

Review of: "The Chinese View on Time – A Reflection on The Concept of Time in Dao/Yijing And Modern Science"

Daniel Rueda Garrido

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In the introduction, the purpose of the article is well presented: an exploration of scientific and cultural conceptions of time in order to better understand our subjective temporal experience. It starts from two traditions: the one that understands time as a linear progress and the one that understands it as an entire cycle. The scientific view is based on these traditions, from Aristotle to Newton (for which change is not a perception of the observer but an external reality related to space and movement), while the cultural view is exemplified by Merleau-Ponty and, above all, by the Dao and the Yijing.

Explaining the cosmology of the Dao, he distinguishes between the primordial chaos, an indifferent totality, in which there was no time, and the birth of heaven and earth with the thousand beings, with whom time is born. The way-making is that timeless energy that drives the cycle of all beings. Thus, the Dao is timeless, although it is known by its temporal manifestations. I cannot help but draw a parallel here with Augustine of Hippo, for whom there is not only a phenomenological time (that which I understand because I live it but cannot explain if you ask me about it, as he says in his Confessions), but also an external time that is born with creation, so that God the creator is eternal because he does not identify himself with his creation; he is outside of time, since only in creating the world, time is born. And God is outside the world and outside time. In this context, there is also the distinction between transcendental and empirical time. I like the Taoist distinction made about there being a Dao that is timeless and an empirical experience of its manifestations that is temporal, or, in other words, between embodiment and detachment, temporality and timelessness.

At one point, it is said, "Chinese philosophers see that things are always provisional and conclude that transformation is time itself. They understand time as the primary aspect of changing, myriad events" (Chang, 2009, p. 216-217)." For Aristotle, the universe was eternal as the multiple cycles of nature were eternal, so that time was nothing more than the substantial change of some beings into others like seed into tree and tree into seed. How exactly does this conception of time differ from that of the Chinese philosophers? Time in both is change and movement framed in eternal cycles.

The key to the article is to understand how this view of time, which requires an external observer, can be combined with the scientific conception that time exists beyond our existence. It seems very relevant, even today, to raise this question because it seems that we live in a cognitively dissonant world, separated by a scientific culture that passionately repeats that time exists independently of us and another humanistic cosmovision that puts human beings at the centre and denies the objectivity of time.

The postulated solution is based on the Dao as potentiality, which only when observed and named becomes Dao in its

ontic reality as plurality. Time as an objective reality would be inaccessible to human beings, while what we experience is empirical time, the Dao actualised in the world (tian xian di). The dialogic relationship between the always evasive potentiality and the partial actualisation of that potentiality seems important to me to understand the transition from the ontological to the ontic. In this case, I would ask what exactly limits us, for if we are manifestations of the Dao, we are also realizations of its potentiality; can we not understand or intuitively grasp Dao in ourselves and in others? Can we not transcend the time limit and merge with the timelessness that constitutes us?