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**Time and the conceptual problems of the temporal
dimension of business education discourse**

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[Lancaster University, Department of Behaviour in Organisations – Discussion paper BOR 003/00]

1. The aim of this study

This study follows the theme of time in religious, philosophical and social theory thinking in order to understand how contemporary management education is constituted as a theory of practice. More particularly, the aim is to understand whether time is represented as a homogenising dimension of human existence or as a heterogeneous human experience in the everyday unfolding of practice.

This theme is however only one of the main dimensions of any theoretical approach to human practices. Time is – like space or a model of man, for instance – an implicit dimension of theorising about human practices. However, time is a complicated subject. It is not malleable in practice, regardless of our conception about it; nor is it simple enough a subject for theory. Much less is written specifically about time than about the way in which people and the world supposedly are and function. Time puzzles academics and practitioners alike; nowadays, as always. Yet, to begin with, it can be said that neither theory, nor practice exist outside time. This is an intuitive statement and can be made about any form of being. Words such as “being” or “existence” imply a temporal unfolding. What sort of comments can theories make about time? How can a certain conception of time be detected in accounts of practice? Thomas Mann asks the same question directly:

“Can one tell – that is to say, narrate – time, time itself, as such, for its own sake?” (1999:541)

Section 2 offers a contextualisation of the general problem of time. The main aim of this commentary for the thesis is to outline the two major modes of thinking about time which characterised the twentieth century and still form the axis of enquiry in philosophy, as well as social and natural sciences. These two directions of thought are represented, on the one hand, by the work of Immanuel Kant (1983) whose contribution to the search for a transcendental essence of human knowing led him to elaborate one of the most influential conceptions of time; on the other hand, the work of Martin Heidegger (1962; 1992) marks the most important philosophical challenge to Kant’s transcendentalism. These two positions, however, can be interpreted as representative of the wider historical human search for the meaning of time. The contrast between Kant and Heidegger is wider than the mere subject of time although the two were not even contemporaries. Yet Heidegger’s critique of the universality and ahistoricity of time according to Kant has created a fundamental opening in the language of philosophy for the consideration of the human, existential relativity and historicity of time. This distinction is crucial in setting up this discussion of the theme of time.

Upon considering Kantian thought about time and its consequences for the modern search for a unified, trans-historical conception of time in scientific rationalist terms,

hinges the credibility of the idea that the paradigm which dominates management education is homogenising in the sense given to the notion in this thesis. The discussion of time adds a third dimension to the intellectual matrix of the MBA: it establishes that the view of time implicit in the architecture of mainstream management education is of a functionalist, homogenising nature.

Yet in order to offer this conclusion, the analysis begins by stressing the importance of the difference between ways of talking about time which focus on the existential concerns of human beings and ways of dealing with time which focus upon non-human units of analysis.

Section 2 offers a relatively lengthy discussion of three ancient religions and their view of time, followed by a discussion of European philosophical and scientific notions of time. The former is an important step in establishing the central position of human concerns with time and its very profound expressions in beliefs and social practices. Religions are perhaps an insufficiently considered source of reflection in the age of science and reason. Yet they represent expressions of worldviews that capture precisely the search for *human* meaning in existence rather than abstracted models with non-human foci. Moreover, the role of religions – extending to reach entire communities – makes them significant instances of genuine existential concerns of human beings. Perhaps the idea that the human species is defined among other elements by the religious imperative could be further refined by the interpretation of the religious imperative as being in fact a *temporal* imperative bound up with the tension of finitude and the consciousness of time. If this view is acceptable then it will become perhaps clearer how the ensuing discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions is made easier by the context created through the analysis of religious conceptions.

Section 3 uses the contrast discussed in section 2 to develop a more direct analysis of the temporal dimension of mainstream management education discourse. This analysis addresses certain models used on MBAs, it also examines some of the theoretical contributions to the study of time from an economic and functional perspective, and it also offers a brief critique of the inherent notion of functional time underlying certain corporate practices.

The overall aim is to show that time as a fundamental dimension of human existence is appropriated in MBA rhetoric via a functionalist intellectual avenue which allows it to be translated into a transcendental, trans-subjective, almost material variable that enters the equation of resource allocation for the corporation. Thus “managed”, time becomes a homogenous medium which is used as a reference for productivity in company rhetoric. Its allocation, as it is well known since Taylor, Gilbreth, and Ford, is dominated by cost optimisation functions. However, the argument here contends that such a conception of time deters reflection from the more complicated human experiences and constructions of time as dimension of cultural horizons with which meanings, identity, and aspirations are bound up. Whereas the corporation transforms it into an operational resource, the complex human engagement with time summons images which reveal that management and organisational processes are vastly more complex. Incidentally, it can be argued that the very economic efficacy of resource allocation is dependent upon the ability of corporate management to accept – at least at a minimal level – the intricacy of the meaning of time for people in the organisation, and engage more creatively with the human fabric of corporate processes.

However, at this point it is not a prescriptive line which this project pursues. The central concern here is to understand how time can be – and has been – gradually articulated as a quantitative, linear dimension of the general experience of processes of “work”, “production”, or “consumption” in the cosmological matrix in which business education discourses share. If the overall argument is that management education derives its intellectual direction from the traditions of modern science, then it should obtain that the temporal horizon of MBA programmes can also be associated with the cultural perspective on time “produced” by western science.

2. Background to the problem of time

The relatively extensive commentary which introduces the subject here lays the foundation for this analysis.

Man has been defined in many ways; one of them might show man as possibly definable in terms of his relationship to time and conceptions of time. Amongst living beings, man is perhaps the only one who could conceptualise time beyond the immediate “survival ring” of the biological present. He thus became intrinsically dependent upon finding a meaning for this elusive and – finally – indeterminable category. Some saw time as fundamental to man’s questioning of beginnings. Van der Leeuw (1959) quotes one of Hesse’s verses in *Magister Ludi*:

“A magic dwells in each beginning and
Protecting us it tells us how to live.” (Hesse, 1949:396)

But there also is the other fundamental sense to the question of time claiming equal importance in man’s preoccupation with existence: the question of the end, of mortality, and of what might occur post-mortem¹. Among the most memorable images of this obsession occurs in the penetrating modern fictional narration of Hadrian’s life in Marguerite Yourcenar’s novel of 1951:

“Like a traveller sailing the Archipelago who sees the luminous mists lift toward evening, and little by little makes out the shore, I begin to discern the profile of my death.” (Yourcenar, 1986:16)

Yourcenar’s work is particularly significant as a twentieth century piece which convenes two worlds, the ancient and the modern, precisely around the theme of existential melancholy and concern with the unswerving passing of life-time. But the *belles-lettres* literature provides volumes upon volumes full of such images of grave (yet not always pessimistic) heedfulness of time.

Thus, the figure of man seems to be that of a creature who can raise the problem of eternity whilst being intensely aware of its own finitude and the certainty of its death. Human beings have displayed – for as long as evidence of their existence is available – a serious preoccupation with time in the engagement with life and death. Archaeological evidence seems to point out that, since the earliest cultures, groups of humans have developed a preoccupation with life’s finitude and metaphysical means of engaging with

¹ A powerful account of the Christian European history of preoccupation with death can be found in Ariés’ *Hour of Our Death* (1981).

the *temporal* questions of existence: when did existence itself begin? What is the meaning of our birth and death in the context of the rest of existential time? What happens before birth and after death? Will we return at some future point, and how? Should we be sad for having been born, or for our temporal finitude? What is the meaning of our present experiences? What should we try to be and what should we try to do in our life? When will the existence of everything end? Although these appear to be impractical questions, a deeper examination of the consequences of asking them reveals that they are actually concrete; the way in which we address issues in everyday existence depends upon a sense of what our temporal being is and the actions we engage in are inextricably linked to our temporality. The sense of life's temporality is all-encompassing because time itself appears to be paradoxical: on the one hand, personal life is irreversible – we can only grow older, time is felt as an all-devouring force; on the other hand, life in general renews itself all around us in the powerful cycles of the year's seasons, stars and comets turn and return with uncanny precision. And time seems to be endlessly malleable in our memory and imagination too. It appears that the profound human feeling of existence's deepest ground in a precarious relationship to time – which is itself unfathomable in the sense of its returns and inexorable passing – can only find its voice in poetry. Hölderlin's, the "poet's poet" as Heidegger called him, lament of youth is among the most powerful images in European culture:

“O youth, once of a different aspect to me!
and can my prayers
Not make you return, never? does no path
lead me back?” (Hölderlin, 1943:145)

And perhaps even more disturbingly still:

“And if impetuous Time too forcefully seizes
My head, and want and wandering among
mortals shatter
My mortal life, on stillness, in thy depths,¹
let me ponder.” (Hölderlin, 1943:54)

The perennial nature of questions about time has been actualised in an endless series of modalities of answering them. Every culture known displays profound and sophisticated approaches. Yet no culture has been able to produce a concept of time or temporality which would satisfy each person's fascination and fear with the problems faced in life. Time is perhaps one of the most elusive notions with which we operate in everyday life, in science and philosophy, management practice and theory, but also in music, art, religion. One important issue to consider in discussing the problem of time lies precisely in this dimension: that human life is uniquely personal, but also absorbed in the life of our cultures from which we draw the first meanings for time. Whether as groups, or as persons, whether we realise it or not, time confronts us with complicated processes of meaning construction. And it is this degree of complexity that renders any approach difficult to follow in itself for it requires leaps from one level of abstraction to another: from the phenomenological to the ontological to the metaphysical, from the intuitive to the conceptual, from concrete illustration to utmost abstraction, from textual interpretation to stylistic judgements on the author, and so on.

¹ The poet is addressing Poseidon, the god of the sea.

All human cultures have shared from the beginning the need for a narrative which allows them to situate their own existence in the larger cosmic story. The archaic, the premodern, or traditional societies, as well as the modern ones have ontological conceptions about the nature of being and that of reality (Eliade, 1989:3). However, the metaphysical concepts with which they operate on this level were not always formulated in the theoretical language modern Europeans are used to. Yet symbol, myth, or ritual express specific means to every culture of capturing in a system of coherent affirmations their own sense about the ultimate reality of things. Such a system can be legitimately regarded as a *metaphysics*. Whilst it is useless to search archaic languages for the precise concepts created by the great European philosophical traditions, it does not mean that the engagement with the fundamental problem is absent. Words such as “being”, “non-being”, “real”, “unreal” or “becoming” might be lacking in many languages; but the ideas are conveyed in a coherent fashion through symbols and myths. What is fundamental about time is that it is the central dimension around which revolve histories, myths and everyday action. All forms of utterance in human cultures have an implicit temporal dimension.

A. RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF TIME

The earliest and perhaps the most striking manifestations of man’s preoccupation with eternity and finitude, with this world and its relation to a possible other, are religious doctrines. This subsection discusses some examples of the complexity of conceptions of time that can be found in different religions.

Premodern humans inhabited a world which they held in profound religious reverence. Before the secularisation of culture in Europe, the omnipotence of religious language marked the way in which space, time, and the universe were conceptualised and inhabited. For the moderns, the thought of traditional man imbued as it is with both sacred and profane content and symbolism appears baffling and obscure. Yet this judgement can hardly be passed since the two modes of engaging with life, secular and religious, could not be more antithetic and counter-intuitive for each other as they currently are. With regard to conceptions of time, the situation of this contrast is abundantly revealing.

Modern anthropology has always been interested in documenting empirically the traditional relationships between people and time in different cultures. Yet the method of anthropology was not confined to offering simple descriptions. Implicit in the anthropological account, especially in the work of early anthropologists, are several assumptions about determining factors in the make-up of cultures. In the works of Fraser (1922), Lévy-Bruhl (1931), Mauss or Hubert (whose research – 1909, 1972, 1979 – could be reliably located in the structuralist tradition) the relationship of humans to time is essentially social. Religious rituals and calendars are only the by-products of systems of reckoning time whose foundation is the secular social system of a particular culture. Thus the relationship with time – even with reference to religious beliefs and practices – is usually seen by anthropology in terms of some form of social determinism which links sacred time to instances of rhythm and repetition found in the framework of social (profane) life as such. For example, Lévy-Bruhl develops a taxonomy of daily time for the Dyaks which contains five different sorts of temporality (1931:18-19). The quality of these parts of the day is recounted as lucky or unlucky, favourable or

unfavourable for work. For Lévy-Bruhl, the relative independence between this system and the real, natural rhythm of daily time throughout the year shows that it is not a mode of celebration of sacred rhythms but a mode borne out of social patterns among the Dyaks themselves. Mauss and Hubert too analysed sacred time as a product of social patterns rather than as a consequence of the religious consciousness in different cultures (1909:213).

In contrast with anthropologists, historians of religions point out that sacred time has its own existential logic and that it represents a specific mode of engaging with the fundamental problems raised by human experience. The works of Otto (1923) and Eliade (1954; 1958; 1959; 1965; 1969; 1979) develop another modality in the study of religious phenomena related to the relationship between sacred and profane time. Eliade proposed a view of the sacred and the profane which shows that the process of time-category formation in religious cultures works in a complex way producing heterogeneous representations of time and existence. Instead of being a direct reflection of social patterns, the religious mind develops along certain initiatives of the intellect (personal and collective) in producing specific ways of coping with the world. He demonstrates that even the difference between sacred symbolism and profane life is one of *modality* rather than of *essence of the process*. In other words, sacred and profane thought are two forms of the same essential mode of existential engagement, with different contextual directions, yet with the same “mechanism” seeming to be at the core of religious consciousness.

In his study of myths and rituals, Eliade discovers that “sacred time is reversible in the sense that it is a primordial mythic time re-enacted in the present” (Eliade, 1965). Any religious manifestation, any liturgical moment is a reactualisation of an event that took place “at the beginnings”, *in illo tempore*. Sacred time does not flow, it is not a “duration”. It is an ontological time *par excellence*. Always equal to itself, it is not altered by the succession of generations. It can be recovered periodically and re-enacted through ritual. It is not *historical* in a linear sense. Sacred time is of a different quality than profane time for religious man, it does not depend upon the biological cycle of individual life, specifically it does not begin at birth, nor does it end at death. Moreover, profane time can be “stopped” by introducing through rite a non-historical time, sacred time, which moves man in the times of “creation”, in the same way that the church represents a space of a different quality than profane space (in it, it is possible for religious man to participate in the existence of the gods). After analysing the myriad of rites and myths dedicated to time and its regeneration in various cultures throughout history, Eliade finds two main categories of responses to the question “How has man tolerated history?” (especially in Eliade, 1958).

The first is what he called “the need of societies to regenerate themselves periodically through the annulment of time. Collective or individual, periodic or spontaneous, regeneration rites always comprise, in their structure and meaning, an element of regeneration through repetition of an archetypal act, usually the cosmogonic act. In the last analysis what we discover in these rites and all these attitudes is the will to devalue time. If we pay no attention to time, time does not exist; furthermore, where it becomes perceptible – because of man’s “sins,” i.e., when man departs from the archetype and falls into duration – time can be annulled” (Eliade, 1954). Religious societies “tolerate” history and defend themselves against its tensions by periodically abolishing time through repetitions of cosmogony, and the subsequent regeneration of time as *illud*

tempus: the golden age of Creation – when things were pure, and man needed not fear history.

The second mechanism is “to give historical events a metahistorical meaning, through archetypes, a meaning that was not only consoling but was above all coherent, that is, capable of being fitted into a well-consolidated system in which the cosmos and man’s existence had each its *raison d’être*” (Eliade, 1954). The masses find their consolation and support in transforming a historical personage into an exemplary hero and a historical event into a mythical category. As a psychological phenomenon, this idea sheds light not only upon religious life, but also non-religious everyday life by exposing a certain mechanism through which meaning is associated with existence. Whether at a personal or collective level, evidence shows that in every meaningful act, in behaviour or memories, *archetypal* contents (in other words, multiple “temporal strata” stored in spite of time in our identities) constitute fundamental elements in the process of giving sense to experience. The past returns without us necessarily making conscious recourse to it¹.

These ideas show that time is a notion created by man and as such it may be seen as the result of a process of relating to existence as mysterious. Profane time seems to be a notion of the same order with sacred. It represents a bridge into the unknown of everyday existence just as sacred time bridges man with his primordial origins. Its meaning is different, but in experience it appears as the result of a similar process. Profane time is different because the notion is formed with a different intention. Sceptic commentators argue that there is scarcely any “sacred” element left in the life of “modern man”. Indeed, they are right in a certain sense. But the desacralisation of the world must not be misunderstood. Modalities of human experience vary historically; there might be no place for sacred or mystical experiences in the life of man in the age of science, who may look condescendingly upon the times of alchemy, or the Chinese scholars labouring over the resurrection of Nature as a sacred space in minute miniature gardens. Yet, whether religious or non-religious, the human experience of finitude remains a central feature of existence.

As the examples below show, understandings of time differ in different cultural backgrounds. Through these backgrounds humans experience their existential worlds in time as opposed to merely ordering the same time as physical substance. The impression of the continuity of time is a result of people treating experiences in their succession through the means of specific metaphors such as development, change, process, being, etc., but the content of these metaphors is situated in a cultural context which has to be considered in the process of understanding a particular modality of dealing with time in different cultures. The three following illustrations are drawn from ancient religious doctrines in the European and Middle Eastern cultural space. The reason is that they stand in historical contrast with contemporary views which are more difficult to disentangle from the links with the modern worldview characteristic of the same space. As a contrast, they offer a clearer picture of the cultural past of Europe and allow further clarifications of conceptions of time in contemporary Europe.

The powerful image of *Chronos* is familiar. He was the god of time for the Greeks (or *Saturn* for the Romans), one of the Titan sons of the sky (Coelus, or Uranus) and of the earth (Terra, sometimes also called Titea in Latin, or Thea in Greek). Chronos-Saturn is

¹ As it is obvious, Eliade’s work has profound affinities with that of Carl Gustav Jung

the god who devours his sons as soon as they are born, and this is still a haunting example of the sophisticated metaphors which convey how profound the dilemma of finitude and eternity is for human existence. The mythical story of Chronos starts with his father, Coelus, the sky, who was seen by the Greeks and the Romans as the cannibalistic originator of mankind who swallows his own off-spring. The heaven is the frontier people believed they will cross when they will die; but death was conceived as a cruel act perpetrated by the fatherly divine figure himself. The plot of the legend prompts the divine mother, Terra, to seek vengeance. She arms her son with a scythe made from metals extracted from her own body. Chronos has to stop his father from begetting children whom he would treat unkindly. Coelus is slain and Chronos obtains his father's kingdom on the promise, however, that he will never bring up any male children either. Thus Chronos becomes the new figure to assume his father's role in replaying the drama of man's finitude. He has, in turn, to devour his male offspring to keep his promise to his siblings. The act of devouring remains a haunting image of the tragedy of finitude. It is a powerful allegory of death not simply because life is interrupted as such, but also because human life's reproductive power is arrested.

The solution of the Greeks and Romans is a circular one, perhaps not the most elegant in ancient mythologies. A more detailed analysis of the legend offers, however, more insight into the main pre-Christian European religious mind. Divine and human characters meet repeatedly in ambiguous circumstances and the story of time offers actually a more sophisticated alternative: this and the other world, profane and sacred, come together in a space in which everyday human experience can confront its perennial anxieties (Lemprière, 1994:179, 605).

Overall, the Greek-Roman myth of time has a powerful lesson to convey. Faith itself cannot be conjured up to offer a solution to the core tension of human life. Man cannot avoid contemplating the most tragic necessity of his existence: the anxiety of time passing away and, with it, the erosion of life.

Another very powerful religious occurrence of the fundamental theme of time is *Zurvanism*¹ in ancient Persia. Zurvanism was a particular current which emerged from a key change of nuance in the doctrine of Persian Zoroastrianism. The latter became the state religion of the Achaemenid dynasty after Cyrus's successful campaign to unite the peoples of Persia in one empire during the first half of the sixth century BC (Smart, 1989:31). Zoroaster (name derived by the Greeks from the original *Zarathustra*) was the central prophetic figure for ancient Persians, and he lived at some time before 600 BC, perhaps even as early as the tenth century BC (Smart, 1989:219). He left a series of writings, the *Gathas* – incidentally displaying profound religious affinities with the Vedic period of Indian religion – whose most important feature for the period is their monotheism. The supreme figure, the One God, perfectly good, is *Ahura Mazda* (Ohrmazd) who begins the cosmic drama by creating both good and evil (he fathers twin sons, representing the two principles). The drama of universal existence unfolds in three stages, or three *ages*: the age of creation, the age of struggle between the good son and the evil one (who becomes evil by making a wrong existential choice), and the age of the future in which the good will be rewarded with judgement and immortality. In the third age, human beings were imagined as having pure bodies in a state of resurrection. This idea proved to be extremely influential for the religions of the Indo-European space:

¹ Smart (1989) uses the word *Zurvanism*. Corbin (1957) uses *Zervanism*, whereas Eliade (1989) calls it *Zarvanism*. All these terms refer to the same branch of Zoroastrianism.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each proposing a blissful end of time consisting of a refreshment of existence, which will finally be full of the splendour anticipated through the agonistic experience of human life.

As all religions, Zoroastrianism engages with the problem of cosmic destiny; the main dimension of the story is *temporal*. The solution proposed by the Achaemenid and, later, Sassanid Persians was going to prove very fine indeed – especially from the point of view of its treatment of time. Not only did it influence fundamentally all the major religions of Europe and the Near East, but it is the basis of a series of extremely profound developments, one of which is among the most interesting theologies of time.

Zurvanism was derived from Zoroastrianism sometime during the Alexandrian period through a fundamental doctrinal adjustment. *Zurvan* – which was originally the name of the force of time – becomes the supreme deity from which all existential principles emanate. This innovation is eminently significant, yet little known. Time itself becomes a deity, it becomes the neutral god of all creation, beyond good and evil, and is also the ultimate condition of all existence. The Zurvanitic solution is perhaps one of the most elegant and most generous doctrines known. That time was attractive for the Persians is not surprising; they possessed fine astronomical knowledge and were surrounded by civilisations with strong celestial cosmologies. The dynamic of the sky and the stars was the very basis upon which many cultures conceived of time and of heavens; the evolution of constellations was seen as the very condition of time. Upon knowledge of the constellations – that is, upon astrology – was based the most important religious experience of all: opening the mystery of the future, of personal and collective destinies, the ultimate human mystery.

In Zurvanism, however, the ultimate destination is not predicated upon a moralistic basis. In Pahlavi literature, Zurvan is supreme, but Zurvan is not the embodiment of supreme goodness. Time is a neutral deity. This subtle development meant that divinity itself is not morally inclined. Yet this does not mean that Zurvanism is amoral (or even immoral, as it was going to be accused of by Christianity and Islam later).

The universe exists in cycles; as shown above, each cycle consists of three *aeons*. Although all cycles exist in the “person of time”, in Zurvan, the nature of time differs between the first and third aeons, on the one hand, and the second “age”, on the other hand. The first and the last are made of infinite time¹; the middle one is finite. At the beginning of each cycle there is an aeon of creation. But it is not simply a creation anew; it is more a restoration of the world to which Persians aspired, a return to the original state, an *apokatastasis*, as Schelling (1942:137) argues. This aspiration is another sign of the main direction of Persian religious thought with regard to existence – a sign of the hope nurtured across cultures that there might be a mode of overcoming finitude, of return, or of a final resurrection into eternal bliss.

¹ The paradox which emerges – i.e. infinite time within finite cycles – is not a mistake; the problem of formal logical consistency was not crucial in religious doctrines. Infinity was equated with *very long* cycles which represented the life of many generations of humans. The use of very big numbers of years to denote the eternal length of divine time in comparison to human time is present in almost all cultures with cyclical views of the universe. Moreover, contemporary astrophysicists operate increasingly with a finite view of universal infinity. The contemporary scientific notion of an infinite universe which, however, has a beginning (agreed by scientist to have been 12 billion years ago) and a possible end rests upon a similar paradoxical conception.

The story begins with Zurvan who performs sacrifices for one millennium in order that a son may be born to him who would be the creator of Heaven and Earth (Corbin, 1957: 129). But doubt arises in Zurvan's mind regarding the efficacy of this solitary liturgy: will a son be born? The outcome is that in fact two sons are born: Ohrmazd, the good son, child of his father's liturgical act; and Ahriman, the evil son, child of the darkness of his father's doubt. Zurvan vows to bestow the worldly kingdom upon the first born, Ohrmazd. Hearing this, Ahriman finds a way to be born prematurely and confronts his father with his vow. Knowing that he cannot break his vow, but also that he cannot let the world be ruled by evil for eternity, Zurvan compromises by establishing the worldly aeon of his evil son's rule to a limited period: 9,000 years. During this second stage of the drama, human life unfolds under the pressures of a problematic world. But although human life is finite – as the world's – it is one in which people are free to choose between good and evil in the knowledge that their supreme god intended the world to be ruled by good. This option within finitude is a thoughtful development in Zurvanism; it marks its subtle doctrinal difference from mainstream Zoroastrianism with regard to the problem of human freedom. The divine principles of good and evil come to influence men's lives in their finite temporal horizon; but human choice is not constrained by a preordained moral damnation. The only ontological constraint is the finitude of time. A morally neutral time-god himself, Zurvan allows equal footing for all combatants populating the cosmic stage¹. In the third aeon, the eschatological resolution is always positive: Ohrmazd-the-good wins. What follows is an age of bliss for all, regardless of their worldly choice. Again, Zurvanism offers a generous view of universal existence: it does not condemn human beings to hell. Good reigns eventually, but – within the philosophy of Zurvanism – it is not metaphysically ultimate. The sacrifice of the metaphysical ultimacy of goodness put Zurvanism under great pressure from mainstream Zoroastrian clergy and, eventually, marginalised it, especially after the rise of Christianity and Islam. Another plausible explanation for Zurvanism's unattractiveness for the clerics was its inherent political tolerance: only a doctrine with a strong sense of damnation can be used to control human subjects in this world. A theology which, on the contrary, does not condemn either in this world or in the other remains unsuitable to support a political establishment.

Yet the intellectual importance and originality of Zurvanism remains intact precisely because of its generosity and its original conceptualisation of time. Moreover, for the religious cultures of the ancient world, everyday life was – as already shown – imbued with sacred and profane meanings. Thus, Zurvanism was not merely an abstraction for the clergy. Doctrinal texts were taught to every member of society and represent the way in which the celestial drama became actually part of people's real lives. Manuals of doctrine punctuate different stages in the passage from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. For example, Corbin (1957:115) cites the little Zoroastrian *Book of Counsels of Zartusht* thought to date from about the 4th century AD. It requires everyone over the age of fifteen to know the answers to the following questions: “Who am I and to whom do I belong? Whence have I come and whither am I returning? What is my lineage and what is my race? What is my proper calling in earthly existence?”, and so on. The answers illustrate the continuity with the doctrine:

¹ For original Zoroastrianism, a system of belief in which evil is ascendant by birth would have been intolerable.

“I came from the celestial world, it is not in the terrestrial world that I began to be. I was originally manifested in the spiritual state, my original state is not the terrestrial state. I belong to Ohrmazd, not to Ahriman; I belong to the angels, not to the demons.

The accomplishment of my vocation consists in this: to think of Ohrmazd as present Existence, which has always existed, and will always exist. To think of him as immortal sovereignty, as Unlimitation and Purity.” (Corbin, 1957:115)

This text is not strictly Zurvanitic (few texts for lay practice exist for the possible reasons explored above). The excerpt is Zoroastrian; yet it emphasises the profound preoccupation Persians had in general with the issue of surviving finitude into some form of eternity and the expression of this preoccupation in a complex myth. This particular example affords a glimpse of how a religious worldview becomes a certain kind of reality, how it becomes a very powerful bond between an apparently high abstraction and the very concrete tension it represents. What this brief fragment illustrates is how an individual human being is re-inserted into eternity through the doctrinal myth itself. It can be speculated that this invocation in fact represents a positioning of personal life in the second *aeon*. In other words, for each member of the culture, lay or cleric, personal life *is* the worldly phase of the cosmic drama. This almost intuitive connection seizes the way in which a substantive bridge is created between the story of the cosmos and the story of one’s life. The bridge is time, and the time of one’s life represents not simply the second stage of the cyclical cosmic drama, but indeed the central stage in the tripartite cycle of existence. Thus, time’s existential significance in human life is accentuated as central in Zoroastrianism and Zurvanism; the interpretation might go as far as emphasising that the entire relationship between man and cosmos is centred on time itself. Such prayers emanating from man to his gods, such invocations of the latter in the circular temporal predicament of the former represent the fine blending of daily life with cosmological myths which is characteristic of many religions.

For the Persians, as for the Greeks, the conceptual bases of their theologies offer a complex view of the intensity of religious cultures’ preoccupation with time. They illustrate the centrality of the theme of time in man’s existence across cultural spaces in early history.

Another important example of this preoccupation is the temporal dimension of the Gnostic faith and its relationship with early Christian, Judaic, and Hellenistic notions of time (Culianu, 1992; Pearson, 1990). In very general terms, Gnosticism represents a religious attitude characterised by the belief that there is an absolute knowledge (*gnosis*) which it is in itself the path to salvation. As a religion of knowledge, it follows a course well known to many other religious systems (see, for example, Pearson, 1990). The *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, is a text which elaborates the doctrine of the distinction between salvation through “knowledge” and salvation through “works” in the Vedic tradition; but there are many other traditions which pursue knowledge without being necessarily recorded by the history of religions as technically *Gnostic*, the most immediate examples being Hermeticism, Mandaeism, or Manichaeism. Although in what follows the focus shall be on the Christian forms of Gnosticism, it must be emphasised that its scope extends well beyond the early Christian period when Gnosticism was well known, especially in the first millennium of the Christian era. The

ancient Gnostic believers were pluralistic and creative regarding the details of their teachings and practices.

With regard to Christianity, the Gnostics were particularly active in the second century AD (Puech, 1959:53). The term “Gnostic” was first used to designate a heretical movement whose chief representatives were Basilides, Valentinus, Marcianus – all followers of Simon Magus and Saturnilus of Antioch. The movement lasted until at least the seventh century AD (according to many sources; see Puech, 1959). But other groups of Gnostics were also active in this period – for instance, the Ophites or Naassenes, the Sethians, Archontics, or Audians.

The members of these movements claimed to offer a comprehensive interpretation of Christianity derived from a genuine secret revelation of the original message through mysterious traditions coming directly from Christ and his apostles. Although the writings that survived from the Gnostics were found only in 1945 at Nag Hammadi on the superior Nile in Egypt, the teachings remained in the store of wisdom of many medieval and modern groups of Christians whose activities have always been condemned by mainstream churches (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 1988). The Gnostics were sectarians who formed an elite of “knowers”, *gnostikoi*, who had been initiated into the true interpretation of Christ’s teachings – in opposition to the mere “believers”, called “*psychics*”, and the even lower class of “*hylics*” who were enslaved by body and matter (according to Puech, 1959:54).

The model of reality which comes from this interpretation held that creation was a process which involved an original and transcendental spiritual unity from which emanated a vast manifestation of pluralities. However, for the Gnostics, the created universe of matter and mind was not the work of the original spiritual unity but of a spiritual being possessing inferior powers – the *Demiurge*. The latter seeks the perpetual separation of humans from the unity of God. The Gnostic saw the human being as a composite: the outer (bodily) existence being the handiwork of the inferior creator, while the “inner man” represents the “fallen spark” of divine unity. As sparks of divinity, people are trapped in a material and mental prison, and are stupefied by the forces of materiality and mind. But, God had not abandoned these sparks; rather there is a constant effort forthcoming from divinity aimed toward the spiritual awakening and liberation of humans. This awakening is brought about by *gnosis* which means, in essence, knowledge for salvation. Yet this knowing is not simply an outcome of belief, or virtuous deeds, or obedience to commandments – these are only preparations leading toward liberating knowledge (see, for example, Stroumsa, 1992). The essential element of salvation is the grace of Sophia, the feminine emanation of divinity. She was involved in the creation of the world and ever since remained the guide of her orphaned children. The Gnostics believed that from the earliest times of history, messengers of light have been sent forth from the ultimate unity with the task to advance the *gnosis* in the souls of humans. The greatest of these messengers in the ancient European historical and geographical matrix was Jesus Christ as the descended Logos of God. He was a teacher (imparting instruction), and a hierophant, or mystagogue (imparting mysteries). It was a privileged status in relation to these mysteries imparted by Jesus which was claimed by the *gnostikoi*. The doctrine’s occurrence in early Christianity represented a substantial challenge to the mainstream Pauline pedagogy of Christ’s history. As the latter crystallised, Gnosticism became entirely incompatible with the church, and was considered heresy.

Philosophically and theosophically, Gnosticism occupied a ground between Hellenism and orthodox Christianity. In terms of its implicit view of time, Gnosticism offers an important example of conceptual solutions which engaged with two radically different views of time, existence, and history. On the one hand, the Hellenistic conception was based on a circular time; Christianity, on the other hand, introduced a linear view of time.

The Greek view has been partly explored above. However, it is necessary to introduce here the role of philosophy: the Greek view of time was influenced toward the end of the classical period not just by mythology, but also by philosophy, especially by Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions. As a consequence of these related influences, time was seen by the Greeks to flow circularly, cyclically, not in a straight line. Based on the Aristotelian ontological conception that movement and change are inferior degrees of reality, or being, the Greeks celebrated above all permanence and perpetuity, hence recurrence. Repeating existence ensures the survival of beings through their continuous return. This, in turn, means that the will of the gods – placed at the summit of the existential hierarchy – is fulfilled. To this we need to add the Platonic image of time as the circular motion of celestial spheres capturing the mobility of the eternally immobile divinity. The existence of nature, in its cycles of generation and decay, is also circular. Time is thus circular. Commentators note the important consequences of this view: there is no firm beginning or end of time on a circle; thus the world does not have a beginning or end in a strict sense; hence the sense imparted to history by an act of *Creation* correlated with the event of a final *consummation* is absent too (for example Puech, 1959:41-42, or Smart, 1989). The lack of temporal direction implies a different orientation with regard to the possibility and nature of history as part of the ancient Hellenistic worldview: nothing radical can occur in a circular account; there is only eternal repetition. Thus, as Puech also emphasises, it was in the logic of their view that a philosophy or theology of history could not be fully developed by the Greeks (see also Puech, 1959). Human history and its time are only lower reflections of the superior order of the divine cosmos; time unfolds in a circle because the cosmos itself is on a cyclical course.

Christianity introduced a radically different conception of time. Time became a line, finite at both ends; yet the status of this finitude was not simply physical, related to the human level of existence. Rather, the finite nature of the linear time of Christianity was a manifestation of the will of the divinity. God creates the world, he wills and governs it, the line of time being the single indistinct dimension along which the total history of mankind unfolds. Time is unidimensional and homogenous because, in the Christian story, mankind itself is a single block (Puech, 1959:46). Christian time also flows unidirectionally, “forward” toward an end, a goal which represents not simply a repetition of the beginning, but also the achievement of a dynamic of progress. As commentators note (Eliade, 1954; Puech, 1959; Smart, 1989), with Christianity time receives not just a new orientation but also a new overarching dogmatic meaning. This meaning derives from the very different worldview of the Christians compared to that of the Greeks. For the former world begins in time (chapter 1 of the *Genesis*) and must end in time with the *Apocalypse*. This temporal unfolding of the world’s existence is unique, it will not undergo a restoration, a re-creation or any other form of return. For Christians, the world is entirely temporal, it is “wholly immersed in time” (Puech, 1959:46). God has absolute rule over this world; no other intermediary existences are

interposed between man and divinity. There no longer are demigods, heavenly bodies, or other entities to actualise the rational design of the world; the ontological hierarchy is reduced to two poles: god as infinite and absolute; man as mortal and powerless in relation to time.

This image of the cosmos is not simply a doctrinal coincidence; it fulfils certain deeper needs for the early Christians. Firstly, as a new belief, the story of Christ had to be based on a strong justifying history, radically different from the ones dominant at the time. By adopting as its beginning the Judaic tradition, it gave itself an origin traceable back to the *Genesis*, thus beyond the other great stories of the Babylonians, Egyptians, or Greeks. To relate its history in this fashion, Christianity needed time to be linear; otherwise a historical “before” and “after” would not be logically possible. Secondly, Christianity was drawn to linear time because of its ideological circumstances. The *Messiah*, whose arrival was intensely prophesied around the eastern Mediterranean, was in itself an eschatological figure. Its arrival was expected as the spelling of the end of one phase of history and the beginning of another. The idea of a *Saviour* is bound up with the expectation of an end to the world, and the Pauline account of Christ’s life together with the four Gospels fulfils the role of a coherent story of the end of history. Corroborating the apocalyptic feeling in Israel and Palestine, Jesus’ figure – especially through the resurrection from the dead – supplies the basis upon which the most powerful and coherent current of eschatological monotheism penetrates the Graeco-Roman world (via St. Paul’s teaching) establishing a new sense of time and history in Europe.

Turning back to Gnosticism, scholars saw in it both a “Hellenisation” of Christianity (Harnack, 1886, Burkitt, 1932, or Schaefer, 1932 – cited in Puech, 1959:56), and a “re-orientalisation of Christianity” (Lietzmann, 1949 – cited in Puech, 1959:57). Was Gnosticism a mere variation on the Greek or Oriental themes? As Puech argues, neither wholly represents the Gnostic attitude, and especially its conception of time (Puech, 1959:57). In fact, it can be said that Gnosticism had its own independent view of time and temporal existence and that this view was congruous with its distinct overall doctrine. Moreover, this view could only represent heresy for Christians and was not compatible in spirit with the Hellenic attitude.

How can the Gnostic view of time be characterised? As shown above, for Gnostics, God was separate from the world; indeed, God is opposite to the world which is considered entirely evil. In view of the latter clause, God cannot have any relationship with the world without being sullied and impurified. God intervenes in the world only in order to save men from it. He is alien to history; he does not pursue anything within the world framework. Thus he is an “alien god”, the “other”, the “unknown”, etc. (see Jonas, 1963). God is not given in the ordinary occurrences of daily life, nor in ordinary forms of knowledge. God is “strange”. Moreover, the demi-deity in the Gnostic frame is present with its inferiority in the earthly world and existence which are thus imperfect too.

What does this tense doctrinal co-existence of good and evil mean with regard to the Gnostic conception of time? For the Gnostic – as opposed to the Greek – the world of men is to be despised and denied; the Gnostic does not look up to Heaven for a sign of collaboration between the divine hierarchy and earthly events. The Gnostic believes that existence is ordered in the universe, but that this order is contradictory and especially around the notion of the quality of time: the temporal unfolding of human daily existence

is essentially evil because it is created by evil, whereas the atemporal, eternal, good existence of the deity is what man should aspire to. Worldly time is itself the product of the Demiurge and thus it is tainted and a feeble image of divine eternity. Between them, the doctrine provides no ideatic or conceptual passage like in the case of Zurvanism or Zoroastrianism. Neither Hellenism nor Christianity can accommodate this view. Both provide opportunities for salvation through accession in the “other” realm in which the order is perfect and the sins of earthly existence are pardoned, etc. The Gnostic view of time is neither cyclical, nor continuously linear; history is in fact broken, split in two realms – one of imposture, one of true eternity – without a substantial bond between them. Yet Gnosticism is a religion of salvation, especially of salvation from the evil world of human life. The sense that earthly life is determined by *destiny* gives the Gnostic the substance of his denial of the world and the basis from which to seek release. This substance is the body with its existence subjected to the tribulations of matter, to the inferior finitude manifested through the degradation of the flesh. In this position man finds himself as a consequence of a fall, and it is the reason for which the feeling of nostalgia for the higher original state and denial of the worldly one is the superior attitude to life. Time in this world is servitude (Puech, 1959:64), this existence is strange, alien – *allogenes* – to man’s own self. The sense of worldly time is principally ordered for the Gnostic along the linear direction of biological decay; thus every moment is the victim of the next and the destroyer of the previous. Time itself is degraded, it “contains within it a rhythm of death”, as Puech (1959:66) emphasises, and can only be the source of the existential suffering which characterises embodied life for the Gnostics. Salvation can only come from a deep negation of this kind of time which is *in itself* the most acute manifestation of the fall of *Sophia* (the entity which represented the perfect wisdom of divinity) from heavens, fall caused by an error, a deficiency which throws it into the fatality of finitude and the servitude of the Demiurge. What is interesting at this point is that the Gnostics do not conceive of the physical sky as the representation of the original heaven of the good god. That is why their attitude to astrology and astronomy is one of negation of an illusion that is merely another part of the work of the Prince of Darkness. He created the spheres on the firmament to mislead humans into believing that the divine order is guided by the temporal dimension of the motion of stars and planets.

For the Gnostic both earth and sky are elements of the grand deceit of time; life is a time of profound anguish. Most Gnostic texts, especially lamentations in forms of poems, can be cited as illustrations of this tense relationship with worldly time:

“Deliver me from this profound nothingness,
From the dark abyss which is a wasting away,”

“Never, never is salvation found here;
All is full of darkness.” (cited in Puech, 1959)

The sense of revolt against time in Gnostic texts and tradition is one amongst many examples of feelings of *contemptus mundi* which feature in many less radical systems of belief. The problematic relationship between a finite life full of exertions and the existential aspiration of man toward the blissful realm of immortality leads – in many cases – to the existential problematisation of time itself.

The Gnostic tradition is perhaps one of the most distinctive examples of such an attitude because of its specific association of the difficulties of life's content with the "torture of time" as invented by an imperfect and ill-intended deity. Time itself is the chain of this servitude. The *gnosis* (knowledge) that leads to salvation is precisely understanding this distinction and aspiring to that other – superior, elevated – condition which is the proper one for man. Like in Zurvanism, this understanding would provide answers for the crucial questions of existence: "Who am I and where am I?"; "Whence have I come and why have I come thither?"; and "Whither am I going?" (Puech makes similar comments; 1959:73-74).

These examples are only a few of the abundant illustrations that can be drawn from the study of religious conceptions in traditional societies. Perhaps the most important aspect arising is that the preoccupation with time for a member of a particular religious culture is one of acute existential importance, rather than one of mere secondary, or academic interest. What is interesting is the sense of intense need for answers to fundamental questions relating personal existence to time which represented the source of such complex and sophisticated systems of ideas.

Certain important elements for the present argument emerge from this very brief study of examples of ancient religious thinking. First, it is important to refer to the fact that what appears central in all these doctrines is the exigency of offering first and foremost a coherent conception of time and eternity as answer to the anxieties of finitude, to the open sentiment of acute danger in front of death. Thus, whether making time the ultimate deity as the Zurvanitic Persian, or the ultimate manifestation of evil as the Gnostic does, it is around a stable account of time that the key questions of individual human existence are ordered. Secondly, it is important to note that space is conceptually subordinate to time. The world is ordered by time, and spaces are delineated and inhabited according to their relationship to types of time. Thirdly, time is not a simple, uniform quantity to be rationalised, organised and measured; this view characterised the European tradition later, especially after Descartes and Kant, and became dominant through the gradual secularisation of European culture and the development of capitalism. It was in particular historical and cultural circumstances that the increased rationalisation of the worldview of modern man also led to an increased rationalisation of existential tensions. The disappearance of heaven and hell, of afterlife, of bridges between this world and another, the official dissolution of the space available in the universe for another world – all consequences, at least to some extent, of the cosmological shift engendered by Darwinism – led to a simplification of time itself, to the homogenisation of its existential importance, and to an increased feeling of discomfort with regard to death. The latter came to be seen by the rational mind as an act of the elemental and unthinking life standing in contrast with the spirit of caution and organisation of modernity. Later, medical technology would emphasise the tendency toward the separation of physical aspects of death from its existential and social meaning. The contrast is plainly illustrated by an advice given in the Christian Bible (more precisely in the *Vulgate* version), in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (7:4): "*Justus, si morte preoccupatus fuerit, in refrigerio erit*" ("The good man, if he was mindful of death, will be in paradise" – author's translation).

Following from this contrast of religious and secular attitudes to death, one last important comment must be made here in respect to the measurement of time. Most religious cultures were ordered, amongst other elements, by celestial myths. The

relationship with the *sky* means a relationship with *heaven* for many cultures. The sky represents a direct revelation of transcendence and of infinity. Contemplating the sky is a religious experience. It offers man a measure of his own finitude and modest condition which comes from the simple realisation of the sky's infinite height (Eliade, 1958:39). The starry sky is also providing a sense of stability and regularity because the motion of celestial bodies is the most regular phenomenon observable by man; this order which seems everlasting is interpreted as a sign of the absolute reality and majesty of divinity. To contemplate the sky means to have a particular kind of access to the inaccessible. Through the strict observation of special rites, "good" people may, however, nurture the hope of ascending to the dwellings of the gods after death – in other words, there is a possible connection between the worldly condition and eternity through a proper worship of the order of the sky.

This sense of awe brought with it a careful effort of understanding the manifestation of divinity in the ordering of the sky and the visible motion of stars and planets. If gods are invisible and inaccessible, the sky as sign of their will is revealed to man all at once and, moreover, not merely cognitively (Eliade, 1958:39). Thus, the work of astronomers, astrologers, the construction of observatories (not simply as "scientific" institutions but as temples), the temporal (usually annual) order of worship developed as a mirror of the order of the heavens – all represent the scrupulous devotion of religious man to the precise *measurement* of celestial motion in time units according to which worldly life might too be measured and normed.

But the measurement of time for the description of motion was not done, as will be the case in the European secular cultures of the late second millennium, with a focus upon the temporary passage of man through this world. Rather, it was focused on eternity and the search for a modality of gaining access to heaven for the really important part of universal existence: the eternal domain after death. Time was not measured as resource to be used in worldly pursuits.

The renunciation of eternity that came with the development of the dominantly secular cultures of Western modernity, the demystification of the sky, the "clock culture", or perhaps more precisely the "personal organiser" culture of time measurement, and – as a consequence – the anxiety surrounding "time wasting" in both the private and the public spheres of life are all expressions not of a new and better, accurate "knowledge" of time, but of a new cosmology which has resolved to give ontological reality to the time of "this life" and to repudiate as "unreal" any notion of another kind of time which would have existential relevance to man. As Le Goff comments upon the interest generated by Dante's references to time measures in cantos 10, 14 and 15 of the *Paradise*, it was not simply the coming technology of the mechanical clock which made time a key problem, but "the true historical context, the context of a society as a whole rather than of technique a society, in its economic, social, and mental structures" (Le Goff, 1980:43).

One of the themes in the European culture of the two Christian millennia which offers a glimpse into the subtle transformation in the views of modern man is the general manner of narration, especially with regard to the emergence of the modern novel. Myth and legend fade due to the narrower space of Christian scriptures, markedly so after the Renaissance. What is powerfully affirmed by the modern novel is ordinary life, life as it is experienced in the time of this world. As Taylor (1989:286) also notes, an important feature of the reframed narrative modes of modernity is the equalisation of the

importance of daily human life in relation to that of the mythical types, or archetypes, as well as the more egalitarian treatment given to the lives of different classes and groups in society. This is favoured by the egalitarian treatment of people in the writings of the Christian tradition, but it would also mean that narration will gradually escape the rule of the other-worldly, that archetypes would slowly leave the centre-stage to the events of human life. Thus, the temporal permanence of archetypal models, the sense in which – for the believer – the archetype recurs for every epoch, or generation, in a sort of temporal equidistance to all ages are replaced by the inevitable transitory character of human life. However, a new mode of coping with finitude emerges in parallel. The Cartesian solution of *disengaged reason* created the basis for a new self-understanding: modern man sees himself as living in objective, “homogenous, empty time” (Benjamin, 1973) whose meaning is merely physical. Time is the physical context in which events occur in causal or conditional relationships. The stories of existence are told to an individualised audience who is confronted with a “slice” of this physical time in which events more or less connected occur within an ephemeral story-space (Taylor, 1989:288). The story is told about other people. The fundamental change for modern man is that the characters’ story-space is optically separate from the space of the reader’s own life. It is the story of others, like ourselves but not exactly, their experiences are non-transferable. As humans, they too are uniquely located however much insistence is put on exaggerating some of the dimensions of certain circumstances. In actual fact, exaggeration is not logically possible within the modern novel, or film: they must tell the story of life “as it is”. For the reader, the story remains existentially meaningless outside its limited space; lessons can hardly be drawn out although sometimes there is an intense search for moral types or archetypes on behalf of the audience. What is achieved at most is an aesthetic connection, an identification at the superficial level of sensorial experience, especially when the medium involved is based on visual imagery. This makes imitation (known as fashion) – rather than emulation (in the tradition of Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*) – the main feature of the latest phase of modern narrative culture brought about by the domination of television.

As Watt comments, the “formal realism” of the modern novel is based upon “the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human existence” (Watt, 1957:34-35). This premise will find its most fertile ground in the process of the upstaging of the written word by the visual realism of the film medium. Most illustrative is the rise and dominance of TV realism by soap operas. For the authors, they represent an attempt at capturing “reality” as experienced by “real” characters in “real” situations; for the audience, the relationship is more ambiguous in that the characters and situations also come to represent (more or less consciously) some form of ideal type, of archetype, especially in moral terms. Yet soap operas may be interpreted as failing to become genuine myths perhaps mainly because the attempt to be real in human terms means that stories must inevitably be told in terms of temporal finitude. The temporal dimension of realism leaves always open and problematic the problem of ending life stories because their only logical closure is mortality. The general tendencies in the evolution of plots and characters’ lives appear to bear out the general discomfort with finitude: firstly, most soap operas cannot be somehow ended, and, secondly, the exit of characters is a permanent narrative difficulty for producers and directors.

The destiny of soap operas can usefully be contrasted with other modes of narrative whose expression of existential tensions can be seen as perplexing the sense of linear

time characteristic of modern realism. The twentieth century provides abundant examples: the *theatre of the absurd* (Ionesco, Beckett, Brecht, Albee, etc.), the *magic realism* of Marquez, Llosa, or Borges, but also the more cryptic time equivocations in the neo-Romantic novels of Hesse or T. Mann, or Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1954). Last, but certainly not least, Proust's monumental *Remembrance of Things Past* (1969) represents one of the most radical instances in which the modern self seizes the existential malaise which characterises modern rationality in relation to time making it so suspicious of the problem of eternity.

Although these works still appear as a recounting of events, temporal boundaries and sequences are profoundly altered and the shapes of life which emerge seem markedly unreal, yet also disturbing precisely because they are intimately connected with real human experiences of time as non-linear and mysterious. For the modern mind, these literary forms offer a form of refuge from linear, rational reality by creating a reflective space in which the irrational can be contemplated and, at times, cathartically realised.

Overall, the contrast between religious and secular accounts of time offers insight into the perennial importance of time, but also in the subtleties of its treatment in history, subtleties inherent in the difficulty and general undecidability of the subject of time.

B. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS: TIME IN TWENTIETH CENTURY THOUGHT

This section of the overview of the theme of time will mainly deal with the developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the second millennium AD. However, modern philosophies and sciences cannot be explored without a brief reference to the ways in which time was conceptualised in the Hellenistic period. Much of what contemporary conceptions hold to be true owes, often to a very large extent, to the ancient and scholastic traditions of thought.

Philosophy can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Historically, as Gadamer suggests, philosophy itself can be seen as a "peculiar sort of activity which erupted in the fourth-century BC Athens and radiated out from the person and work of Socrates." (Gadamer, 1981: x-xi) In a laconic formulation, one of the crucial differences between religion and philosophy was the need of elucidation of the latter, the need to shed light (*e-luci-date*) on the mysteries which the former preserves, the need of the latter for human answers to questions which the former maintains as the domain of the divine and the initiate.

Time has preoccupied philosophers since the dawn of what we call nowadays philosophy. It is possible to see the Greek world as disposed around two main views of time: on the one hand, the proto-relativism of Parmenides and Zeno; on the other hand, the dynamism of Heraclitus and Aristotle. The former tradition maintains that time as passing, change, past-future statements are all illusions. Later developments in physical sciences, mainly the theory of relativity in the twentieth century, have stressed this view to the point of denying the existence of temporal "becoming".

The Aristotelian view offers a conception of temporal passing which emphasises the dynamic reality of time in motion in its relationship with past, present and future. As alluded to above, for Aristotle motion has as its main reference the heavenly sphere

which embraces everything that exists. But the heavenly sphere is not simply space¹, it is first and foremost *time*. He says that everything is in time which revolves under the vault of heaven (Aristotle, 1936:218^b6f). From relating motion to time, in chapter 11 of the *Physics*, in book 4 (chapters 4.10-14 – i.e. the treatise on time), Aristotle develops his definition:

“For time is just this – number of motion in respect to the before and after.”
(Aristotle, 1936:219^b1f)

As Heidegger explains, time for Aristotle is “this something counted which shows itself *in and for* regard to the before and after in motion, or, in short, something counted in connection with motion as encountered in the horizon of the before and after” (Heidegger, 1982:235). Aristotelian time as rhythm of motion, but also time as “number of motion” (as *arithmos*) is the closest metaphor of time to the modern European worldview. In its intimate convictions, it has been an important element of the doctrine of Christian theology, through Augustine’s *Confessiones* (11:14²), then through the scholasticism of Aquinas and Suarez, through Enlightenment philosophy in the works of Leibniz, Kant and Hegel, and, finally, it has been at the bottom of certain dominant views of modernity. It is the latter cultural period’s conceptions which are key to the overall argument of this thesis.

For Europe, the twentieth century began under the spell of the success of the nineteenth. Moreover, at the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant conception of time was still basically the one which had been established a hundred years earlier by Immanuel Kant. On the basis of Newtonian mechanics, Kant developed in *Transcendental Aesthetics* (first part of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1983) the idea that time is not a “thing” in itself, or a substance. Alongside space, Kant conceptualised time as an *a priori* form of human sensibility, one of the “pure forms of sensible intuition”. An interesting paradox ensues: in Kantian *ontology*, space and time are conditions of *epistemological* possibility: the first enables the human subject to “know” co-incident, the second succession. Kant conceptualises time as reflexive, as a dimension of the basic constitution of human subjectivity. In the centuries past since Kant, however, this idea of time has been systematically misinterpreted both in philosophy and particularly in natural sciences. It has been assumed that Kant had actually refuted the reality of time and that he saw it as a mere subjective illusion. Yet there was nothing “subjective” about time and space in Kant’s intention, certainly not in the normal sense of the word. His concepts were intended as “pure”, non empirical forms; they represent structures which are universal (identical for all individuals) and transcendental (prior to all experience).

This ambiguity in abstraction favoured two major lines of interpretation in philosophy and science, both of which became the basis for ideas which led to searches for *unified* notions of time. On the one hand, there were those who interpreted Kant’s theory as implying that there is only one time and one space, i.e. an “absolute” time and an “absolute” space within which the “phenomena” studied in various forms of science occur. On the other hand, as will be shown below, there were scientists who interpreted

¹ as contemporary physical thought is used to see since Descartes, i.e. the three directions of the expanse of things.

² In passage 14 of book XI, Augustine makes his often-cited comment on the nature of time: “What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain it, I am baffled.”(Saint Augustine, 1961:264)

the transcendental subjectivism of Kant's time as suspending its very reality as a dimension of existence.

However, a more adequate interpretation of Kant's critique of the assumed objectiveness of time shows that he did not probably intended to reduce time to the level of a mere illusion. His association of time with the subject – albeit in transcendental conception – can be seen as relatively direct attempt to give the intuitive sense of time's objectivity a new metaphysical base by creating a transcendental theory of sensible intuition. He accentuated intuition as the primordial source of all human knowledge thus offering an antithesis to the dominant tradition which held, as Plato did, that true knowledge can only be an outcome of processes of intelligent cognition. This basic intention can be detected from the opening sentence of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1783):

“In whatever manner and by whatever means a mode of knowledge may relate to objects, intuition is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed.”

At the turn of the twentieth century Kant's view dominated the development of the natural sciences.

McTaggart, the British philosopher and founder of analytical philosophy of time, provides one of the illustrative examples of the ways in which the misunderstanding of Kant's idea of time took roots especially within analytical philosophy. He was among those who suggests that, “In philosophy, again, time is treated as unreal by Spinoza, by Kant, by Hegel and by Schopenhauer” (McTaggart, 1908). McTaggart saw his own work as an analytic extension of the proof of time's unreality, as it was allegedly demanded by Kant:

“I believe that time is unreal. But I do so for reasons which are not, I think, employed by any of the philosophers whom I have mentioned (...)” (McTaggart, 1908:462)

What McTaggart proves in fact is nothing more than what Kant had shown: not that time is absolutely unreal (as McTaggart believed), but rather that time's reality is dependent upon the subject. In Kant's ontology, time lacks only a certain kind of reality, not reality altogether. Thus it is not the case that time is unreal in an indiscriminate sense, and just a mere illusion. Moreover, time's subject-dependence is by no means a deficit of reality; time's being is not less valuable in contrast to other things. Otherwise, as others have shown (e.g. Dummett, 1960), time as a subject-independent, fully describable reality is a formal fiction which implies access to a level of reality through which we connect with the inner essence of entities inner-being, but not through our perceptory conditionings, i.e. outside our own experience. Kant's aim was to resolve this logical predicament inherited especially via the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions.

Among scientists, similar positions with regard to time's supposed unreality were taken, for example, by Einstein and Gödel. Einstein's developed as a natural extension of the arguments emerging from his critique Newtonian physics. In 1905, it formed the basis for the formulation of the “restricted” theory of relativity, which was to be followed a few years later by the “generalised” theory of relativity. This was a major transformation of orthodoxy in physics because, without challenging the mathematical

results established by Newton, it revealed that the latter were only valid within a given framework of reference. In other words, there appeared to be no “absolute” space or time, but only systems of co-ordinates whose scales and references can be easily modified. Gödel supported Einstein’s proof that time had lost its objective meaning through the relativity of simultaneity:

“In short, it seems that one obtains an unequivocal proof for the view of those philosophers who, like Parmenides, Kant, and the modern idealists, deny the objectivity of change and consider change as an illusion or an appearance due to our special mode of perception.” (Gödel, 1959:557)

Wallerstein’s categories of *TimeSpace* belong to the family of approaches which took the space-time nexus from relativity physics into the realm of human and historical sciences. Like Wallerstein’s, Giddens’s work (1981, 1984) represents the social world in terms of time–space relations. However, the work of these authors subtly ignores the curvature of time-space systems in the physical theory of relativity. Due to any system’s mass, time and space is curved. Eventually, the system is bent to the point of circularity; hence the notions of “before” and “after” loose sense. In Einstein’s physics the conclusion was inevitable: time co-exists with itself; past, present and future co-exist. The subsequent appeal of notions of “time travel” derived from this theoretical clause. What remained ignored was that neither functionalist approaches (such as Wallerstein’s), nor anti-functionalist attempts (such as Giddens’s) could clarify the way in which the paradox of temporal circularity could be resolved in the terms of human existence and history. Neither an individual’s life, nor social histories seem to return, or fold back upon themselves. And yet the application of relativity categories to the historical or social world has been comfortably confined to the theme of globalisation. In the context of globalisation, functionalist approaches, and alternatives to functionalism (such as Giddens’s work cited above) converge in creating a unified image of the temporal dynamics of society and history. This is due to one of relativity’s key human consequence: Einstein’s theoretical construction implicitly (and for some explicitly) re-problematizes *human free will*. If time is indeed co-existent with itself then the future has already happened; hence, present human agency is void because existence is not contingent. The world appears as *already* determined. Braudel’s account offers precisely this type of translation of structural pre-determination of culture by technology and economy. Wallerstein takes this notion one step forward and develops an account which grounds the notion of cultural relativisation to technology and economy through *TimeSpace* as matrix of world-economies. The temporal dimension of Braudel’s and Wallerstein’s historical accounts allows the establishment of a view of world-space as homogenous. But the recourse to relativity theory categories in social sciences has not yet managed to give a satisfactory answer to the existential dimension of human experience manifest in the central problem of free-will (or agency).

Quantum theory increased the conceptual tensions regarding the unfolding of processes at subatomic levels, especially concerning causality as a meaningful element of experience. The speed of light can not be used as constant reference value to establish sequences of events because time intervals collapse to a degree of smallness which makes causality meaningless. The notion of “quantum” is used to represent theoretically microscopic units of energy and time (according to Adam, 1990:58) with their own space–time referentials. This view shows nature and matter as a complex interlacing of endless quanta with their own dynamics and parts to play in a universal web. The

difference between the temporal dimension of quanta and the sense of temporality in common experience is explained by Capra (1982:83) who shows that at the subatomic level we would be surprised to find that “the interrelations and interactions between the parts of the whole are more fundamental than the parts themselves. There is motion but there are, ultimately, no moving objects; there is activity but there are no actors; there are no dancers, there is only dance.” Quantum theory was echoed in social theory too. According to Adam’s comment (1990:58), the category of quantum “forms a pivotal part in the social systems analysis of Luhmann” (see Luhmann, 1978). Luhmann’s contribution to social theory was itself part of the sociocybernetic movement in the first decades of the second half of the twentieth century.

The overall sway of systems theory captured scientific imagination in many different theoretical fields. The tendency toward a homogenous explanation of time characterises not only relativity or quantum theory circles, but other strands in contemporary scientific thinking about time. Research on time has been part of the wider effort to develop a homogenous conception which would unify everyday experiences of the self and the world within a comprehensive academic theory about nature and man. Another example is the *global time concept* developed between physics, chemistry and biology within the framework of *theories of “self-organisation”* (discussed by Krohn et al., 1990). Early cybernetic theory studies were also located within this conceptual framework. In 1962, a volume of proceedings was published exploring the principles of self-organisation (Von Foerster and Zopf, 1962). The main aim of this work was to examine the concepts which would allow the creation of models to clarify the oneness of machine automation, individual cognition and the coupling between the functioning of collective human organisations and technology. The work of cybernetic theorists was in fact an effort of bridging understanding of natural and human processes of thought and action through a common framework of systemic analysis. The origins of the principles of self-organising systems emanated from biology but spread due to deep intellectual affinities to human “organisations”, as Ross Ashby comments (1962). The most notable aspect of self-organising systems theory is its direct conceptual link to Hayek’s market theories and – perhaps less obviously – with Wallerstein’s theory of the world system. Ross Ashby’s review of the principles of self-organisation (1962) shows that the overall theoretical framework – which has “global time” at its centre – is very similar to Hayek’s category of spontaneous order. Notions of conditionality between wholes and parts, of spontaneous generation of organisation within a competitive environment, the category of requisite variety (from the theory of information) represent the basis upon which Ross Ashby concludes that, “Today we know *exactly* what we mean by “machine”, by “organisation”, by “integration”, and by “self-organisation”. We understand these concepts as thoroughly and as rigorously as the mathematician understands “continuity” or “convergence”” (Ross Ashby, 1962:277). Furthermore, he argues that all these notions are of the same ontic order, that they are “operators” whose actions can be seen “over a long time, as both unchanging and single-valued” (Ross Ashby, 1962:277).

From this conception of the world as a systemic collection of systems, time has also been deduced as uniform and “global”, namely a systemic time, a medium for actors but independent of their actions. Self-organisation theory was seen by its advocates as a way of overcoming the duality between *natural* time and *historical* time, and thus as a resolution to the conflict between physical, biological and philosophical approaches to time. Recently, in this context, Lübke suggested,

“that even the temporal structure of historicity, which, according to Heidegger and the hermeneutic theory which followed him, results exclusively from the subject’s relationship to itself, which constitutes meaning, is in reality a structure belonging to all open and dynamic systems which is indifferent to the subject matter” (Lübbe, 1992).

Prigogine too noted earlier, in the light of his thermodynamic theory of irreversibility, that,

“Whatever the future of these ideas, it seems to me that the dialogue between physics and natural philosophy can begin on a new basis. I don’t think that I can exaggerate by stating that the problem of time marks specifically the divorce between physics on one side, psychology and epistemology on the other. (...). We see that physics is starting to overcome these barriers.” (Prigogine, 1973)

This review of theoretical developments which dominated theoretical physics and the other fundamental natural sciences (chemistry and biology), as well as social theories in the twentieth century depicts the contrast between discourses of time in modern sciences and in religious doctrines. The latter were preoccupied with the existential position of humans in the universe; the former aimed to explain the human via other units of analysis. The temporal dimension of human existence is absorbed in unified scientific views of the world whose core laws are the laws of non-human entities such as space-time systems, quanta, automata. Religious views centred their discourse on man and portrayed the universe as a medium created by divinity for human existence. It is important to note the shift in focus in the two quests for solutions to interpretations of the world and of man’s place in it.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, in response to the scientific pursuit of unified models of time and space, new philosophical theories aimed to restore man as the central unit of analysis of fundamental ontology. The theme of time is one of the central – perhaps the most important – elements in the new post-Kantian and non-scientific philosophical arguments.

This family of metaphysical critiques is complex to define. Its origins can be seen in ideas of philosophers who were unreceptive to the rationalism of Kant and Hegel whose ideas were seen as disregarding irreducibly human aspects of human existence (“being affects” like worry, anxiety, or mystical feelings). These did not seem conceivable in terms of formal reasoning and Hegel in particular ignored them in his works. The reaction generated by his views in the middle of the nineteenth century has been first illustrated in Kierkegaard’s work *Fear and Trembling* (1987) – a meditation on the fragility of existence threatened by death. His work (1980; 1987) contains the elements of what was soon to become “existentialism”, or, more accurately, the current of existence philosophy.

For existence philosophers, human time – far from being a simple, univocal and homogenous reality like so-called physical time – is seen above all in terms of the perception which the subject has of it. This view appears simple and prone to accusations of relativism; twentieth century thought, however, worked with it in a variety of ways.

With his *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1927), *Matter and Memory* (1896), and *Duration and Simultaneity* (1965), Bergson's was the first critique of Kant's "abstract" conception of time. Bergson makes a key theoretical breakthrough signalled above in the contrast between scientific and religious conceptions of time.

He stated that Kant's conception presented philosophy with an obstacle: the confusion between "*objective*" time (the time of physical science, of matter and clocks) and the *existential time* of personal human consciousness. For Bergson, the former can be measured by numbers. Moreover, it is an artificial, *epistemological* construction of logical thought. A discussion of the latter can only be pursued in *ontological terms* because it is not time but a pure, ineffable "duration" which is the fundamental category added by Bergson in the study of time. Duration is not independent of the subject, it is intertwined with the flow of consciousness itself. As such, it is beyond both formal analysis and beyond calculation. Yet this distinction is little more than postulated by Bergson although it is central to his entire work. A development of Bergson's theory can be found in the work of another author, Bachelard (1950), but the latter's ideas are not purely Bergsonian.

Nevertheless, Bergson opened an entirely new modality of conceptualising human time which takes it back into the realm of existence with its imperatives and tensions. His insight will be developed by Husserl's phenomenology which legitimated the notion of human time, and will culminate in the works of Heidegger which will form the substance of part III of this thesis. Bergson's importance in European modern thought relates to the main aim of this thesis because it marks the opening toward a re-consideration of man as a unit of analysis with regard to time.

A decisive contribution was made by Husserl (who was not aware of Bergson's work) through a course of lecture given during 1904-5 at Göttingen University. The *Phenomenology Of Internal Time-Consciousness* is the collected volume of these lectures published in 1928 by Heidegger (translated in English by Churchill in 1964). Husserl's inquiry continues questioning the way in which our consciousness of time is originally formed. He relates to Kant in answering this question by challenging the theories of Brentano. Husserl begins by excluding what he calls objective time and he sees this as opening the path toward a more comprehensive phenomenology of human, or time-consciousness. As in his general phenomenological project (1960; 1964), Husserl believed that time too can be understood by the mind through what he calls the *epoche* which is the key to his phenomenology. This means that the mind should attempt a "reduction" exercise which consists of "bracketing out" all pre-existing assertions which relate existential time to the objective time of physicists. For him, what then appears to make our intuition of time possible is the "intentional aspect" of our consciousness – in other words, the ability of the latter to recall a particular sensory impression (for example a sound) as an "object" in what he calls a "secondary remembrance" (Husserl, 1964:57 ff.). This process of "retention" has no linear limits, it can be retained over and over again, in continuity with the previous one, and so on. This process is for Husserl, the basis of our consciousness and of time. Consciousness (and human existence), as well as time are both related in the same flow of experience (Husserl, 1964:175 ff.). This is where Husserl's categories place him firmly in the existence philosophy movement. For him, the flow of lived experiences precedes all discussion and, all scientific interpretation. Husserl's phenomenological description is still a search for a theory of transcendental subjectivism, a post-Kantian one, yet one

which would resolve metaphysically (not existentially) the tension between humans and the world. The move toward making human existence in the time of everyday experience the ultimate domain of ontology was to come later, with Heidegger's *Being and Time* in 1927 which will be discussed in part III.

The review of time so far contrasts unified theories of time (working with units of analysis which reduce the diversity of human experiences of time to transcendental non-human essences of existence), and the existential turn in the twentieth century which produced theories focusing precisely on the incommensurable and irreducible uniqueness of human experiences of time. This co-existence of theoretical modes of time analysis had important consequences in different fields of study. For this thesis, one interesting aspect is that of the changes brought about by existential conceptions in the work of certain historians. On a collective level, new versions of history begin to show that human perceptions of time are formed entirely by social codes which vary according to time and place. Anthropological historians (such as the ones mentioned at the beginning of this study) show that there appear to be no absolute calendars in societies, but only calendars created for political or religious purposes. The argument is that human adaptation is a process of identifying and coding the *laws of existence derived from experience*. With these codes, adjusting the course of time through calendars is one and the same thing with enforcing these laws. These views became established with the success in the 1960s of the *Annales School* and Braudel followed by Wallerstein, and of the so-called *history of mentalities* (advocated by Ariès (1987-1990), and Foucault (1970, 1971, 1972, 1978)). Braudel's and Wallerstein's views are, however, not existentialist. Neither accept the primordial historical role of the human agent and its experience of time. Their work approaches human agents in a relativist – rather than existentialist manner – and this explains their turn toward non-human temporal flows (as shown above) as primordial ordering principles of human history. Their historical narrative shows a close affinity with a homogenous non-human view of time which was briefly shown in the present section.

This new historiography gave rise to re-problematisations of the ways in which historical writing develops. One of the main analysts of the problem of narrative forms is Ricoeur in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1984). His work is influenced by Anglo-American linguistics and philosophy, but also by the “hermeneutic” (or interpretative) thought put forward by Gadamer (1975). Ricoeur interprets the meaning of human experiences of time by analysing novels and historical narrations. He shows that the creation of a plot, the core of all stories, unfolds in the same way in which people, individually or collectively, create personal identities through historical accounts of experience legitimising certain moral aspirations. Time is contained in language and thus is vested with an existential human aim of an ontological and ethical nature.

Thus, Ricoeur's research disputes the unified non-human modes of time analysis which lie at the heart of the unification tendency in certain contemporary theories of time. He opposes this tendency by revealing the impenetrable incommensurability between historical and natural time. Human time, exists, on the one hand, in broken down form of diverse, immeasurable “temporalities” of diverse experiences; on the other hand, these “temporalities” depend upon and can only be deciphered by referring to their original existential meaning encapsulated in their founding narrative.

Ricoeur's view illustrates how human time can be understood as uniquely divided into a multitude of mutually incompatible heterogeneous concepts. Ricoeur shows "the break, on the level of epistemology, between phenomenological time on the one hand and astronomical, physical, and biological time on the other" (1984) as being insurmountable. This means, for Ricoeur, that the claimed convergence between the two heterogeneous understandings of time is "a phenomenon of mutual contamination" through which "the notion of history had been extrapolated from the human sphere to the natural sphere" (Ricoeur, 1984).

One of the most important comments made by Ricoeur in light of the interest in the present thesis regards the notions of "change" and "history" in their relationship to time. He argues that the underlying discontinuity which exists "between a time without a present (natural time) and a time with a present (historical time)", there can be no "reciprocal overlapping of the notions of change (or evolution) and history". He sees the two categories placed together in a relationship which is factually without foundation, and is as such to be refuted. Ricoeur thinks that, "whatever the interference's between the time with a present and the time without a present, they presuppose the fundamental distinction between an anonymous instant and a present defined by the instance of discourse that designates this present reflexively" – i.e. the present of a human being rather than of a non-human entity (Ricoeur, 1984). Hence, to Ricoeur, "it... seems impossible... to include phenomenological time in the time of nature, whether it is a question of quantum time, thermodynamic time, the time of galactic transformations, or that of the evolution of species" (1984). Phenomenological – i.e. human – time, with an existential and historical dimension of future, past and present, is explained as being appropriate only in the narrative medium of human beings. Finally, for Ricoeur, time marks the "mystery" in our thought; thus it declines representation in measurable terms. The thought of measuring existential time like we measure physical time is, for Ricoeur, a logical impossibility in that our existence irrevocably pervades our thinking. In other words, what is to be measured is a feature of the agent who measures¹.

This basic review of the trends in contemporary conceptions of time considered the common assumptions underlying the theses behind theories of unified time, and the antitheses which emphasise an irreconcilable divergence between natural and historical time. The proponents of views lending time a unified character regard the ontological universality of time as an aspect of the universe as proven by the unity of historical and natural time in theories of self-organisation. Proponents of the incommensurability of historical time argue differently. They see the plurality of time as referring to the problematic nature of existential time which is at once given in common to all human beings, but which is lived uniquely by each of them through their unrepeatable place and contribution to history. This type of time in principle defies representation, but seems to be factually evident through the very experience of its unrepresentability.

As indicated at the beginning of the study, the twentieth century bears the seal of two tendencies. The culmination of the modern understanding of time has its origins within philosophy in the two differing approaches of Kant and Heidegger: the former arguing for the universality and ahistoricity of time; the latter for the existential relativity and historicity of time.

¹ An equally important contribution to the clarification of the difference between physical and phenomenological time can be found in the work of one of Husserl's students, Roman Ingarden (1964).

Above all, with regard to time the twentieth century witnessed the culmination of the malaise of modernity which is resolutely manifest in the need for a so-called radical “temporalisation of time” perhaps best expressed in Musil’s novel *The Man Without Qualities* mentioned above:

“The train of events is a train unrolling its rails ahead of itself. The river of time is a river sweeping its banks along with it. The traveller moves about on a solid floor between solid walls; but the floor and the walls are being moved along too, imperceptibly, and yet in very lively fashion, by the movements that his fellow-travellers make.” (Musil, 1954)

3. Time in management education

What foundational conception of time can be traced in the underlying discourses of management education? The question of time addressed revolves around the following distinction: is time in the MBA framework seen as a homogenising medium in which human practices are determined by a rationalistic principle of another order? In other words, can the analysis of the tendencies in modern philosophical and scientific traditions allow us to evaluate the view of time implicit in the paradigm of management education? Is the latter’s view of time equally faithful to the overall functionalist tenor of its worldview which has emerged so far? Can it be said that, through economic and functionalist approaches, time is denied its existential importance with regard to the human present in the reality of practice?

To develop this critical discussion of the temporal dimension of international management education, this section draws, on the one hand, on elements provided in Costea (2000 – especially chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6); and, on the other hand, on some of the literature on time in management and organisational studies (especially Hassard, 1996; Thrift, 1990; Adam, 1990; Nowotny, 1994).

The aim of this critique is consistent with the overall aim of the thesis: to advance understanding of the representation of human diversity in management education. The axis of the analysis is provided by the contrast set up in the previous sections of this study – i.e. between *functional time* as represented by MBA discourses, and *historical time* as existential temporal horizon of human practice. The argument follows a relatively simple line: if ideas developed in Costea (2000) are correct, then the preoccupation in management education with a representation of the world of management practices as one ordered *exclusively* by economic and functional (systemic) principles, then – despite its silence as a subject of study – the conception of time underlying these approaches must be itself consistent with the overall implications of the paradigm. In other words, the temporal horizon of human practices is itself absorbed in certain ways in the economic-functionalist view of human beings and of the world as space for history. Thus, time itself is rendered homogenous by being treated as a “mass” in which agents act with a single purpose, that of synchronising their actions and make more efficient use of time as a economic resource. This sense of what time is can be detected from the ideas presented in this thesis so far. The dominance of the theme of business policy and strategy is the first element which, in combination with economics, accounting and finance, gives the MBA its clear grounding in an economic view of the world and of the passage of history. The indicators used in specific models (like those explored in chapter 3) imply time as a rhythm or rate of economic aggregates, rather than

of human action. The latter is implicit in the former: human time is only as valuable as the economic results of its deployment as a resource. The theme of time in accounting techniques is even more strongly non-human: the pursuit of *net present value* indicators for various aspects of what are perceived to be company assets at any given point represents the basis upon which allocation decisions are taken. Accounting techniques are ordered temporally around the “*present monetary value* of everything” – i.e. accounting is used in a process of translation in monetary language of every aspect deemed of economic interest for the corporate unit. In this context, the dominance of economic rationality makes the MBA framework a family of discourses in which human existence, with its unfolding in specific historical and cultural time, is extracted from these contexts and presented as uniform, temporally determined by a single factor, economic adaptability, in which historical and cultural locations are mere variations whose influence upon economic performance can itself be quantified and compared. The obsession with measurement gives the conception of time in mainstream management education its focus; but, by doing so, it abandons the irreducibly human experiences of time, those which in fact constitute managerial and organisational practices. Themes such as motivation (within the corporation) and globalisation (as a world perspective) are attempts to incorporate human realities of time in a rationalistic framework which purports to give historical priority to an economic outlook on the overall destiny of humanity.

Although these aspects can be advanced about management education, there is little management literature which deals with time, and much less about time in management education. Das (1990:267) observes that “the dimension of time remains largely unexamined in the management and organisational studies (although an important focus in the sociology of work and organisations) very little has been accomplished in this area.” Whipp (1994) corroborates Das’ point by commenting that the “gross assumptions made by the western world about such a fundamental dimension of human existence have remained intact for too long. ...the way in which innovations in time-ordering have been reported, by both practitioners and analysts, is fraught with difficulties and lost opportunities.” He sees as the main problem “of both commercial and scholarly appreciations of time and management ... the narrow conceptions of time employed. Whether it be at the level of organisation or industry, rationalism and linearity dominates” (Whipp, 1994:100).

On the other hand, there are sociological and psychological texts which deal with the way in which time is managed in contemporary capitalism and the way in which time is conceptualised by general economic and functional discourses. To arrive at a better understanding of time in management education, this analysis will draw on a number of such sources as complement of the argument pursued so far.

As Hassard (1996) suggests, many of the texts focusing on time in the domain of management emphasise its gradual historical appropriation in the family of “economic resources”. In economic theories, as results for example from Costea (2000 – chapter 5), the temporal dimension remains a constant reality, a linear dimension whose variability is only one of *value* in the specific circumstances of the market game. The higher the speed of action due to the information possessed by an agent, the more efficient it is, hence the more valuable the time of that agent is. It is at this point that one of the major elements of divergence between human time and the economic view of human time occurs: economic theorising cannot take into account but time used by the agent to

engage in economic action. Invariably, economic theory will only be able to comprehend this kind of human time. The existential side of human experience is adumbrated and eventually excluded from economic reckoning of time. That part of life-time not used for economic purposes becomes a variable of irrationality, of added expenses, of economic loss. As will be shown below, the functional approach of the MBA will further exclude – *tacitly* – from the sphere of management reasoning the irrational time of human problems as a desynchronising factor in the flow of corporate life-time.

The gradual commodification of time, crystallised in images such as “time is money” or “time is a limited resource” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), has been seen as one of the most important ways in which human concerns in the workplace are replaced by the concerns of corporations. Since Marx, the problem of time and its allocation between the private and the public spheres of life has been seen as central to understanding industrialism and managerial controls. Many authors have emphasised that the appropriation by corporations of individual human beings results not only in a quantitative limitation of private time, but also in a subtle shift in the general social discourses of time (Thompson, 1967; Nyland; 1986; Thrift, 1990). The economic development in Western Europe over the last six centuries has placed technological, economic and financial concerns at the top of the social agenda with regard to the use of time as a resource. Thrift (1990:105) argues that English society became the “domain of technique” and that private life in turn became slowly fragmented and isolated ironically from the mainstream matters of pursuing economic gain. The calculative focus of social action led, according to Thrift, to a change in the consciousness of time over a period from the 14th to the nineteenth century.

The way in which time is conceptualised in social discourses transforms the sense of self-identity of entire cultures. Gradually, people begin to see life as made of every day economic acts which require careful calculation in a world seen as a network of markets of different types. This led, historically, to a substitution of religious and secular calendars based on the observation of rhythms of life with a more and more homogenous time-mass whose internal qualitative differentiations are less and less observable as marking specific ways of unfolding human time. Thrift’s argument can be continued to assess contemporary social practices and views of time in which the day, week and year are less and less distinguishable. A higher proportion of time is demanded by industries for work and the means by which this is achieved are highly intrusive. For example, corporate practices such as the use of shopping substitutes for their employees, the use of child-minding agencies for most of the day and week are modes through which time becomes disembedded from human existence and seized upon by economic organisations who take centre-stage in social ordering.

As Nyland (1986) shows, this tendency receives a parallel conceptual translation through the works of different scholars over the last several centuries. Nyland groups them in several categories such as mercantilists, classical economists, Marxists, Jevonsians, etc. (Nyland, 1986). The common feature of the genesis of the economic discourse of time is that society can be rationalised and unified under one set of principles. Economic reasoning plays the primordial role in the generation of different concepts of social order because the widening sphere of capitalist markets offers this new historical horizon. Gradually, economic aggregate notions assume the role of references for social equilibrium. As Nyland explains, the notion of the national balance of trade occupies a

central role in mercantilists' view of national prosperity (Nyland, 1986 republished in Hassard, 1990:131). Alongside this macro-economic notion, micro-economic variables are used to portray economic health, first the cost of labour-power for an enterprise (Nyland, 1986). The argument in favour of low pay was, however, based on a cultural reality: workers as direct producers tended to reduce the time they spent working in pursuit of leisure. The priority for mercantilists became one of finding the level of income which would ensure that workers survive but also that they spend increasing time at work.

This view, according to Nyland, was challenged after more than two centuries by the classical economists. They argued that the notion of a depressed life standard for workers might be in fact counter-productive, that a sense of increased economic gain would stimulate them instead. This new view of work-time represents, for Nyland, a critical aspect of the rise of classical political economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, followed by the neo-classical views of the twentieth. With Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, the challenge for political economy was one of reviewing its concept of human nature. Smith's contribution in this direction was basically one which can relate directly to contemporary models of motivation which dominate mainstream MBA teaching. He argued that, in spite of its ethical limitations (laziness and negligence), humans have basic *drives* and *needs* of an economic nature which predispose them toward a certain amount of useful work. Moreover, Smith argued, people are also characterised by egoism which means they are also in permanent pursuit of self-interest. In 1965, Becker was to re-crystallise this set assumptions in his discussion of time for consumption and time for work. In this neo-classical view, individuals are indeed driven on the one hand, by the desire for more goods (through increased income), and on the other hand by the desire for more leisure.

This view has remarkable influence on the implicit view of human nature in economic theories. Hayek's own view (examined in Coseta, 2000 – chapter 5) developed a similar concept taking on the implicit bases of evolutionary thought and self-organising systems principles.

Hill (in Blyton et al., 1989:57) summarises the contemporary state of economic views of time. For him, time in economics is either seen as a "calibration of change, allowing variations in economic values to be measured", or, as already mentioned, as "a scarce resource" in economic decisions. In models of forecasting, forming the basis of strategy and business policy models on MBAs, time is "an independent variable"; whereas for accounting and financial decisions, time is a "justification for interest payments in the analysis of investment". Hill emphasises in his analysis that time as "a social or psychological concept has had little significance in the development of economics, in which time, if mentioned at all, has been usually calendar" (Hill in Blyton et al., 1989:57). What Hill shows is that the economic view of time (as it has evolved in the context of modern economics since the 16th century) is predicated upon the simple basis of the model of individual/organisational choice between work time and leisure time. This model emphasises the view of human beings – individually and in groups – as pure economic agents. Das (1990) offers a similar perspective:

"The majority of [management] research presumes time to be a phenomenon which behaves more like a constant than a variable, even though this reductionist view militates against our direct (and vicarious) experiences. It thus merely

perpetuates the mundane conception of time in terms of the clock. The clock-time conception in [management] is identical to that presumed in most of the topics in the related business and management literature, such as time and motion studies, time allocation, time budgeting, time management, forecasting, time series analysis, industrial dynamics and futures research. Notice though, that these latter subjects do not involve the human actor as central, and that their conclusions are not dependent on how individuals conceive of time.” (Das, 1990:268)

The well-known MBA basic framework can be interpreted as resolving the problem of time in organisations on the same basis – especially that of neo-classical economics – both in microeconomic (individual and corporate) terms, and in macroeconomic (metahistorical), global terms. With regard to time, the core MBA paradigm (ordered by disciplinary discourses such as economics, accounting, and quantitative techniques into models of strategy, marketing, operations management, OB/HRM) has two important conceptual consequences, albeit implicit. One is that – as a thematic approach focused on economic rationality – it can only convert time into a homogenous medium in which virtually a single significant type of event occurs: the exchange of quantities of resources expressed in monetary terms between analogous entities with similar rationality (producers, suppliers, consumers, employers, or employees). Moreover, it places them always in the present. As mentioned above, culturally and historically varied human practices are translated into a language of quantitative moments *forever in the present* through market models, accounts, cash flow charts, balance sheets, etc. The model of income/leisure choice introduced above governs the logic of employers’ reckoning of labour time. As Hill shows, the model is in fact indifferent to individual human differences with regard to the quality of work; it does not take into account such differences (Hill, in Blyton et al., 1989:62). The main aim for the employer is to ensure that a certain aggregate number of work hours are guaranteed in any time unit (day, week, month or year). It can be said that the MBA discourse follows a logic of temporal assimilation of diverse human experiences and contributions at work into a one-dimensional time. This type of time can be measured and budgeted, it is the time of the clock and the standard accounting and production calendar.

This is linked to a second consequence of the economic view expressed in the metahistorical standpoint which results and shapes the tone of the MBA with regard to the nature of world dynamics. By reducing the very substance of culture and history to elementary features of a transcendental economic view of human nature, the current MBA curriculum uses the theme of economic globalisation to accompany its dominant functional tone. The economic-functional kernel finds in globalisation a way of situating management education in a rationalised cultural and historical discourse. Through a specific choice of facts to portray the world, historical closure is brought about by the appropriation of world historical time into economic and functional time. Economic and technological globalisation is a way of discussing history which aims to demonstrate the convergence of human practices toward the same goal implicit in a common human nature. As shown in Coseta (2000 – chapter 6), globalising views of history are based on an implicit exclusion of human time with its existential concern from the general trends in history. The recourse to globalisation reinforces the functional account of work organisations as homogenous temporal containers; within them, human beings can be seen as subjects of a universal (ahistorical and acultural), hence *timeless*, economic rationality. History, as temporal unfolding, is assimilated as a culturally homogeneous,

almost quantitative continuum. Models of “diversity management” (such as Hofstede’s or Hampden-Turner’s explored in Costea, 2000, chapter 3) are used to reduce human time to a form of functional time. This amounts, in effect, to an ontological abandonment of diversity as core feature of managerial and organisational practices; life and history become simple constants.

Following on from the exploration of economic time, the analysis brings to the fore the notion of *functional* time and its major implications for the contrast with existential time (which are developed in Costea, 2000b). The essential source for the concept of functional time comes from the work of Sorokin and Merton, initially published in 1937 and re-published by Hassard in 1990. Sorokin and Merton argue that time can be understood in the context of society, organisations and change as the reference point for the synchronisation of action. Similar to economic time and the dynamics of markets, the functional view emphasises “the change or movement in social phenomena in terms of other social phenomena taken as point of reference” (Sorokin and Merton, in Hassard, 1990:58). Systems of time-reckoning follow the dominant imperative of different social groups. In terms of corporations and other economically-driven activities, Sorokin and Merton’s view translates time-ordering in the reference system of economic gain. The economic imperative becomes the social necessity for the continued observance of time allocation as a resource to which every action has to be aligned. For an economic unit to function, time use and time rhythms must be ordered by economic rationality. They explain time in terms of its dependence upon “the organisation and functions of the group” (Sorokin and Merton, in Hassard, 1990:60). The demands of the mode of life of the corporation must take precedence over any other considerations of time.

Thus, the units of time reckoning must reflect the rationality of the functioning of the corporation; otherwise, the social group which forms it can be seen as dysfunctional. Sorokin and Merton illustrate this need for social synchronisation with the example of the *week*. Using various examples from different societies, they show that the week is a time unit which is closely associated with the market (Sorokin and Merton (1937), republished in Hassard, 1990:63; also see Sorokin, 1962). Regardless of how long the week is, it represents the way in which societies manage time between work and exchange as dimensions of the economy. A similar case is the *month* which they show to be not astronomically determined but rather determined by the increased need to schedule regular intervals of other types of exchange, for example, monthly salaries.

The functional analysis of time complements the economic one by adding a further dimension to its homogenisation: time units represent critical devices for the capacity of social organisms to calculate the rate of their functionality in economic terms. Accounting techniques are essentially dependent upon regular time intervals in order to be relevant. These techniques promote a discourse with an implicit allegiance to limited linear time and objective models based on the notion of time as a material resource to be managed in competition, or in project development, strategy elaboration and the like. Strategic and operational changes require time-ordering devices to level differences in rhythms across work groups and to synchronise organisational functions participating in production or innovation.

Extending Sorokin and Merton’s argument to contemporary corporate practices, the dominance of share-price as indicator of corporate performativity has created the need for increased co-ordination of corporate accounting systems to financial markets whose

dynamics bear closely upon managerial practices. The relationship between monthly and quarterly performance embodied in corporate accounts, and the dynamic of the share price on the stock market increases the need to integrate activities in the wider space and rhythm of globalised capitalism. Competitive advantage in the language of the stock market is conceptualised as “economy of time” in production or design, and models proposed by consultants (for example Pascale, 1990) aim at showing how companies might be enabled to shrink time and intensify its commodification in a wholly rational way. This increases the pressure to force the alignment of local human practices to the unseen and non-negotiated rhythms of abstract economic variables determined by a de-humanised logic. The logic of timing work and management becomes increasingly anchored in the extraneous dynamics of markets which in turn re-materialise as the key factor in ordering human practices. The preoccupation with linear speed is overwhelming. It is even more apparent in the language justifying the increased use of IT in every possible area. “Soshanna Zuboff [1988:415] devotes a separate appendix to such [IT] measurements in her book on “information technology in the modern workplace.” Statements quantify how computations costing one dollar today would have cost “30,000 in 1950” (Whipp, 1994:104). Authors such as Zuboff, as well as consultants advise companies “to move faster in every area of business. Quality is mandatory, speed can provide the competitive edge” (Whipp, 1994:105).

The current dominance of stock market prices over the agenda of corporate management brings into sharper focus the phenomenon of the gradual homogenisation of time in management discourses. The efficiency of time allocation is increasingly measured against reference points outside the organisational context. The temporal horizon of strategy models is shaped with priority by the expectations of financial markets more than by product or service markets. The tension which is thus created is to trade off long term plans of development for short term improvements of bottom line financial reports. Long term plans, on the other hand, are the way in which certain organisational arrangements could be set up to offer individual employees a sense of existential certainty (such as long term or permanent contract, or some aspects of social security) as motivating factors. The dominance of time-reckoning systems which emphasise shorter intervals related to stock markets has led to the erosion of corporate concerns with such arrangements (eminently in the case of Japan in the 1990s).

It can be argued that the asset-stripping, hostile take-over and downsizing movements of the last three decades of the twentieth century have made corporations increasingly uncertain environments for the life concerns of human beings not only in economic terms but in existential terms too. Yet these transformations of the workplace have been accompanied by a paradoxical change in managerial in the “80s and “90s. The “strong culture” movement which had originated in Japan’s stable corporations has taken hold in the West and dominates the demands placed on individual employees to conform with, and furnish commitment to the corporate cultural agenda. The combination between short term financial priorities and long term development of organisational cultures shows the problematic nature of the assimilation of human time with functional organisational time. The involvement of human values such as commitment, enthusiasm, readiness to devote large portions of time to the organisation is a specific question related to the overall place work occupies in an individual’s life. The functional demand that culture should be aligned to a set of values defined by senior management teams in order to enhance performativity proves the fundamental misappropriation of the Japanese experiences in Western discourse.

The cultural turn of the ‘80s in Western corporate management ignored the fundamental certainties associated with the social context of strong cultures in Japanese organisations. Life-time employment, pension and health schemes, as well as promotion according to seniority were the key factors in maintaining a strong sense of identity between individual and corporate dynamics. The techniques of participative quality management and innovation (quality circles, TQM, or JIT) not only were originally of American extraction (via Deming’s contributions to SPC in the 1950s), but were themselves successful because the Japanese work context made possible a relatively comprehensive heedfulness to existential concerns of individual employees. The unproblematised association of short term imperatives of economic gain with implicitly long term existential aspects of organisational life and culture in the MBA paradigm as if they were of the same functional order of being is one example which shows that functionalism provides the cardinal understanding of time in management education.

The addition of HRM to the agenda of MBA programmes in 1981 represents another important element in the attempt to understand the way in which human time is further assimilated by the functional philosophy of management education. HRM represents a new discursive modality through which the management of people has been re-articulated in the wake of the neo-classical political transformation of welfare states and national business systems in the UK and US under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The new free market politics (inspired by Hayek’s conception in Thatcher’s rhetoric) meant a destabilisation of labour markets. Employers were given new liberties in the attempt to drive labour costs as low as possible to compete in the global environment. One of the consequences for management education was that, through the new HRM discourse, management practices could be re-justified in their short-termism through the use of new modes of organising work. MBA curricula begin to emphasise the value of techniques such as project management, teamwork, short term training, or flexible working arrangements which are increasingly introduced as modes of managing culture by enhancing commitment or empowerment.

The important temporal aspect of such techniques is that they are serving short term purposes *par excellence*. Moreover, managing such work systems is in itself treated functionally. The spectrum of models offered on MBAs for the management of teams for example revolves around ideal type recipes such as MBTI models (Myers-Briggs, 1980), Belbin’s team roles (Belbin, 1984), or Margerison and McCann’s management team roles (Margerison, 1991). The main tenet of these models is that individual diversity can be typified, i.e. reduced, to a small series of human types which can then be combined to offer “ideal” premises for a performing team. These models allow the unproblematic treatment of team dynamics by providing a straightforward diagnostic and normalising technique. The models used to present group development are equally oriented toward linear, short term processes. For example, Tuckman and Jensen’s *Stages of Group Development Revisited* (1977) provides the backbone for many MBA sessions aimed at exploring group behaviour.

Group life is presented as a cycle which involves learning through “forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning” – i.e. learning through cycles of observation, reflection, hypothesising, experimentation, action and experience. Learning is modelled as circular sequence which is a way of representing the possibility of endless repetition of such cycles in any group. When one group ends its life-cycle, another group can be

created based on the ideal model, regardless of previous histories of group membership embodied in real people. In the logic of types, a person is not herself or himself, a person is an abstract type that can be combined with other appropriate type ingredients to form a new and history-less functional team. Time can be mechanically re-created, it can be started again. Legitimised as scientific, such models of human learning have to make firm recourse to “linear” time which is relatively unproblematic in that it overcomes the difficulties of elaborating an explanatory framework for human phenomena which surpass it. To paraphrase Gadamer, the group development methodologies promoted on MBAs “make what has grown historically and has been transmitted historically an object to be established like an experimental finding – as if tradition were as alien and, from the human point of view, as unintelligible, as an object of physics” (Gadamer, 1975:xxi).

The rhetoric of teamwork reaches for its grounding in the culture movement imported from Japan with its long term orientation through participative quality assurance techniques. However, over the 1990s, short term, team-based project work has increasingly become a way in which work is both organised and controlled in the context of relatively short term employment arrangements. Via teamwork, HRM rhetoric introduces a subtle modality of controlling commitment without managerial interference and added costs. Social pressures toward conformity and loyalty are seen as substitutes for direct control in certain work contexts.

In conclusion, this analysis shows that, with regard to the problem of time, management education discourses originate in a paradigmatic framework which leads to the assimilation of human practices in the overall economic-functionalist view of human beings and of the world as space for history. Thus, time itself is rendered into a homogenous resource to be managed according to the agenda of the corporate organisation as main unit of analysis. The role of human beings involved in this process is to merely synchronise their actions and make more efficient use of time as a economic resource. Linear, quantitative, clock time is a prerequisite of the whole analytic process characterising MBA rhetoric, of its entire flow of method. The analytic models which form the programme could not be predicated if they were not elaborated in terms of sequences of mechanical causes and effects.

The functional philosophy dominating mainstream business education presents human practices devoid of their humanity by replacing life’s everyday content with mechanical representations which remove the possibility of thinking about practices as irreducibly varied in their specific historical horizons. The temporal dimension is consistent with the general representation of management and organisations as separate practices from local histories and cultures.

The need for linear, homogenous time is related to the problem of a certain “politics of truth” (to use Foucault’s terminology) – i.e. it is related to the problem of maintaining the consistency of the overall discursive matrix of the programme in terms of its implicit view of man, the world and time. Yet this amounts, in effect, to an ontological abandonment of diversity as core feature of managerial and organisational practices; life and history become simple constants, reduced to paradoxical temporal voids.

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