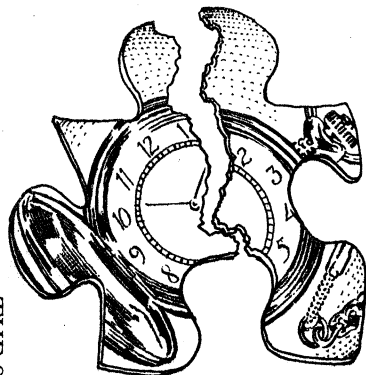




Just a matter of time

Joseph F. Doyle



On time, out of time, who's got the time, in time — just what is time?

Any one event affects all events that follow. Scientists call it "sensitive dependence on initial conditions in chaos theory," or the Butterfly Effect.

A second (like an inch) can be infinitely divided geometrically, theoretically giving it an infinite duration. No matter how you cut it, the distance from beginning to end can be divided again and again and again, and the fraction left before reaching the end has as many infinite components as the entire distance.

So, how do we know when an instant is over?

To the best of my guesstimation, time is an invention of mankind, and a fabulous one. On a clear and starry summer night, in the woods or on the beach, away from man's artificial light, one can look farther and farther into the heavens, and see no end. Infinity at least appears to be the ultimate reality of everything.

So relatively speaking, how much time is enough time for anything?

Running out of time? Where does the time go? Are you on time? Is there enough time?

What does it all mean?

Would a slower-moving (or faster-moving) intelligent life form even understand the human concept of time? Would it even notice us go by? Or would it perceive us as immobile? Maybe a human's entire life cycle passes by in the blink of a slower-moving alien's eye, or vice-versa.

Since, apparently, the measurement of time is arbitrary, we can believably say that we are still in the first instant of the creation of the universe. That being the present, since every moment is the relative present, we could say we exist in one eternal moment.

The moment is not changing, but if the physical contents of the universe refuse, at any given point, to assume a permanent shape or form, but instead are constantly shape-shifting and reforming according to some universal pattern that can never be nailed down to a permanent trend, is chaos then the real order, or does order spring from chaos?

If time extends infinitely, there is hardly any relative difference between a billion years and one second; those measurements all depend on what the being doing the perceiving is trying to perceive.

For instance, what is the ratio in duration between the formation of a mountain range and the birth of a star? Are any other comparative ratios the same, or are they all completely different?

Relativity and quantum theory only allow for comparative, not universal, measurements. We who are concerned with measuring everything have only existed as a race for an immeasurably small fraction of time, if measured against the backdrop of infinity, or even the age of the universe, or of our own planet. After as thorough an examination as we can ever hope for, given the span and scope of it all, all we can conclude is that what is, is.

And I have come to the conclusion that, regarding this exposition, I am now out of time — and space.

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