

Fulfilment to comprehend time

by Constanza Iturriaga

“What is, then, time? If no one asks me, I know what it is; but if I wish to explain to him who asks, I do not know.” – St. Augustin Hippo.

“What is Time?”- This is a question that has permeated throughout our history. It is a question that still to this day echoes tirelessly, as it has through the centuries, without fading still from its baggage. Theorists from different areas have answered, but apparently, it is the question itself that calls our attention and settles on top of our existence. The purpose of this article is to reflect not on what is time (as a concept), but the ‘how’ (the experience of it). For this, it has been of great help and discovery what Dr Alfried Längle proposed in his latest conference in Chile: “Tiempo Sentido – Tiempo con sentido (Time sensed – Time with sense)”

Personally, Dr Längle’s conference happened to be greatly enlightening. I did my thesis based on the concept of time of Aristotle and Heidegger, and finished it without feeling any closer to comprehending it than when I began. So, when I ask myself “What is Time?,” there is no space for personal involvement. It becomes into an empty way of thinking, a reflexion about general things that leaves my affective disposition to the side of the picture. Counterposed to this empty thinking, to me time was -as Heidegger puts it-, always a ***time lived, experienced, and felt intimately by an I***. Each time we want to apprehend the concept of time, its real dimension escapes us: the personal and individual experience of Time. Time is not a concept to be apprehended impersonally, less so to be defined as something foreign to us. Time is this “tick-tock” of a clock that is absolutely mine. It is my second hand moving throughout my life. Time is for oneself each time, of someone with an own name and surname. It is the voice of a human being saying ‘*my time*’, ‘*this time*’, ‘*my life*’.

Dr Längle used other words to refer to this personal dimension of the experience of time, however, independently of the words we use, we can already appreciate this change in outlook: it is not about the what, but about the how. It is about how this question relates to me. What can I say about this time I was given? What do I do with it? How do I make it mine? – And so, *time* takes *my time*. I manage then to open a space for the question to penetrate and palpitate in myself: How do I live *my time*? And above all, how do I take conscience of my own time? Is it not somewhat obvious, that I have a given amount of lifetime and that I occupy it my way? As obvious as these questions may read, it seems that there is not a day-to-day rooted awareness about the importance of this temporality. The radical change is not that we ‘have time’, it is that we *are time*. We are *temporal* beings. There is no infinite reserve, filled with time to take as we desire: *we are temporal*, this means that each time I occupy my time, I do not occupy it like I utilize a pen, a car, a towel, or

any other external object. The way to operate time is always to *live it*. This time can be spent, it runs out. Irremediably my time 'goes away' or I 'live it away'. Either way, there is no way back.

So, each decision and each election that I make in my routine, acquires a new dimension for my priorities. When I act taking time for granted, when I act as if I were eternal, I cannot notice the weight to the absurd of completing tasks that have no meaning to my life. And in that there is a deeper meaning. It is something that Buddhism and other disciplines have highlighted already: being *present here and now*. What does this phrase tell us when we dig deeper? For me, personally, it is the neuralgic point where I manage to unify what Dr Längle proposes with my own experiences. What I couldn't do from the point of view of philosophy was taking charge of vital and personal relevance of being *always in the now*. Because if I want to turn *time* into *my time*, I need to find the way of *being present* throughout all possible *now's* that may happen in my own life. How do I manage to be present, *really*, in each *now*? Because it is not the same being truly present in something, than simply 'being'. It is the difference between existing and *passing time*: How do I appropriate time in an authentic and personal manner? If we see that the present is really a '*being present*', then the answer must be that only I can appropriate my time as I do every action, devoted to it. Being-in each act: in my case it is being *in care* of my home and family, *in writing* this article, *in working*, *in my lectures*, *in my strolls and walks* through 'Ñuñoa', and also *in pain*.

From here we could make the following question that, although obvious, seems necessary: Are we not always present? We may be, and we 'lapse' through all of time, but that is not the same as being present. When I am present I need to approve what I live through each day, each now. My mind does not meander in the possibilities, in what I could be doing, nor in the anxiety for the future, nor the nostalgia for the past. I am in no other situation than my present action, whatever it may be. So, what happens with hardships? Unpleasant tasks? Do I not count in those moments? Maybe it's precisely then when we find the challenge of staying present. The sense -from my point of view- of being present is this particularity that I call 'unconditional friendship' or 'sacred marriage' with oneself. As with a relationship of absolute fidelity, I cannot nor should abandon myself precisely when I need myself the most. I cannot evade because it is then when I most need my presence, that embraces what comes and accompanies me in the event of grief, of a specific problem, or of a highly challenging situation. Being present then is being 'whole', because then I serve completely to myself, I serve 'fully in what occupies me'. Whatever it may be. Deeply moving are, regarding this, the experiences that Viktor Frankl relates as a survivor of Auschwitz. How may someone find direction, and internal space to survive, is something that amazes me. But there is no doubt this experience is no 'magic trick', and I think that it can only be possible with the previous condition of "having been present", even in the atrocities and the pain.

Many times, when we hear the words *sense* and *fulfilment*, it seems as if we heard unreachable and abstract ideas. My idea is proposing that *sense* and *fulfilment* are *concrete* actions and are found *here* and *now*. To make a reality of the concepts of *time*, *fulfilment*, and *sense*, it is necessary to bring them to everyday life: nowadays, for example: *what good made the actions I chose? Do the things I chose make sense to me? What do I want, can, can allow, and can make sense to do?* And if I need to do a tedious task, I ask: *what is it good for? Why did I choose to do it?* Suddenly I find that in every thing I ask, there is value. And it is this value that plays a part each time I choose to do this tedious task. The connection with the questions of my diary living, is what make these concepts real. It is necessary to bring reality to time (rea-lize it), and at the same time comprehending that time is not something that simply *happens to me* but is my own life that is in play and plays out 'now' after 'now'.

There is nothing more enlightening to feel time, than remembering our own mortality and knowing about how finite and ephemeral being. Searching for fulfilment in the stars, in a better past, or in the unreachable possibilities furthers us from our immediate presence. **Fulfilment is the fulfilment of our presence.** It is paradoxical that being temporal, we have to appropriate time. "Am I not born with time?", someone could ask. But anyone that has felt that time flees them, could maybe also comprehend this: that if well it is a mystery why we have reached this existence, it is not a mystery that for me to live it authentically I need to reflect about time, **about my time. Let us be interpellated by this question, and answer like so: "yes, today I was truly present. My life is not a mere *weight*, I am here, I exist"**. And then we may say "yes, I am, *whole*".

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