

Minding Time in an Archetypal Cosmos

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What is time? Who can give a brief or easy answer? Who can even form a conception of it to be put in words? Yet what do we mention more often or familiarly in our conversation than time? We must therefore know what we are talking about when we refer to it, or when we hear someone else doing so. But what, exactly, is that? I know what it is if no one asks; but if anyone does, then I cannot explain it.

-Saint Augustine, *Confessions*¹

Time as a whole and in its parts bears to Space as a whole and its corresponding parts a relation analogous to the relation of mind to its equivalent bodily or nervous basis; or to put the matter shortly . . . Time is the Mind of Space and Space the body of Time.

-Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*²

Sixteen-hundred years after Augustine's death, despite humanity's tremendous advances in scientific knowledge and technological power, time remains as mysterious as ever. On the one hand, the experiential passage of time is among the most mundane facts of our day-to-day lives. We say, "I am twenty-nine years old," or "Let's meet Wednesday for lunch," and no one has the slightest problem understanding what we mean. On the other hand, as even Augustine, one of the most philosophically learned persons of his era, was forced to admit, when we stop to ask "*What is time?*," our intellect is stunned into silence.

Despite time's mysteriousness, many thinkers have overcome this silence to venture an answer. Samuel Alexander's pithy account of time as "the Mind of Space" provides my essay with an point of departure. I endeavor upon this brief account of several archetypal modalities of time with the understanding that, for the most part, time's rhythms unfold unconsciously in the depths of the cosmic psyche. Time unfolds in its full complexity, in other words, at levels far more profound and pervasive than what I am normally capable of perceiving. The time of my conscious mind and personal psyche is bound up with and dependent upon that of the Platonic world-soul. I glimpse but a small sliver of its divine temporality. I grasp time in terms of days, weeks, and years, while the psyche of the cosmos, the soul of the world, encompasses time as its eternal circumference. Because my conscious intellect penetrates only so far into time's obscure cosmic meanings, my philosophical reflections will be aided by the participatory epistemology characteristic of archetypal cosmology. The intuitive (but no less rigorous) method of minding time's rhythmic modalities exemplified by the practice of archetypal cosmology complements ordinary critical analysis using concepts by opening its practitioners to a non-ordinary form of sympathetic perception by way of symbols.³

With help from archetypal cosmology, as well as the genius of ancient Greek language and mythology, I aim to begin untangling the knot of time by naming and so differentiating three of its most important strands. Said otherwise, I want to introduce my readers to three gods, each of whom has a powerful hand in shaping our experience of time: Chronos, Kairos, and Aion.

To set the stage for their entrance, I must begin with a brief history of the idea of time as it has been understood in the West. Plato suggests in his dialogue *Timaeus* that time is brought forth by the rhythmic dancing of the Sun, Moon, and five other planets known to the ancients across the

stage of twelve constellations. Through the friendly wandering of these archetypal beings, eternity is permitted entry into time. Plato's ancient vision of a perfect cosmic order had it that the motion of the seven known planetary spheres was in mathematical harmony with the eighth supraplanetary sphere of fixed constellations. Time is said to emerge from this harmonic motion. The precise mathematical description of the planetary motions had not yet been devised, but Plato was intuitively certain that a solution to the "problem of the planets"⁴ would eventually be found. He argued that the ratios of the planetary orbits should add up to one complete whole, finding their unity in what has been called the Platonic or Great Year (known to us today as the 26,000 year precession of the equinoxes).⁵ This highest of the heavenly spheres was the god known to the ancient Greeks as Aion.

A generation later, Aristotle critiqued his teacher Plato's idea of time as produced by motion. Aristotle argued that time could not possibly be produced by motion, since motion itself is something we measure using time. Motion can be fast or slow, he argued, but time always flows at the same rate. Time, for Aristotle, was simply a conventional means of measuring change. His was the beginning of the scientific view of time as a measurement, replacing Plato's more mythic account of time as "moving image of Eternity" or living icon of God. We must be careful not to over-simplify their disagreement: Aristotle didn't deny the reality of an eternal divinity, he just severed all connections between eternity and time, God and the World, whereas Plato struggled to articulate how the two might participate and dwell within one another. Plato related time to the world-soul, the mediatrix allowing invisible Eternal Forms, or archetypes, smooth passage into the visible motions of the animated physical world.⁶ When Plato looked to the heavens he perceived in their hidden harmony the very source and destiny of cosmic history. As will become more apparent when the gods of time are described in more detail below, Plato's view of time is ruled by Aion (the guardian of eternal, mythical, circular time), while Aristotle's is ruled by Chronos (the god of historical, linear time).

Despite Aristotle's preference for a more abstract conception of time, even two thousand years after his death most of Europe's theologians, philosophers, and astronomers assumed that the planetary motions were in some sense a reflection or expression of living, qualitative time. For example, Copernicus' heliocentric reform of Ptolemaic astronomy was undertaken, in part, as a result of the Church asking for the construction of a more accurate liturgical calendar. Without an accurate calendrical account of the rhythms of time, religious rituals could not tap into and participate in the life cycles of the cosmos and so could not keep humanity synchronized with the sky. Usually thought of as the initiator of the scientific revolution, Copernicus's scientific work was also motivated by a spiritual commitment to Neoplatonism. For him, the Sun was God's visible image and worldly manifestation. It was only fitting that He be seated in the center of the solar system.

Galileo's view of the universe was, on the face of it, a complete rejection of both Plato's ensouled cosmology and Aristotle's animistic physics. Students of Aristotle will remember that he still held a teleological view of chronological time: an apple seed develops into an apple tree because the latter is the purpose of the former. Similarly, an apple falls to the ground because it desires to do so, because Earth is its natural home. Temporal process is given a meaningful arc, which is to say

that motion is understood teleologically, that is, in terms of its purpose or end. For Galileo, nothing in the apple compels it to fall: it is simply a blind happening caused by the abstract laws of gravity. Time becomes merely a means of measuring this meaningless motion. Galileo, like many other early scientists, rejected the idea of purposeful, meaningful time—at least in his work as a physicist. In his work as an astrologer, he accepted the qualitative texture of time's planetary rhythms.

Similarly, while Newton the physicist reduced time to a mere mathematical quantity, Newton the alchemist and faithful Christian held a firm belief in the providential arc of history. He employed an exceptional amount of mathematical effort attempting to calculate the exact dates of the crucifixion of Christ and the apocalypse based on the Lunar cycle. Despite his largely private obsession with the divine structure of time, Newton's public influence on the development of physics is clear as day. He finished what Galileo had started: as a result of his elegant equations describing universal gravitation's effects on heavenly planets and earthly apples alike, time was thenceforth understood to be nothing more than a constant background rate of change against which the meaningless motion of material objects through empty space could be measured. Time became t , an algebraic function in a differential equation. Though they rejected Aristotle's view of teleological time (again, at least in their role as physicists), these early scientists only further formalized Aristotle's view of time as a measure of motion.

Less than a century later, Kant preserved qualitative time from total annihilation at the hands of mechanistic science, but only by sequestering it within the human subject as what he called a form of inner intuition. Plato's archetypal forms, once living cosmic powers, became for Kant fixed concepts within the human mind with no intrinsic relationship to the dead material objects they supposedly represented. Human consciousness was full of qualitative depth and guided by a creative intelligence, but the soulless world upon which it gazed—whether it looked vertically to the sky or horizontally along the earthly plane—was to be understood purely in terms of mechanical laws.

The picture painted by Kant is not so clear cut, however. He never suggested that the universe *actually is* a giant machine. He only argued that the human mind is unequipped to grasp it intellectually in any other way. He speculated, especially in the *Critique of Judgment*, about the possibility of some supersensible ground responsible for the organic formation of the visible world (something like Plato's world-soul), but remained in the end unable to defend such a view with the science and logic available in his day.

By the first few decades of the twentieth century, the situation had changed dramatically: relativity and quantum theory exploded the Newtonian clockwork model of the universe with even more force than Copernicus' discovery had shattered the static crystalline spheres of the ancient world.

Einstein's theory of relativity superseded classical physics by revealing the intimate relationship between time and space. The observed temporal sequence of physical events was shown to depend on the relative position and velocity of the observer. But still, Einstein's new vision of a space-time continuum ignored the full qualitative depth of time, flattening it into to a linear, easily measurable and quantifiable function. The reduction of time to Chronos initiated by Aristotle was brought to new extremes by Einstein's all-too-mechanistic vision of the cosmos and human life,

despite the latter's well-known spiritual inclinations. Einstein is yet another example of the strange schizophrenic split separating many modern scientists' personal spiritual views from their professional work.⁷

Quantum theory overturned the mechanistic assumptions of Newton and Einstein alike, making possible new forms of empirical, experimental, and experiential participation in the creative becoming of the cosmos. Although change remains slow in some quarters of the scientific establishment, quantum theory has spurred the emergence of an entirely new form of natural science, a form modeled on a view of nature as composed of complex organic wholes rather than simple mechanistic parts. Carl Jung believed that the acausal, non-local phenomena discovered by quantum physicists must be connected in some way to the otherwise inexplicable occurrence of synchronicity in his own and his patients' lives. He studied the potential connections together with the renowned physicist Wolfgang Pauli. As is discussed in more detail below, synchronicity is an expression of the modality of time ruled by Kairos, the Greek god associated with the opening of momentary windows of opportunity, openings when the apparent randomness of physical events unfolds as though some cosmic foresight had been directing the show all along.

Another famous quantum physicist, Sir James Jeans, had this to say about the quantum revolution:

Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science approaches unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine. Mind no longer appears to be an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.⁸

Later in the twentieth century, other new paradigm sciences such as complexity and chaos theory have taught us that the physical cosmos is quite a bit more unruly than earlier thinkers, including Plato, let on. Our world is better characterized as a *cosmogensis*, rather than a finished cosmos, an open-ended creative adventure rather than a closed eternal circle. The orbital periods of the planets shift ever so slightly as the years pass, and the "fixed" stars are actually other journeying suns playing host to their own planetary families. Our universe is strange, and measuring time is no easy matter. Even merely chronological time is extremely counter-intuitive: A day on Venus, for instance, is longer than a Venusian year!

After a millennia-long obsession with the order and measurability of Chronic time, humanity is beginning to reawaken to time's other divine modalities. We are being called to enter personal and collective psycho-planetary therapy, another name for archetypal cosmology. We are rediscovering the soul of time in the archetypal rhythms of the planetary spheres. Whereas the skeptical Kantian consciousness tucked archetypal time away in the private recesses of the human mind, we are coming to recognize that the ideal forms and archetypal ordering patterns ingredient in the actual occasions of the visible world are not projected upon that world by our consciousness, but are directly perceived as intrinsic participants in these activities. Time is not simply a subjective form of intuition hidden within the human mind, but a multifaceted divine power whose meaning-giving

rhythms mark the pulse of the cosmic psyche. The planets in particular are the most potent communicative organs from our Earth-based perspective of the invisible—because all-encompassing—world-soul: they distill the meaning of time most clearly, as they circle overhead providing a near-universal context for all our particular earthly endeavors.



Having briefly traversed the history of the idea of time (at least in the West), we can now turn our attention to the gods standing guard over its various modalities. It is important to remember that, in concrete experience, each mode, each god, works in concert with the others. They are co-rulers of time, even if in some moments one or the other gains the upper hand. I only separate them symbolically to help us get a better sense for the archetypal anatomy of time, remembering all the while that “we murder to dissect,” as Wordsworth once put it.⁹ Each god grants us another perspective on time, whose true essence remains as mysterious as ever. My correlations between each mode of time and a specific planetary archetype arise from subtle intuitive resonances, not clear and certain knowledge. The complexity and multivalence of these archetypes forces me to hold these correlations lightly and to invite the reader to test them in the fire of their own experience. Having said that, I humbly ask for the blessing of the gods of time as I attempt to give expression to their meaning and power.

Chronos rules quantitative, homogeneous, and secular time. The modern age has almost entirely succumbed to Chronic time, which is empty and passes meaninglessly without narrative arc. Chronic time is mere conventional measurement, a means of quantifying time so as to be able to use

it as we see fit for our private economic or public political ends. It is time as something to be “spent” or “wasted” (“time is money,” as Benjamin Franklin put it¹⁰). Chronic time is time flattened into a grid upon which unremarkable change can be plotted. It is time as materialistic science knows it, where the past is conceived to be ontologically identical to the present and the future, such that there is no creative becoming or teleological unfolding. Chronic time is utterly indifferent to what happens, a passive background rather than an active and interested participant. When ruled by Chronos, time ticks on without regard for the conscious subjectivity apprehending it. Chronic time is ruled by death anxiety: it is the time of the ego and represents the reality principle. Practitioners of archetypal cosmology may recognize Chronic time as an expression of the planetary archetype of Saturn.

Kairos rules qualitative, heterogeneous, and seasonal time. Kairotic time is full of potential, beckoning us to partake in special moments of archetypal pregnancy. Kairos reveals to us that there are certain times when the world-soul attempts to persuade human souls to participate in the unfolding of events in a particular way, times when a certain mood descends as though from heaven to characterize events on earth. Unlike the indifferent Chronos, Kairos allows for a subject-situation correlation. Kairotic time introduces novelty into the banality of linear, Chronic time. Kairos represents time as “creative advance,” to use Alfred North Whitehead’s phrase.¹¹ It expresses itself as unexpected or fortuitous timeliness. One might even refer to the planetary archetypes as *kairoi*, as principles of timeliness, rulers of the different ways eternity puts on the dress of time. When we ask, “What time is it?” we receive an answer in Chronic terms; when we ask “What *kind* of time is it?” we receive an answer in Kairotic terms. If Chronos is the time of the literal-minded ego, Kairos is the time of the creatively awakened soul. Archetypal cosmologists may recognize Kairos as an expression of the planetary archetype of Uranus.

Aion rules unbounded, sacred, or eternal time. Aion is time as “a moving image of eternity,”¹² as an Eternal circle that, when we contemplate it, grants us Eternal Life. Aion is time as experienced by the archetypes themselves (in contrast to Kairotic time, which is how our human consciousness experiences the archetypes). Aionic time is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. The time of Aion grants us participation in eternity. It is always present with us, even when we imagine ourselves stuck somewhere on Chronos’ timeline or are enraptured with Kairos’ timeliness. If Chronos is the time of the ego, and Kairos is the time of the soul, Aion is the time of the Self. Archetypal cosmologists may recognize Aion as an expression of the planet Neptune.

Minding time requires learning to participate again, to collaborate with the stars and planets above in the making of meaningful time here below. Without the Promethean aid of planetary astrology, the archetypal architecture of time remains invisible to our mind’s eye, its music inaudible to our heart’s ear. Astrology makes time sensible, meaningful, and even moral, allowing us to turn skyward for guidance when earthly cues are unclear. The archetypal astrological perspective also teaches that each of us expresses our own time signature: transits allow us to become aware of how our own psychic rhythms attune to planetary rhythms. Each of our beating hearts is a microcosmic Sun, which is to say that we are each at the center of our own microcosmos. Time does not just happen to us; we must help generate its meaningful passage. Only Chronic time seems to happen to

us, while Kairotic time waits for our creative response. Aionic time dissolves any difference between what happens to us and what we make happen. All three gods, even Chronos, ultimately depend upon our participation before their power can manifest. Whether this participation is conscious or unconscious depends on us.

I will bring this essay to a close by offering one practical way forward for our disenchanted civilization. Consider the difference between modern conventional and ancient cosmological calendars. Ancient peoples tended to have calendrical systems based upon natural or cosmic rhythms. Egyptians, for example, started their year with the periodic flooding of the Nile. Modern people live according to calendrical systems that are more mathematically regular, but bear little if any relationship to cosmic time. It was the Roman Empire that introduced the Gregorian calendar we still use today. Its year begins arbitrarily on January first, a free floating date that corresponds to no significant cosmological or ecological event, not even aligned with the winter solstice less than a fortnight earlier. The modern world measures time in merely conventional terms, reducing time's archetypal texture to an arbitrary cultural construct. If we hope to re-invent ourselves by bringing forth a more cosmologically grounded and ecologically embedded civilization, turning again to the heavens for our sense of timing is a crucial first step.¹³

Endnotes

1 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills (New York: Penguin, 2006), 267.

2 Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 38.

3 Critical analysis is only "ordinary" for modern, disenchanted consciousness. Not so for most of the history of human consciousness.

4 Richard Tarnas. *Passion of the Western Mind*. (New York: Random House, 1991), 48.

5 Plato, *Timaeus*, 38b-40d.

6 Plato, *Timaeus*, 49-53.

7 In his famous debate with Henri Bergson in 1922, Einstein rejected the former's philosophical defense of the concrete time of experience, what Bergson called *la durée*. From Einstein's point of view, Bergson's intuitive "philosophical time" was a chimera. There is, he argued, only the real "physical time" revealed through the natural scientific methods of his relativity theory and the persistent but nonetheless entirely illusory "psychological time" experienced by human consciousness. For a more detailed critique of Einstein's mechanistic cosmology, see my *Physics of the World-Soul: The Relevance of Alfred North Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism to Contemporary Scientific Cosmology* (Lulu Press, 2013), 58-74.

8 Sir James Hopwood Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 137.

9 William Wordsworth. "The Tables Turned." In *The Complete Poetical Works*. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888; Bartleby.com, 1999). <http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww134.html> [accessed Nov. 14, 2015].

10 Worthington C. Ford. "Franklin's Advice to a Young Tradesman. Two Unique Impressions," *The Bibliographer*, I (1902), 89-96.

11 Alfred North Whitehead. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 35.

12 Plato, *Timaeus*, 37d.

13 This is not to say that the rationality characteristic of Chronic time is to be ignored or rejected, but rather that it ought to be brought into balance with the power of the other equally real and indeed divine modalities of time.