

# Chronicity and Temporality: A Revisionary Hermeneutics of Time

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NOT BY ANY STRETCH of the imagination can we believe that the topology of time is anything but non-linear, for instance the following is a very typical and normative idea of time:

The main reason there can be no such reduction lies in Deleuze's [Gilles Deleuze, 1925–95] use of asymmetry, a very important term in his philosophy of time, since it not only explains why time cannot be reversed and why there is an arrow of time (or rather a series of arrows depending on which process we take), but it also explains why processes themselves cannot be reversed. The counter or reverse of any given process does not go back to an original position or state, preserved according to some set of laws or kind of symmetry according to isomorphic functions, but rather it brings about another transformation that is itself irreversible. So the transformations implied by Deleuze's multiple view of time are all irreversible and asymmetrical. There is no going back because the initial conditions have been changed by the process such that even if we were to reproduce, for instance, an initial set of objects, the place and function of those objects within the processes will have changed. In turn, this is a first clue as to the radical nature of Deleuze's philosophy of time: it is inherently anti-conservative and anti-reactionary due to its inbuilt and unavoidable asymmetries of time. There is no represented and original past to go back to. There is no eternal realm to escape to in the future, where time stands still. Every process is multiple, irreducible to others and free of claims to higher sources or pure origins.<sup>1</sup>

And more simply, time is:

The special moment at which [the distinction between past and future events] occurs is known as the *now* or the *present*, and as events make the transition associated with this distinctive difference between past and future, the now moves, or flows. Philosophers (and physicists, too) call this common feeling that all humans have of the passage of time the *psychological arrow of time*.<sup>2</sup>

But to speak of time as if it were a stretchable string is also absurd, since that is a mathematical model which helps us to understand large distance, for example, between galaxies. We have learnt to think of time as another dimension within the space-time continuum not from physicists but much earlier, from the Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> They conceived of time as a creation of God, not infinite or eternal; but beginning with the creation of the angels and then, most memorably punctuated with the Happy Fall, leading to the gathering up of time by God at the Second Coming of Christ.

Eternity is the prerogative of the Godhead and it is a quality of being God. Eternity has nothing to do with what we conceive to be the nature of time. So, it would seem that the great physicists of the theories of time were performing their cultural work through the validation of Christian eschatological theologies. In this sense, Western physics is rooted in the Semitic religions. Whereas the Buddha and his followers

were concerned with the topology of time<sup>4</sup> and its flow qua reality, Christian physicists are lulled to certainty by their co-option into the very same Christian metaphysics which they so vociferously decry. Physicists in their rush to define and normatively pin down whatever they encounter within the physical universe, have willy-nilly turned theologians of time within the Semitic traditions.

For instance, and this is the instance most known to the public, is the current blockbuster, *Interstellar*, where time is shown in a popularly consumable manner as a separate dimension which is elastic and gives way to all types of time-travel. The science behind the movie is dubious but it is an ideological fallout of Einsteinian physics at its best avatar. The purported science behind the movie and the movie itself take for granted Western notions of time. Elaborate mathematical jugglery props this time-project to take on a glow of knowledge and scientific verity while negating Eastern conceptions of time. And what are these Eastern conceptions of time?

As had been mentioned above, time is of concern to the Buddhists. According to canonical schools of Buddhism, time as a continuum does not exist within Buddhist metaphysics. Therefore to use mathematics:  $n$  and  $n + t_1$  is not really the continuation of the  $n$ th moment in time:  $n$  and  $n + t_1$  are two different phenomena. The point here is that within Buddhist metaphysics  $n + t_1$  is impossible since  $n$  is not a continuous function. Therefore  $n$  is  $n$  since it signifies the  $n$ th state of all phenomena; and since all phenomena are in flux, time which measured the age at point  $n$ , does not progress to time  $n + t_1$ , since such progression is impossible. This is since according to Buddhism, all known and unknown manifestations change not with time, but rather their change manifests as time. Thus

time is perceived not as a dimension within Buddhism but rather as a sign of the transformation of all phenomena.

This Buddhist conception of time was not *sui generis*. Rather it was a reworking of the Hindu understanding of time. So what is the Hindu conception regarding time? The popular misconception is that the Hindus saw time as cyclical. That means that the occurrence of a certain event, defined through contemporary physics, as a spatio-temporal event, is theoretically possible to recur *sine die*. So the fact of this author writing this article in the here and the now is possible infinite times within time. Neither is this logically possible, nor do the Hindu scriptures say that the recurrence of any event is possible even twice, leave alone infinitely. The Hindu view of time is in effect that space within the epochs wherein the being in time can come to terms with its own inherent divinity and inseparability from the supreme Godhead, that is, Brahman.

How is it then that historians have dismissed Hindu conceptions of time as unworthy of empirical scrutiny? This dismissal has been possible by the following techniques: by powerfully misreading the Hindu scriptures; by accepting the theological position of the Semitic religions as being the *sine qua non* of the physics of temporality and using mathematics to justify this theological position and finally through the use of the mass media. We shall address each of the methods systematically. But before we proceed, it must be stated clearly that the Hindus who meditated upon time were not naive to think that the spatio-temporality of a phenomenon is reproducible. Let us now turn to the methods through which Hindu conceptions of time have been constructed or produced to serve, as will be seen later, the purpose of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The German Idealists began a deep reading of the Hindu scriptures. Scholars of colonialism studies have definitely called their bluff. Suffice it to say that these German scholars became deft Indologists to pander to what later Hitler will harangue about: more living space—this is the shrillest shriek of those who look to other lands for annexation. The German Idealists, much before Macaulay hatched his plan to destroy Hinduism, had begun their polished game. What was the game that these ‘lovers’ of all things Indian and Hindu played? They cleverly borrowed the methods of the great commentators of the Hindu scriptures; they began interpreting Hindu canonical texts in a manner which suited Europe’s colonial impulse the best. It is not for nothing that Germans felt no particular need to physically invade India. They just became Indologists; albeit their Indological arsenal depended heavily on very un-Hindu techniques of interpretations.

For instance Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and later Hans Gadamer (1900–2002) began what is known as the hermeneutical study of the Bible. They started reading the Judaeo-Christian canon interpretatively. This stated aim of this interpretative act was to expose the historicity of the Christ event and not to edify others. Their idea of historicity is best summarised by the contemporary neo-imperialist Niall Ferguson,<sup>5</sup> who in his book *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, defines history as a discourse which is informed by only ‘one past’ and the ‘past is over’ for good. He further goes on to say that ‘History is not just how we study the past; it is how we study time itself.’<sup>6</sup> This last quotation is the most crucial. Western historians have powerfully changed how we think of ‘time itself’ to reinforce the view that time is linear and non-recurring. But what compelled them to construct a linear definition of time?

The apparent answer is that empirically time is only chronologically contingent. But if we bring the Protestant work ethic and the need to establish hierarchies of capital accumulation within their construction of history, it shall be clear why it became necessary to the Western world to define time as historical, linear, and non-recurring.

First, according to these historians and scholars of the Bible, the past is a one off event and if only it is a one off event can the act of forgiveness erase past misdeeds absolving the perpetrator of the misdeed of any further responsibility for past occurrences.<sup>7</sup> The casual utterances, ‘move on’ and ‘get over it’, are sufficient to absolve a person of one’s involvement with say, apartheid. The world has moved on and the natives of South Africa need to forget that they were mistreated by Europeans.

If the past has a possibility of recurring then big businesses with no national boundaries cannot function. Some memories are best forgotten if the inhuman march of capital is to go on. During the times of Schleiermacher and Gadamer, big businesses meant huge trade including slave trading. The movement of capital from poor nations to richer nations demanded the rethinking of time. If time is recurring then guilt for the past will have to be paid sooner or later. Therefore, the idea of karma has to be shown vacuous. Western thinkers<sup>8</sup> therefore, negate causality for freedom of choice in the here and the now.

Secondly, the concept of a linear time as against the Oriental concepts of time serves another insidious function. Time as marked off by clocks and watches strengthen the so called work ethic, that is to say, the money-making method. Oriental time extends to the Being-sufficient spatio-temporality to work out one’s own salvation through self-control. But Western time is suitable for exploiting others for increasing

profits. Simply put, it binds people with worldly targets—one has this period of time to do this and that period of time to accomplish that. The industrial sales force therefore speaks of targets. Target in any field of capital accumulation is an offshoot of time.

Western time is limited and therefore the individual has to follow the *vita activa* and let go of slowing down enough to contemplate the Godhead. Western time therefore is a method to ultimately disconnect the individual from interior pursuits for the singular purpose of making all humanity disciplined, target-oriented money-making machines. Through their twisted reading qua hermeneutical interpretation of the Hindu scriptures and their subsequent use of these scriptures out of context, they created what we now universally think of as time. Time within this scheme is neither eternal, nor dependent on human agency. This time has a dead end, a target called the end times.

Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina times are all eternal and thus give the *dasein* enough scope to restructure its own destiny. Karma is real, as also is real the scope of the *dasein*'s freedom to wear out all the effects of accumulated karma through the eons without end. The Occident has problems with the Oriental sense of time since the West does not want to see past the visible world. The invisible future and the possibility of recurrent pasts in different guises will topple the most valued institutions of the West. And a line must be added to this—if there is no recurrence of times past, there goes out of the window, the concept of karma and if the latter is thrown out then all the non-Semitic religions are false and therefore, all non-Semitic cultures and the civilisations based on them are also so much hogwash. Hence the Semitic can carry on enlightening the East and with any enlightenment comes various forms of slavery!



## Notes and References

1. James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2011), 4.
2. Paul J Nahin, *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1993), 123; cited in Karen Hellekson, *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (Kent: Kent State University, 2001), 38. The parentheses are Hellekson's.
3. See 'Augustinian Time: some things never change' <<http://tinyurl.com/lrf156f>> accessed 06 September 2015.
4. Vasubandhu (fourth century CE) for example interrogates the problems posed by time to rebuff Advaita Vedanta in favour of the Buddhist idea of *Shunya*. Nonetheless, he along with other Buddhist philosophers fail to establish the non-existence of the *dasein*, being in time.
5. Fergusson extols the glory of the erstwhile 'White Empire' and categorically in each of his books berates the Orient, including the civilisations of South East Asia. Fergusson is one of the loudest voices who ridicule Oriental conceptions of time and religions. His arguments are pathetically simplistic: the ascendancy of the West was that it was very different from the East. And when he speaks of the West he speaks of its religious discourses also. In *Civilizations: The West and the Rest* he ridicules colonial and post-colonial studies as invalid domains of scrutiny.
6. Niall Fergusson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin, 2011), xx.
7. The necessary erasure of the past by imperialist powers has been well documented by scholars. One glaring instance is how the developed nations refuse to relieve the very African nations, which they robbed of, their debt. Erasure of the past allows people to wash their hands off the misdeeds of their forefathers. Who in contemporary Germany will own up that first their grandparents killed Jews by the millions and then they allowed Germany to be divided into two and erstwhile West Germany's residents did nothing much to help their Eastern counterparts?
8. John Hick (1922–2012) is one of the most readable philosophers who claim to demolish the concept of karma.