

The Problem of Time and Space

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Fundamental in the whole problem of our conscious existence is the question of Time and Space. It is not simply the question of *when* a certain event took place, or *where*, as related to other events, the question of *before* and *after*. After all, everything in history or in nature is related to every other thing in respect to these two categories. The one, in a sense, is as fundamental as the other. And yet, there can be no problem of the before and after if there were no when and where, no time and space. And in this sense, we dare say, the question of the actual existence of time and space becomes more fundamental than that of before and after.

We take time and space for granted, and very easily. Do we think of them as concepts, or as having reality? Is the old problem of the Kantian philosophy to rise again to trouble us once more? For Kant would try to banish time and space, so that we could learn to know and understand the thing itself, the "*Ding an sich*", apart from the notion of this chair, that tree, that river as it appears to us in time and in space. In other words, what is that chair, and what, eventually, am I, if we could know that chair, or know me, away from the very idea of that chair "in time" or me "in space"? Is there on the whole such a thing as "a river apart from time and space," a "person without time and space," i.e. a river or a person, as it were in an "ideal" world?

Isn't it at this point that our reason begins to play tricks with our common sense? It is true; we do speak of a chair, a river, or person in the abstract and without thought of any particular chair, river or person. A chair we define as an object with four legs, a seat and a backrest, and any object that fits that description we call a chair, and the idea of time and space is totally absent. Similarly a river, even a person. Thus we speak in the abstract. But who would be satisfied to sit on a chair "in the abstract," to make the river "in the abstract" the borderline between two hostile countries, or to marry a person, boy or girl, "in the abstract"? In other words, an abstract thing is like a definition, useful as far as it goes to describe or define; but like an imaginary line, it has no existence. And why? Because time and space are lacking.

Then do we do speak of something apart from the ideas of time and space? Not as though it really existed. And let us remember this well. Anything that exists is there to be measured, as if we could say: that object is so and so large, it existed at such and such a time. If an object occupies space or time, that location is proof of its real existence. Thus even a thought has reality because it occupies time. We may think a thought as fleeting as you please, the thought still becomes an act of the mind, and an act consumes time.

But can space itself, or time, be measured? This is the crucial question. And the only possible answer is: Certainly. Thus we speak of years as a measurement applied to time itself; similarly of an hour or a minute. Applied to space, we think in similar terms: a mile, a foot, or a thousand miles. In other words, a certain object occupies so and so much of space, or, again, such and such an act lasts so long in time. In this manner the conclusion is inevitable that portions of time and space are there to be measured: a foot, a mile of space, an hour or year of time. And then this conclusion follows as inevitably from that other: *if a portion of a whole, time or space, can be measured, the whole, too, is measurable*. In other words, time and space are not, as some would claim, indefinite entities, unlimited, without boundaries; they are definite realities, quantities, as much to be counted and accounted for as a cup of water or a minute of time.

The significance of this to us is simply this: time has a definite beginning and an end, and space has its definite borders and boundaries and limits. Both time and space are realities to be measured and weighed and described. The question remains unanswered: how long is time and how great is space? At this point our one concern is to establish the reality and definite existence of time and space, so that we can think and speak with full assurance of these entities by themselves and on their own. Knowing that time and space are real in and of themselves, we can go on with confidence to think and speak in terms of when and where, how long and how far, of beginning and end, of limits and boundaries in this direction and that. For it is to be assumed that any reality which is measurable is also definable; it has its borders and limits, its beginning and its end, its start and finish, its origin and its avowed or accomplished purpose, its birth and its death.

It is tempting to contradict this with the assertion that neither time nor space are measurable and that both have neither beginning nor end—and we are about to assume the position of the old religion which held as a fundamental tenet that time and space are eternal? Modernistic evolutionary philosophy actually operates with this idea as a basis for all its speculations. Given time as a thing of indefinite duration, without a distinct beginning or end, what a glorious field for the wildest speculations about small beginnings, fantastic developments and unknown and unknowable end-accomplishments! And how self-evident it seems for the human mind to lose itself in these wild dreams of a world and an existence that has made itself and will continue to do so, stumbling and falling, to rise again in ever new attempts on its upward or wayward path. But what is essential in all of this? *There must be no accounting*, men say.

And yet, if time and space are to be looked upon as entities in themselves and not simply Kantian “forms” of knowledge without reality of their own, must we not grant the idea of boundaries? What is the boundary of space, and what forms the limit of time? Is there actually a point at which we can say: here space begins, or here space ends—as we think in terms of an immensely large room? And is there actually a point in time at which we can say: here time begins, or at this point, minute, second, time will end?

It might be tempting to think in subjective terms: at this point, namely at my birth, or at the moment that self-consciousness is awakened, space and time took their beginning *for me*: and, similarly, in the hour of my death, space and time cease to be *for me*. In other words, do time and space have no reality in themselves, but only as they confront us, the human thinking and observing ego-personality? The thought is injected at this point if only to illustrate how easily the mind slips back and tries to avoid the necessary implications of what we considered the inevitable conclusion above: *if any part of a whole can be measured, then the whole is measurable*—from which it follows that both time and space are definite entities since both are measurable. But where and what are the boundaries of space and the limits of time?

The problem is not as simple as some would make it. When Spinoza pretended to solve the problem of the relation of mind and matter to each other by the mere assertion that mind was the reverse side of matter, the solution was as absurd as the problem was formidable. When our modern evolutionists by a mere fiat imagine that they can add life where there was no life before, the solution again is as absurd as the problem is difficult. When Kant, acknowledged thinker that he was, tried to reduce the problem of time and space to a mere matter of “form” of knowledge, then he, too, has become guilty of an absurdity that will satisfy no-one.

For, as definite as the above proof of the finiteness of both time and space is, so difficult is that other and opposite problem of the limits of both time and space. For there is no such thing as to admit the measurability of time and space and in the same breath to grant that space and time are unlimited, indefinite, infinite. Have we arrived at the statement of a problem simply, or is there any possibility of a logical solution? We seem plainly at the point of the old contradiction of thought, space and time with limits and yet unlimited, measurable and yet immeasurable.

We shall have to admit some contradictions of thought. If a person wants to go from here to there, it is clear that he must first cover half the distance, then half the remainder, and so on indefinitely, with the result that there will always be left half of something if but an infinitely small distance, and he will never reach his destination. Similarly when reckoning time. (The difficulty, of course, resolves itself, also for the mind, when we conceive of distance or time as being divided into equal parts, of which one part, also the last, is covered by each step, etc.) This same contradictory difficulty of the mind can be applied in so many things, and it is time that we humbly recognize that the human mind has its limits, so far as understanding is concerned. In some things the human mind is supreme above all nature—but not in all.

In the next place, being forced to grant that both time and space are measurable entities, limited by definite boundaries, the time has come for the human mind to grant in all humility that we do not and cannot understand what those limits, either of time or space, are or wherein they consist. This is plain that we must learn to speak and think of those limits, not as if or as though they were there, but as being there, definitely, certainly, and without a doubt.

The study of the universe seems to have proven conclusively the immensity of space, and added knowledge only adds to that vastness. But why not let this added knowledge add to the knowledge and happy

recognition of His glory whose might and power holds all in the hollow of His hand? As far as time is concerned, it is not the length or duration of it alone that will prove His glory, but the accomplishment that time records. And let the believing student compare the most recent pronouncements of the world's great thinkers and scientists, with their fantastic and ever growing age-long development, with the simple and utterly demolishing: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exod. 20:11). "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With who took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? ... It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: ... Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth... Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding." (Isa. 40:12-14, 22)

Can it be that we have not given due thought to words such as these, and that we in the meantime have permitted the blind of this world to mislead us into the mired morass of man's own invention? Granted the limited immensity of space, let us learn to recognize in time Him who is personal pure force, and, as Scripture so aptly and majestically puts it, holds the entire universe in the hollow of His hand. Must we understand the nature of that FORCE before we will believe it? Granted the dread limit of TIME, do we fear its accounting more than the fact that we are ashamed to admit that we do not understand? No mere man can ever fathom the deep significance of those words "In the beginning," and then of the parallel expression, "the end of all things is at hand" (I Pet. 4, 7). Is it so difficult to confess the power of God, who has made the beginning, Himself and His might having set the limit of that beginning—to confess (I say deliberately, not to understand or explain or demonstrate) also the end limit as a future sure reality?

We find again that there is restful peace, only at the feet of an all-wise and all-knowing Savior, the great I AM, who is above all Time and Space, having created all by the power of His might. And He who is powerful to "begin" is equally powerful to "end," revealing the glory of His might in both. The atom with its inherent and latent power might well remind us all of the dread and awful, but withal blessed significance of those words: "*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*"