himself, where Atman is Brahman. Here *Space* and *Time* are finally understood as *Consciousness*.

NOTES

1. Plutarch, *Platonic Questions*.
2. For Plotinus, just as Soul is the image of Intellect, so Intellect is the vision of the One looking at Itself. "Everything which exists . . . exists by virtue of its unity." Of Intellect, Plotinus writes, "The intellect is all things. It contains all things in itself at rest within itself." "The intellect in the act of thought produces existence, and existence by being thought gives thought and existence to intellect."
3. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI.
4. Fr. 1, Sextus *adv. math.* VII, I I I and Simplicius *de caelo* 557, 25, in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 266-67.
5. Fr. 2, Proclus in *Tim.* I, 345, 18; Diehl, in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
6. John 1:14
7. *Tim.*, 38B.
8. *Tim.*, 37E.
9. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (London & New York, 1910), p. 120.
10. Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* (Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), Ch. 3, "Concerning the Nature of Time," p. 44.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50: "Impersonal and universal time, if it exists, is in vain endlessly prolonged from past to future; it is all of a piece, the parts we single out in it are merely those of a space that delineates its track and becomes its equivalent in our eyes; we are dividing the unfolded, not the unfolding."
17. Leibniz, #62 in his Fifth Paper, cited in "Time," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan & Company, 1967).

18. Cf., Aristotle, who argues that the *telos* is given in the seed, the *arche* of a tree.
19. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
20. Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan and Company, 1966), p. 38.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
22. Leibniz, *op. cit.*
23. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), p. 57.
24. Patanjali, *Yoga-sutras*, "Samadhi Pada," 12.
25. Goethe, *Faust, Part I*, "Faust's Study," line 176 in *World Masterpieces II*, ed. by Mack, Knox, McGalliard, Pasinetti, Hugo, Wellek, and Douglas (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 430.
26. William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Plate 14.