Quest Of Times: Universal Concept?

supervised by Professor Renaat Devisch

SUMMARY

TIME tamed by precise atomic clocks and mysterious feared Chronos swallowing his own children, old reliable absolute time and time madly changing its pace with mass and velocity, personal time and time of the universe, time of day and time of dreaming, time of harvest and time of famine, past time and time for sale, time of life and - eternity...

At the beginnings of the modern science time was no special category. It was mysterious, yet simple. Both in physics and in philosophy there was just one concept, symbolised by a straight Euclidean line. Time was infinitely divisible, constant in both speed and direction and absolutely causal. Physical discoveries of our century, however, particularly the impact of the relativistic physics and quantum theories brought about a drastic modification, or rather rebuilding, of the classical edifice of science. Time has appeared to be bound with space as its fourth dimension while space has showed to be just another feature of matter. Time has proved to be able to run faster or slower and even stop depending on amount of mass and speed. At the microphysics level it has become very possible that one can speak about certain units of time and causality is not a concrete law anymore for nuclear physicists.

Nobody in the history of humankind would ever have expected that these so much natural boundaries would once vanish, and maybe that's why the momentum of the classical concept of time still lingers. Perhaps except for cosmologists and physicists, the new concept of time did not penetrate into general awareness as a natural phenomenon and most of the other scientists as well as general public are reluctant to adopt the disappearance of the reliable golden old times.

But is it such a revolutionary approach, anyway? Should we present these findings, in an adequate form, to some non-western cultures, we would very likely encounter less bewilderment. Free from the command of clocks they sure have experienced, in one or another way, different speeds of time. Neither the hypothesis that past, present and future might be one is strange to them: for how many of them have already seen their dead parents in their dreams alive, laughing, talking and even threatening? Do we, perhaps out of some fears, create too many needless categories where there is just one? Is it possible - from an anthropological point of view - to propose a single, universal theory of time, or rather *times* embracing the complete range of intercultural social, economic, psychological, anthropological as well as physical, cosmological and philosophical time questions? And then, how would such an universal concept of times modify other anthropological concepts as change, cause, space, destiny, freedom, the particular vs. the general, a part vs. the whole, etc.? Yes, it is apparent that this article aims more at raising questions (although very physical sometimes, necessarily) than their answering. However, if pithy enough, good questions stimulate intellection and are vital and often the triggering prerequisites for brand new answers. And author hopes that questions contained in his paper are very good indeed. Alas, only *time* will show…

The research is drawn upon author's personal selection of magazine and newspaper articles on this topic, Internet sources, numerous books presenting viewpoints from different branches of science, e.g. anthropology, psychology, philosophy and theology, history, physics and cosmology, etc. and upon some university courses and lectures.

Tomáš J. Fülöpp

Certificate Of Advanced Studies In Social And Cultural Anthropology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

✉ *Naamsevest 38, Leuven 3000,* ☎/fax *+32 - (0)16 - 23 02 54*
💻 *Tomi@scientist.com, http://www.earthcorp.com/TJFulopp*

Leuven, June 14th, 1999