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Killing or Redeeming time?

By Marcos Paseggi

Apparently, Albert Einstein was not the only one who cogitated on the relative properties of time. Many of us do it too, even if we are not often aware of it or follow in his footsteps for much more prosaic reasons. For example, even my three-year-old son, who still refers to “yesterday” to mean either “two hours ago” or “last month,” sometimes implies time is as elastic as his mini-trampoline.

Every Thursday evening, he attends a Bible club with other kids. Together they learn Christian songs, memorize

short Bible verses, and review the great stories of the Bible. When I go to pick him up at the end of the session, he is always eager to share his impressions about what has transpired during that hour and a half of “serious fun.” “Everything was so long today,” he sometimes complains, sighing heavily. On other occasions, as soon as he sees me coming, he stares at me with an expression of disbelief. “Is it time to go now? But it was so short today!” Of course, his weekly Bible class usually keeps him busy from 6:30 pm to 8

pm, exactly 90 minutes, no more, no less. But it is his *perception* of time that somehow is disrupted, depending on how bored, tired, focused, or amused he feels after a particular session. Time has not changed; he has.

Unfortunately, his three-year-old fortuitous rendezvous with the seeming flexibility of time is not something he will ever grow out of. As every college student knows, not every class lasts the same. It all depends on how much (or little) we like the professor, the topic discussed, or even our classmates and school. One hour waiting for news outside a surgical ward where a close loved one is going through a life-threatening operation lasts “much longer” than four hours at a baseball play-off game (providing, of course, we do not hate baseball!).

The truth is, scientists seem to agree with this and other time-related perceptions. They even have a name for one of them: “time dilation.” It refers to a notion that “elapsed time as recorded by two observers with identical clocks will differ if one of the observers is traveling at a velocity with respect to the other.”¹ In the field of neuroscience, some researchers have shown – by means of very simple experiments – that our perception of the duration of an event can be easily distorted. For instance, imagine someone flashes a square on your computer screen for half a second. Now, if the person flashes a second square that is larger, you will think the second one lasts longer. And the same happens if the square flashed is brighter, or if it is moving. All of them “are perceived to have a longer duration than the original square.”² Thus, scientists have concluded, “the perception of time is actually a construction.”³

Killed or redeemed?

Now, even in regard to our “faulty” perception of time or precisely because of it, we are beckoned to pay special attention to the way we spend it. “Killing time” is an aptly-put

metaphor that nevertheless encloses profound “realistic” overtones. Time killed is time buried. Forever. There is no expiation, no atonement to make up for time that we let slip through our fingers to never come back. Ellen G. White wrote, “Time squandered can never be recovered. We cannot call back even one moment. The only way in which we can redeem our time is by making the most of that which remains.”⁴

Against this backdrop of “partial reimbursement,” the Bible also calls us to redeem time, to “repurchase” it, by making the most of every second God gives us on this earth. It becomes a moral imperative, not in a Kantian sense based on pure reason, but within the context of a biblical worldview, which has a word on everything we are, say, or do. Time is valuable because our life is valuable. And our life is valuable because God has given us value, first when He himself made us in His image, and later when He gave himself at the cross for every one of us. Talk about valuable! It does not stop there, though, for through the promises He bestows on us, the Lord also guarantees our safe surfing through the ups and downs of life.

But God’s promises do not end in the present. They extend to a future time. Thus, a time-redeeming stance also implies being aware of our place and moment in the history of this world (which in biblical terms, equals no less than the story of redemption.) Paul wrote, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, *because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:15, 16, emphasis mine). Indeed, our role in the concluding episodes of the great controversy requires us to be more mindful of time than ever before.

As Christians, we have no time to kill but to redeem, whatever the time we have left. Even Moses, when confronted with the reality of his own mortality, exclaimed, “We finish our days like a sigh” (Psalm 90:9). But a

moment later, he wisely entreated the Lord, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Our ultimate goal is to reach a day when time and the perception of it – as we know it – shall be no more.

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Notes and references:

1. Phil Schewe, James Riordon, and Ben Stein, “Inside Science Research,” *American Institute of Physics*, Number 655 # 2, September 26, 2003, retrieved from <http://www.aip.org/pnu/2003/split/655-2.html>.
2. David Eagleman, *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), p. 52.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
4. Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), p. 342.