TIME AND EXISTENCE: IS THERE TIME FOR EVERYTHING?

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ABSTRAK

Waktu adalah eksistensi, begitu pun sebaliknya eksistensi adalah waktu. Tulisan klasik tentang waktu dan eksistensi dalam Kitab Suci Kristen, Pengkhotbah, memberikan bobot waktu dengan aporisme — dalam fragmen-fragmen linguistik yang kompleks, seperti jam, hari, dan bahkan tahun dalam pengalaman hidup kita. Dalam artikel ini, bentuk aporisme dan isi eksistensial di sini digabungkan untuk menawarkan tambahan-tambahan yang memerlukan beberapa menit untuk memahami, namun mengundang pengaruh teka-teki abadi dan keingintahuan tentang waktu dan eksistensi manusia.

Kata Kunci: time; existence

(1.0) Now

There is a time for everything and every matter under heaven. Yet immersed in time, we are never finally in sync with time, for our time is also being taken away in every moment we assume is possessed. We presume at least to have present time, yet this is always receding away from us, never being secured as now because it always ceases to be now as then. We are suspended between what is no longer and what is not yet over an ever disappearing now. We are never in sync with time so as to presume we possess it.

(1.1) Time and significance

Now becomes then, but every then is the possibility of a new now. Whether now is not now or a new now, there is always the same now, even if it is a different now. (Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit; Philosophy of Nature)
Now is simultaneously taking time and offering it, at once deprivation and gift, depriving identity of self-standing presence while offering formative time for creative engagement with life. Now is loss and possibility; now is ever slipping away, changing and always new. Elevation of self is thwarted in the loss of now, for whatever consolidates present identity, also lapses into then—I can never announce that I Am. Yet now is a time of grace within which I can experience life in its generosity.

In attempting to isolate a specific now that is significant, either in self-endorsement or for personal anchorage within life, it ceases to be now, only to become then. Paradoxically, any now is deemed more significant in receding away, as past significance is grasped and assimilated for present existence. Yet without new moments of significance, previous significance will calcify and become brittle; it will be cosseted and even become sacrosanct. Now is therefore necessarily received as a gift as also recast, adventurously, with new significance.

(1.2) Eventually is not

Life is time. Anything in which time elapses—is eventually not. The movement is a simple as that. Time assimilates time and us too. Time unfolding as an unknown future is our freedom for responsibility and identity. Yet ultimately, we cannot secure anything that transpires within time, not even our own existence. Even our presumed grasp of present time is an illusion, for this is always receding away from us. As much as we celebrate life, it cannot be sustained beyond its ultimate negation—death and oblivion—the biblical image of being formed from dust and returning to dust again.

(1.3) Seamlessly divided

Time is seamless yet perceived through conscious punctuations by calendar calibrations and events. Time is divided between past and future as the continuity of past and future. A particular moment is experienced uniquely, yet ceases to exist as a particular moment. Time is seamlessly the same yet never the same.

(1.4) Now

Now is without contemporaneity with any other now and is indifferent to any time we designate as now. In becoming now, time also terminates every now. Without a now, there is no past or future; every now necessarily ceases, becoming a past in receiving a future. (With reference to Hegel History of Philosophy II; Phenomenology of Spirit)
(2.0) Between past and future

The past remains as veiled as a present that is moving toward an unknown future. The future will reinterpret the present, from which we interpret the past. The past remains as unknown as the future because our present is yet to be known from future hindsight. (With reference to Hamann, Bayer)

(2.1) Janus faces within time

Whatever we seek to establish within time is already out of sync because of time. Time is change. In negotiating time, we are always encountering change. Time fragments any received coherence and stability—unless such fragmentation is resisted by intentional efforts, either to conserve or to adapt what invariably if ignored, degenerates within the flux of life. Time invokes Janus faces as simultaneously, we face opposite directions: we face the past in sustaining continuity; we face the future in adapting to change that occurs with time. This can be a conflicted movement—as moving with time, yet resistant to time.

(2.2) Our perception of time

Time is relative to our perception of its duration. How long is a minute, hour or day? It depends partially on our experience of any quantum of time in relation to our perception. Our perception of time changes by ratio to pain and pleasure. Memory recapitulates time that is generally referred to in relative proportions as long or short, yet the past is now neither of these measures (Augustine). In memory and hope, the past is recalled and the future is anticipated through compressed images. Qualitatively, our perception of time is relative to vital past experiences and imperative future possibilities.

(2.3) Space and time

Time is feared because it represents unknown futurity and potential demise; these are accentuated by anxiety and regret. Space represents stability as time that can stand still; this is affirmed by reference to a particular place. Space is claimed in cultural stability—by reliving the memory of belonging to a place; repetition as a seasonal or annual event represents an island of permanence within temporality. Yet representing decisions, change and contingency, temporality implies potential movement from a specific space. Temporality represents the possibility of loss; it is also the possibility of gain beyond any previously known in a particular place.
(2.4) Patterns and predictions

We might cite social and cultural patterns for likely future scenarios,

yet events are distinguished from patterns. Human volition as a source of events and so exceptions to a usual pattern is unpredictable and often defies clear motivation. For this reason, we cannot predict an eventful future from past patterns.

(3.0) Is there a right time?

We are punctual in arriving at the present on time but we cannot retain any present moment of time. We are out of time with any moment within time by which we stake our identity. Even memory as a source of coherent identity is invoked within time that both is and is not. Time, within which we can fully establish ourselves, never arrives in also always having departed the moment it arrives. Identity is not secured in the present, much less the past. Identity is received as a gift from the tomorrow of God’s reality meeting us anew within today.

(3.1) Time and acting

While time is familiar, our momentary now is an enigma, advancing and receding as always self-cancelling. (Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit, Philosophy of Nature)

We are suspended between what is not yet and what is no longer over a differential now from which we anticipate a future and reflect on a past. By both desire and nostalgia, we seek to possess our elusive now. In yearning for a now that is not yet and longing for a now that is no longer, our now is a mobile stage on which paradoxically, we engage a future that might not be and a past that has ceased to be.

Now is truly known and inhabited when received as a gift, yet by a particular appropriation—by acting. If an act is intended but does not occur, nothing occurs. By acting, a new sequence of events is inducted into human life, invoking present responsibilities and continuing commitments that occur within every new now of life.

Here too, neither future nor past are negated, for present actions underpinned by gratitude are nourished by anticipation through memory—of having received generously through the tangible actions of others, so anticipating a future in which we can also act generously, creatively, out of gratitude.
(3.2) Casting dice for an optimum time

If we were to cast a dice to determine an optimal time in which we would prefer to live, perhaps a dice with multiple dates (e.g. 1066, 1517, 1823, 1956, 2016, or 2079), now would surpass all these times. (Heim) Tacitly, we prefer now to any other time. We interpret life from a present perspective, rather than any derived from another time. Though we might have nostalgic memories of a past time, we nevertheless modify its difficulties by present interpretation. We might eagerly anticipate a future time, which is nevertheless framed within present optimism that is unprepared for new complexities.

(3.3) Counterfactuals and courage

If K were alive today, he would have said that ...! If Q were still leader, she would not have approached this ...! Each is a counterfactual, so representing a hypothetical alternative. Presumably, a counterfactual offers another approach to a present challenge. A counterfactual might also imply a lack of imagination in having to appeal to a hypothetical view or action of someone no longer present. This could be a ruse for borrowing authority from elsewhere, ventriloquizing through another person from another time, context and unique circumstances. Citing counterfactuals may represent instead, a lack of present courage and interpretive mettle.

(3.4) Where time is invested

Time is existence; time represents value. What we live for can be audited by where our time is invested. Time is intrinsic to anything we value or treasure—as desired, possessed or appreciated. In order to avoid the vertigo of life hollowed out as to any durable meaning, time is invested in confected needs and virtual diversions. This devaluation of time and existence by diversion is exhibited in boredom—a negation of life that precipitates investment in endless artifices to alleviate while further devaluing time by compounding boredom. How existence is valued can be identified by where time is invested.

(3.5) Time falsifies

Time and so change can falsify what is true of a particular context. Ideas that are orientated toward a context at one time will variously, be falsified by time—for within time, a context changes, primarily through its participants, relationships and new challenges. Certainty can become error through time (Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit).
(4.0) Time and identity

Having been thrust into an arbitrary time and place, there are numerous diversions from reflecting on the astonishing reality of having been cast within *a time* that could be any time from antiquity and plunged into *a place* that could be any location on the globe. (With reference to Pascal)

(4.1) Haunted by spectral possibilities

Identity, paradoxically, consists of possibilities that were missed, lapsed, avoided or rejected. Every decision or default concerning one option occurred by excluding other possibilities. These other possibilities, though never having been actualized, can still be present.

As never chosen and actively assimilated, spectres of past possibilities are present as regret, hypothetical trajectories and lapsed imperatives of what *could* or *should* have been. Conceded to time and inertia, these possibilities appear to recede away, only to return in unexpected moments, situations and perceptions.

As latent, virtually non-existent, possibilities not invoked can be awakened by memories, events, crises and wistfulness. As never having been invoked and therefore as past possibilities, words or deeds that might have been spoken or enacted can impose palpable subjective effects in present engagement with life.

Potentially, identity can be haunted with many possibilities that were not realized—spectres, returning unexpectedly to haunt the present at any time within any place. Human existence is never done with what has never existed by choices made in not invoking these spectral possibilities.

Alternatively within Christian identity, to trust present grace that exceeds by redeeming past neglect—confident too in the fidelity of continuing choices—is an expression of faith.

(4.2) Identity between past and future

Is identity an aggregate of past experiences or is it constituted by expectation? It is both, yet the weighting placed on one or the other can have very different effects on present identity. Identity by aggregation is the sum of influences and decisions that now provide stock ingredients for present demands and future challenges. Identity constituted by expectation is continually rejuvenated by anticipation on the cusp of new decisions and commitments. There are similar
volitional dynamics present in both aggregation and expectation; yet one impetus to identity inclines toward a receding past, while the other leans into an approaching future.

(4.3) Identity and continuity

If identity is stretched over too many differences within time, discontinuity instead of continuity becomes dominant. A concerted focus on present experiences cannot allay such discontinuity; the issue of identity also surpasses genetic and physical continuities. What then sustains identity through variegated changes that occur within time?

Memory and hope are crucial to coherent identity within the duration of time (Ricoeur).

Paradoxically, identity is experienced in the present but identity is not derived from present experience. Identity is resourced from elsewhere.

Our actual consciousness of having an identity is only momentary in time. Through recollection and intention, identity is both present and otherwise than present as inscribed in a narrative to which we belong, affirmed by fidelity and trust, as our story. Without such narrative, identity will elude present experience as always slipping away in time.

Our identity and what we can meaningfully experience in life are received and intended through the shared gift of a particular memory entwined with hope. This gift is explicit in Christian faith, as from a story and testimonial relay we receive, trust and continue to step into sustained Christian identity that has continuity, both personally and communally, amid numerous discontinuities introduced by time.

(4.4) Identity, continuity and character

How is identity sustained over a lifetime of change? What kind of continuity is essential within inevitable change? Identity is modified within time; we are not the same person we were at ten, twenty or forty years of age. Identity is dynamic as dialectical: what was earlier affirmed might be negated by experience, reason, or resistance from others; yet negation is also negated and elevated into new perception, understanding, ability and responsibility; moments of previous identity, positive and negative, are integrated dialectically into who we are (Hegel Logic). Continuity is sustained by memory, narration, anticipation and relationships within continual character formation.
(5.0) Retrospective and prospective identity

We generate narrative by selecting specific causes from among the myriad tacit causes for the effects that we desire among many implicit effects. What is made explicit about the past, so cause, exists within interpretation toward certain effects. There can be alternative narratives for the relationship between past and present.

(5.1) Necessity without determinism

A decision might not have occurred. Something else might have been decided, but this did not happen. By its occurrence, one choice among many possible options has turned out to be decisive. We are free to choose among many possibilities. Even a "wrong" decision can prove to be necessary in terms of subsequent discoveries or creative modifications, which would not have occurred if that particular initial decision had not been made. If a decision was necessary, it also had to emerge as such through encountering the contingency of many choices; this is retrospective necessity. Such necessity is not determinism. (Žižek Monstrosity)

(5.2) Prospective creativity

Through forgiveness, evaluation of a past deed is changed, which effectively changes its impact on the present and future. One valuation of a particular deed is exchanged for another, opening an entirely different future. Forgiveness suspends just determinations of a past event. The retrospective effect of forgiveness is also prospective. (Žižek Parallax)

(5.3) Perpetual loop

To change the present by intervening in the past would also change the present out of which one desires to change the past; having changed the past, we may have new reasons for changing the present. This would be a recurring loop. (Žižek Puppet) If we could change the past, would we change it in any way that is different from the past we once experienced? Would a different present be satisfactory, or would that too, cause us to want to change the past? On revisiting a past decision it would, as previously made with best intentions, seem to be right.

(6.0) Time and existence

Life is brief; death opens an abyss. Tacitly, these two realities haunt any perspective on life. Yet amid contingencies both alluring to desire or necessary within elemental existence, we can remain oblivious to the
obvious—that life is brief and death represents the final unknown horizon, which every person faces.

(6.1) Statistics, freedom and initiative

In the crystal ball of statistics, people gaze into what has already been lived and is receding away to be repeated with slight variation or contest. In gazing at what has been, human yearning, imagination and hope are therefore not only equated with existing possibilities—what we can feasibly anticipate—but with what no longer ceases accurately to be the reality of our present time.

Any unique possibility is always beyond the purview of statistics and therefore remains unknown to statistical projection. Any prediction made from statistics, potentially, is negated within human freedom, which can initiate possibilities beyond predictions based on previous trends. Initiative in the face of a new challenge belies the illusion of authority so easily asserted in wielding statistics.

Freedom is the capacity to initiate a new series of cause and effect within human life. In the freedom of conscience, a person can even make a decision against personal interest or comfort through fidelity to truth or another’s wellbeing.

In the freedom to make a decision on the basis of faith, conscience or compassion, a statistically identified trend can be defied; such compelling initiative can generate unpredicted effects that recast a person’s destiny or perhaps the direction of a whole community.

(6.2) Determinism, derailment, contingency and creativity

Christians have engaged the future within two distinctly different perspectives: deterministic and creative.

Within a deterministic framing, decisions made amid contingency are engaged within a veiled plan; we are chess pieces, moved about within an opaque game. Here, decisions cannot be made with truly open possibilities; volitional capacity is overwritten by schematic necessity.

To locate our actions within a given scheme is tacitly, to seek a future guarantee for any decision we make, erasing any impetus and expression of faith as volitional freedom and responsibility amid contingency. Alternatively, faith transcends an anxious concern for alignment with a determinative blueprint. Faith is acting into a future that is not yet, so maximizing both trust and initiative.
By trusting the futurity of creative grace, even the past can be redeemed and reconfigured—for example, by forgiveness. A future framed within a necessary scheme diminishes the freedom of anticipatory faith and also redemptive creativity in relation to any previous failure.

If as Christians, our decisions amid contingency are already fastened to the rails of a determined destiny, derailment represents an anguish-laden catastrophe. Alternatively, making decisions amid contingency with unknown outcomes can occur freely by faith in God’s continual creativity, even within failure or before a present impasse.

(6.3) Split time

Time is generally experienced as fluid, with regular punctuations such as anniversaries and seasonal events. Occasional crises are perceived as regrettable interruptions to the normally liquid time of daily rhythms. Within a seeming rhythmic experience of life there are numerous splits in time, each split forming a before and an after, even if this distinction is only recognised in hindsight. Time is split by events, often by crucial words spoken in our encounters with others. While time is variously calibrated by measurement, its significance is marked by these encounters. By its veracity, a singular word of address can split time into before and after; by its generosity, a single act can do the same too. Rich memories of encounter and discovery represent numerous experiences of split time; we can recall many events of before and after. Split time is wholly different from change, which can be indistinct as flux (and ennui), so without the punctuations of initiative or reflection on events. Split time is eventful and so loaded with significance in representing a point of qualitative difference in our lives. An event occurred as words were spoken, a deed was acted or a gift was given; before and after now exist as having significance.

(6.4) Is there time for everything?

A time for everything consumes everything within time. Time devours time; time gives birth to new time; yet new time is devoured by time. A time for everything is time for nothing in particular. Time for particular things is necessarily moderated by thought and language. Concept and word, synthesis and narration posit significance and relationships amid what is contingent, disparate and arbitrary. Thought and language constrain time for everything by positing reflection and anticipation, so meaning. If time for everything deprives of time for anything in particular, time defined by meaning gives specific gifts for existence. (With reference to Hegel Philosophy of History)
(7.0) A moving hinge of simultaneity

Life for many people is experienced as disjointed, primarily within a lack of *simultaneity* with others (Rosenzweig). Aspiration, anxiety, desire and love are often *out of sync* between people; aspiration is shared, but anxiety is reciprocated instead; where desire prevails, love was sought etc. Temporality is continuity of time and fragmentation by time. If there is a *time for everything*, any mode of relation is out of sync at sometime. Sustained relationality requires a moving hinge of simultaneity. Within time that exhibits fragmentation and continuity, Christian experience gives simultaneity by reference to Christ as this ever-contemporary hinge within time.

(7.1) Time and perspective

The length of a year depends on our experience of a year as a fraction of our lives. This perception is always changing in relation to our changing life span (Arendt). Time is relative to perspective. While time unfolds chronologically with the evenness of a mechanism, such as a clock, it is also punctuated unevenly by perspective, which introduces other dimensions of time within time.

Those who have faced impending execution, only to be given a last minute reprieve, articulate intense expression of time as perspective. Taken to the edge of their chronological time, existential time is suddenly and radically reconfigured. The same dynamic occurs in the experience of rescue from imminent death. Another ending is inserted into a person’s time, creating a different valuation of time that in turn, gives a different perspective of life.

Christian faith modifies time and so perspective, inverting the common sequence of demise and loss that characterizes so much of human experience. Modification of time is here focused christologically, primarily in life exceeding death, wherein gain can succeed loss within any time and so vicissitude of existence. By this modification of time, Christian perspective redeems the past, reconfigures the present, while reorientating expectations for the future.

REFERENCES


