

Some Thoughts

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The heart is the origin of time, for the being, such as we are, who considers itself to be a body. Heart beats: there is life. Heart stops, there is no time any more for that being. This is a simple matter. The physicists may draw up their cosmological cartoons, but the embodied one knows the origin of time.

The being so considered might well ask about what it means to be “one without another.” Distinctness is separation, and the embodied being lives in the continuum, prior to language and distinction. We place the question of One (and thus of multiplicity) therefore in abeyance. On hold.

Without one, without number, without so much as a monadic origin, the inquiry can proceed nonetheless.

1 The brain

The brain, we hypothesize, is the organ of the imagination. There is much to think about there, but the heart is prior.

2 Circulations

We begin in the left ventricle. Rich, oxygenated, nourishing blood is distributed. The heart knows nothing of the consumers, but provides most generally. The principal consumers of this rich mixture will be, to a first approximation, the brain, the gut, the kidneys (whose role is to wash the blood) and the muscles. That rich stream of blood does not stay in pipes of fixed lumen. The bore of the vessels diminishes until the blood runs out, into tissue, as waves sink into the sand on the beach. This is the primary production.

The return, to the right atrium is not a simple matter of gathering what went out and bringing it back. The vessels themselves had disappeared, and the return will be a new undertaking. Those who return the blood are not the same as those who consumed it. The brain, muscles (and kidneys) return what they got. But the blood that went to the gut draws our attention to an entirely different circulation, between gut and liver. It will be the liver that returns the blood, after that mysterious circulation between gut and liver in which blood, bile, chyme, and substance are transformed, bringing about the important difference between food and shit. But the heart knows nothing of this. This is the primary return.

Then there is the second big circuit in which the blood flows through the lungs, encountering the wind, the air. The primary circuit is all internal to the body. The secondary lung circuit interacts with others, thus with spirit. Breathing belongs only partly to the body. It belongs also to the world. The heart knows nothing. But it is the origin of time.

3 Time, unhooked

I go to look for time. I find a tree, cut down, smooth stump disc. The rings here are years, that is, traversal of planet around sun. They are clear. The years are legible in the tree. This is the influence of the sun. The day is similar. Sun rises, sun sets.

Looking closer at the rings of tree growth, there are no months in here, no weeks either. Because months are not of the sun. They are of the moon. In conventional discourse, there is one calendar, but calendars are compromises, and there are many ways that can be reached. Weeks are inventions. The year is not an invention. The lunar month is also not an invention. It is the rotation of the moon about the earth, considered with respect to the reflected light of the sun. I never know where to expect the moon to crop up in the sky, or at what time of day. Its association with the night is a loose and wobbly one. The month belongs to the moon. The week belongs to the industrialist. Weeks are only about the arrangement of human affairs. The French, true to form, tried to suggest a ten day week. The Egyptians had done this before them.

The sun and the moon are loosely coupled. They do not deliver a rigid calendar. The conventional calendar is a rigid construction, still in need of occasional tweaking, for the year is not a whole number, despite being a good candidate for a natural unit, a natural “one.” It is a relation—Earth to Sun—and is not built of countable units. Irrational—as if the relation of the Sun to the Earth could defy reason.

These days, we forget this coupling, which is immanent, real time, and we take the fixed numbers on calendars and alarm clocks for truth. The decoupling of sun and moon is still evident in the manner in which the onset of Ramadan is determined: Ramadan is of the lunar calendar. Europeans forget things, but there have been wars over such matters. Easter still wobbles in an uneasy political compromise, and there is variation across communities. Calendrical reform is political, dangerous. The compromise that allows you to have a fixed calendar includes such wars, as well as the organisational views of the industrialist. Metric time is thus a construction. The monks of Mount Athos still refuse the last general calendrical reform and live 12 years out of whack with most of us. They are reported to have reluctantly allowed Nokia phones onto the peninsula. This might create renewed calendrical tension. In Bhaktapur, Nepal, there are two distinct cycles of religious festival, one based on the lunar cycles, one on the solar. Sun and moon in Bhaktapur still provide two different calendars that must co-exist.

The time that is immanent in the tree rings has every right to be called real time. The lunar month has every right to be called real time. The tides, whole oceans, move with the moon, not the sun. The background conditions of life have always had both lunar and solar influences. Is menstrual rhythm lunar or solar? We wouldn’t know where to look, frankly.

The heart knows nothing of all this, but it is the origin of real time for the embodied being. The word ‘origin’ suggests sequence, and that is misleading. Events are encountered serially, and thus ‘in time’, for any embodied being, but it can know nothing ‘prior’ to immanent arising. Thus the heart is more akin to a groundless ground. Perhaps the Buddhists have good words here. The heart has no metric for time.

4 Leaving common sense

Common sense is rigid and hard to leave behind. But we must do so. The objectifying activities of physics must be set aside to consider the position of the embodied (and perfectly real) being. Common sense relies on historical narratives expressed using calendars. The calendar of convention has a zero point, and the zero point on any scale is absolutely fundamental. If we choose to leave the common sense of history aside, it is because we do not see time as having a zero which is fixed by the birth of a Gallilean exorcist. The so called “Common Era” is not an innocuous description. It is the capturing of all time by the Christian religion. For present purposes we must treat history as fiction. We do not know where we come from. What are the influences that gave rise to this present? The present is assuredly not the product of individual persons, but of uncountable flows and entanglings.

The embodied being must look back from the present, for there is only the present. Origins are always uncertain. To be sure, we can construct stories of kings and geniuses and hang them on a historical time line anchored in Gallilee. But that story tells us nothing of where the textiles come from, how materials flow and change, or where the substance of our lives comes from. The Jesus-Calendrical story erases all women and children, for starters. But we are far from a human story or a history here. To set common sense behind is liberating in this way: Physics, which claims to represent or access reality, is combined with history, which is built of Jesus Years. The bastard child of this pairing is common sense. Physics, however, has captured two words which it believes it curates. These words are 'energy' and 'light'. The inquiry of the embodied being will need to extract these words. They do not belong to physics. $e = mc^2$ is written above the door? Give us back both energy and light. There is no expression of our being that does not require these two terms. As for m ? The embodied being might be consulted here.