

Time

Awareness lives in eternity but dances in time – Rupert Spira

All Fourth Way teachings – from whatever source – tell us that time is an illusion and is simply a construction of the mind. The only reality is Now. This is what we realise when we ‘come out of what we are not’ and start to spend time in the ‘fourth room’, resting as pure awareness.

At first sight, this concept might seem both implausible and impractical. Are not our lives governed by time? How can there be any change or movement without time? How can anything happen? Remembering that the teachings are nothing more than pointers to a reality that each of us must discover for ourselves, we need to find a way of exploring this idea based on our own direct experience. For most of us that means first removing the resistance created by our existing beliefs based on the common conception of time.

As the White Queen discovered in *Through the Looking Glass*, shifting deeply held convictions is far from easy:

‘It’s very good jam,’ said the Queen.

‘Well, I don’t want any *to-day*, at any rate.’

‘You couldn’t have it if you *did* want it,’ the Queen said. ‘The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday — but never jam to-day.’

‘It *must* come sometimes to “jam to-day,”’ Alice objected.

‘No, it can’t,’ said the Queen. ‘It’s jam every other day: to-day isn’t any other day, you know.’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Alice. ‘It’s dreadfully confusing!’

‘That’s the effect of living backwards,’ the Queen said kindly: ‘it always makes one a little giddy at first.’

‘Living backwards!’ Alice repeated in great astonishment. ‘I never heard of such a thing!’

‘—but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.’

‘I’m sure *mine* only works one way,’ Alice remarked. ‘I can’t remember things before they happen.’

‘It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,’ the Queen remarked.

But unlike Alice, we are not expected to follow the White Queen’s instructions and practise believing ‘six impossible things before breakfast’. As we discussed at our last meeting, belief has no place in the Fourth Way. So in this paper we approach the subject from several different angles with the sole aim of loosening the fixed ideas and beliefs that block real experiential understanding. All that is needed is to see that what is being described *might* be so; not that it *is* so. The doorway into Higher Intellectual Centre where inner knowledge of ourselves and the universe resides is unblocked by relaxed open-mindedness and the giving up of all beliefs.

First, it is not too difficult to recognise that our own perception of time is not a constant flow:

There are different categories of Time. One day we think we have very little time, but actually there is enough. Another day we think we have plenty of time, but really it is terribly short. Time mostly relates to the situation. In sleep we see a lot, we cover large areas of Time; but as a matter of fact our dreams occupy very little of our time – a dream which covers a big area of time takes very little time to pass through our consciousness. This difference between dream and our waking state is a thing quite different again from our deep sleep. Time is different again

in deep sleep; and of course in “bliss” as well time has a different measure, so time varies according to the measure. [HH Record, 1962: 19 October]

Mr Ouspensky took a different approach. In common with modern science he considered time as a fourth dimension of space. (See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time> for an account of the various scientific and philosophical theories of time.) He explained that since our perceptual apparatus is limited to three dimensions of space, the concept of ‘time’ is required by the mind to explain the phenomena we observe in the world. He used the analogy of a two-dimensional life-form living on a flat surface (a ‘plane being’) trying to understand our world of three dimensions. In chapter 6 of *Tertium Organum* he explains how a ‘plane being’ would see the third dimension of our world as ‘time’:

If a multi-coloured cube passes through the plane, the whole cube and its motion will be perceived by the plane being as changes in the colour of the lines lying on the surface. So, if a blue line replaces a red one, the plane being will regard the red line as a *past event*. He will be unable to conceive of the red line still existing somewhere. He will say that the line is the same but that *it has become blue* owing to certain causes of a physical nature. If the cube starts moving backwards and the red line again replaces the blue line, it will be a *new phenomenon* for the plane being. He will say that the line has become red again.

Everything situated above and below, if the plane is horizontal, or to the right and left if the plane is vertical, will lie in time for a being living on that plane, that is, it will be in the past and the future. Everything that exists in reality outside the plane will be regarded as non-existent: either as already in the past, i.e. as something that has vanished, ceased to be, something that will never return; or in the future, i.e. as something not yet existing, not manifested but merely potential.

Later in that chapter, he goes on to describe the nature of the resistance that the plane being would need to overcome in order to understand our world:

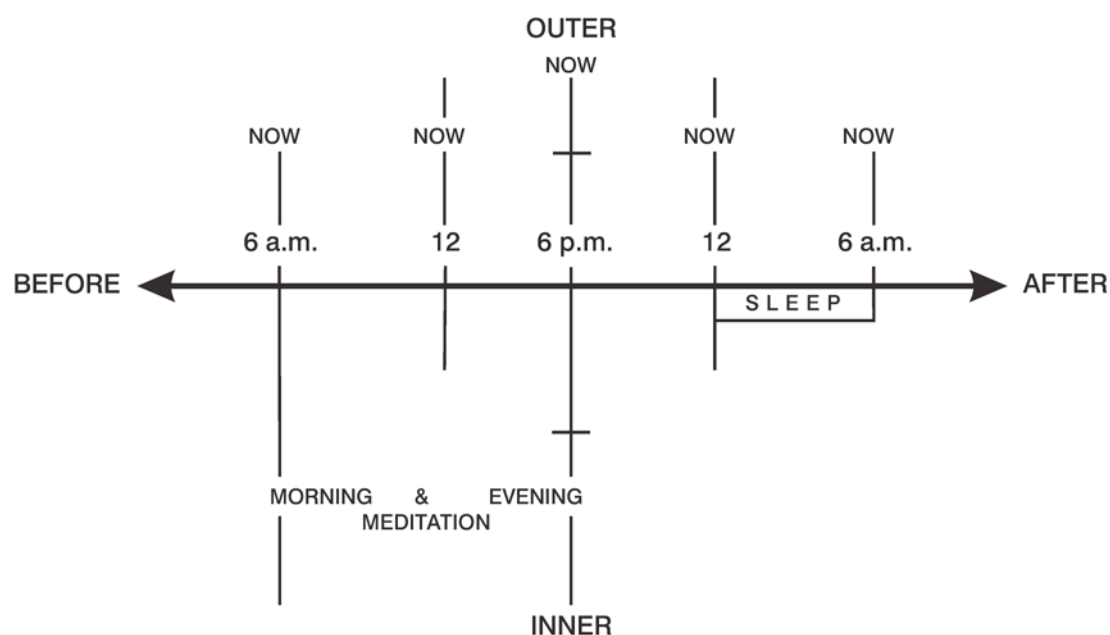
Altogether, to understand even the most fundamental and simple things of our world will be, for the plane being, an infinitely long and difficult process. He will have to remodel his ideas of space and time. This must be the first step. Nothing can be achieved until this is done. So long as the plane being visualizes all our universe in time, i.e. refers to time everything that lies on both sides of his plane, he will never understand anything. In order to begin to understand the ‘third dimension’, the two-dimensional being living on the plane must visualize all his time-concepts *spatially*, i.e. translate his time into space.

To achieve even an inkling of a right conception of our world, he must completely reconstruct all his ideas of the world - *revalue all his values*, re-examine all his concepts; he must disunite all those concepts which unify and bring together those which disconnect and, above all, he must create an infinite number of new concepts.

Dr Roles explained the relevance and practical application of Mr Ouspensky’s model of time to our search for liberation:

At this point some of us feel we need to have a simple picture to present to the mind in any situation – a picture which contains enough knowledge ‘in a nutshell’ to remind us forcibly and instantaneously of our aim to liberate ourselves from the Maya or illusion in which we live.

... we can take as our starting point the diagram (Figure 8) at the top of p.427 of the current third edition [of *A New Model of the Universe*] (with certain modifications) using its author's main line of argument – 6-dimensional space-time:



'Let us take the line of time as we usually conceive it: the line 'Before', 'Now', 'After', is a line of the 4th dimension. Let us imagine several lines perpendicular to this line. These lines, each of which designates now for a given moment, will express the perpetual existence of past and possibly of future moments.'

Comment (FCR). For our present purpose I shall take the short time-space of a day of 24 hours (say from 6 a.m. today to 6 a.m. tomorrow), which is made up of moments of 'psychological time'. Though our worldly lives have to be synchronised by clocks and calendars we simply must not believe in the validity of this artificial line on which we live 'round the clock', day after day all our lives and maybe life after life. Its absurdity becomes apparent when we stop to consider for a few moments: a) How this line has no beginning and no end, b) How the future is not born yet and what was once the 'future' is always fading through the 'present' into the 'past' which is considered to be irretrievable and, c) That the only freedom we get from this prison is when we are fast asleep and know nothing about it!

So continuing Mr. Ouspensky's argument:

'The line of the 4th dimension is the only 'time' we know or recognise. But, though we are (mostly) not aware of it, sensations of other 'times' both parallel and perpendicular continually enter our consciousness; and the perpendicular lines which consist only of now are, as it were, cross-threads, the weft in a fabric over the surface of time, in relation to the parallel lines of the time which represent the warp.'

'But each moment of 'now' on the lines of passing time contains not one, but a certain number of possibilities, at times a great, at others a small number.'

Though we can talk endlessly about it, we ignore those lines of 'Now' which have the most possibility and try to meditate with the outward-looking half of the mind [left hemisphere] which lives entirely on the line of passing time. [FCR Record, 1981/34]

Dr Roles referred specifically to meditation as he was speaking at a meditation meeting, but of course this applies to the whole of the day. How much of our lives are spent living in an imaginary past or future? How much importance do we give to the past and the future? What would it be like to *knowingly* live entirely in the present? (We can't actually live anywhere else!)

The Direct Path adopts a simple approach to experiential understanding of the illusory nature of time that is well within the capability of all of us. All that is required is a willingness to set aside our current beliefs and examine closely our direct experience:

Simply ask yourself the question, "Have I ever had or would it ever be possible to have an experience that was not now?"

Is the past or the future ever an actual experience or is it simply a thought?

See that the past and future are thoughts only. See that we have no experience of a past or a future. We experience a thought *about* the past or future but never the past or future itself.

An event, object, person or situation cannot happen in a thought.

See likewise that the 'now' is not a moment moving through time. It has no duration. There is no time through which we move.

Time is imagined to be real only when we have forgotten our true nature of ever-present Awareness and imagined ourselves instead to be limited, located entities. Time and space are born with that thought.

There is no present moment.

In fact, there are no moments in experience.

The line of time along which we are supposedly moving is never experienced. It is simply an idea and an image. And that idea and image, along with all other sensations and perceptions, is always Now.

In fact, not 'always' now, because there is no 'always' in time but rather eternally Now.

There is just this ever-present Now - eternity.

Time is thought superimposed upon eternity.

And eternity is just another name for our true nature of Awareness.

[<http://non-duality.rupertspira.com>]

For those of us who respond more readily to a right-hemisphere approach, perhaps the best formulation is the following from TS Eliot:

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present*

*All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.*

[The Four Quartets: Burnt Norton]

Contemplation

Now is not a moment in time, sandwiched between two vast spaces of the past and future. This present Now is the only Now there is – the eternal Now. It has not come from anywhere and is not going anywhere.

[Rupert Spira]