

Experiencing time in different mental states

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In the time I have got for this lecture I first want to discuss the three states we can experience in our daily lives. We can contemplate our life, we can feel depressed if something bad or sad happens to us, and we are capable of experiencing an elevated state now and then. These last two states can turn into pathological states.

Usually, we say that we live in the present. We can think of our past, how this has shaped us to be the person that we are now. But sometimes we are hindered in living by our memories. We might be drawn much too often to one or more traumatic moments.

The present can also hinder us, because we are worrying too much. We can even hinder other people in their living by worrying too much.

The future may frighten us, so that our fears get in the way of living wholly in the here and now.

I will discuss these states and finish by placing time in the light of eternity.

The contemplative state

Only time

Who can say where the road goes
Where the day flows
Only time

And who can say if your love grows
As your heart chose
Only time
(Enya - Song text 'Only time')

In the song text of the group Enya we see time compared to a road and a river. When you say that the day flows, it is as if a stream is passing. Sometimes it flows calmly in a wide stream and sometimes it must pass bumpy, narrow places and find a way through it. This can be a symbol of our lives. People compare their lives to a stream. The older you get, the faster it flows. This is recognizable, I guess, for a lot of people amongst us.

If we think of a road, this might remind us of a pilgrimage. When I was young, I had a poster on my door of the broad and the narrow road, to remind me to stay on the narrow path instead of being drawn to the broad road. I think it is very important to stay focussed on where we are going. What is our ultimate goal? Is this the Kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem, where we meet our Lord Jesus, where we will be eternally, together with Him?

The influential 20th century philosopher Martin Heidegger showed that time is much more important for our life than space, although we are determined and limited by both. The arguments he uses, are the following:

- An individual is born in a certain place and in a certain time, and has chosen neither of them. The consequences of being born somewhere can be diminished by travelling. The moment that you were born, however, causes a restriction of your position in time in an absolute way, and therefore also your possibilities. Nobody can choose to live in another period of time.

- For a satisfying life, a certain amount of time is necessary, but it isn't necessary to travel far. Someone can well stay in the place he is born during his whole life.

- Concerning human decisions and activities, the most important question is not what someone has to do here or there, but what he has to do now or later.

Time doesn't reveal itself as a number of ordered moments, but as a course of life. Everyone lives his life in the present, but can also look back on his life until the present moment, and can have an idea of the future. It is a characteristic of people that they can combine a distant and a near position towards time. Because of this they are able to ask what is the meaning of their lives. Of course, some tension can arise between being part of time and being able to reflect on time at the same time. This can especially be the case when drastic existential experiences occur like disease or death. However, reaching a border, a new awareness arises of the time that was, that is and that might be in the future.

In our time and in our Western society we can speak of secularisation as one of the characteristics. This means that people want to restrict themselves to this saeculum. By this is meant that both nature, history and human existence are limited by time and space. The question "Where is God?", however, can't be answered in terms of time and space. Therefore, the contemporary Western culture considers it futile to ask where God is. It is as simple as that.

That God doesn't coincide with nature, history or the human mind makes it understandable that He isn't directly traceable in the observable world of a human being. He is hidden in both nature and history for a human being, while in both, the traces of His presence are to be expected. In all eras of time people have felt themselves called to search for God somewhere behind the scenes of life.

While looking for a solution to the paradox of the hidden presence of God in this existence, people have spoken of a specific domain of God, that is, heaven or eternity. Contemporary variants speak about one or more dimensions that are higher than the dimensions of time and space. Trying to grasp realities of faith like the appearances of our Lord Jesus after His resurrection, it is necessary to take account of more than the perceptible dimensions. Such an idea corresponds with contemporary science; in the attempt of theoretical physics to combine all laws of nature in one universal law, it is necessary to conceive of 10 or 11 dimensions. This may be reasonable for a scientist, but our human brain is not capable of imagining this in whatever way.

What kind of mental state are we in now? I think in a contemplative state. We need this once in a while. As human beings, one of our special gifts is to live in time, and at the same time to be able to step outside it and contemplate our lives. In this way we are capable of reconsidering if we are heading in the right direction, or change direction in reality. We are created with a free will. This is what God wanted for us. This is what we also see in the song text: "Who can say if your love grows as your heart chose". We are free to choose. It is good and Biblical to think that this question especially adds meaning to our lives: Does your love grow? Who can affirm this wholeheartedly? But for us Christians it is not time that will tell, but God. So, in the end, we should not ask for the meaning of our lives; it is God who asks us about the meaning we have added to our lives. We are responsible.

The depressed state

Time

Ticking away the moments that make up a dull day
You fritter and waste the hours in an offhand way
Kicking around on a piece of ground in your home town
Waiting for someone or something to show you the way

Tired of lying in the sunshine
Staying home to watch the rain
And you are young and life is long
And there is time to kill today
And then one day you find
Ten years have got behind you
No one told you when to run
You missed the starting gun

And you run, and you run to catch up with the sun, but it's sinking
Racing around to come up behind you again
The sun is the same in a relative way, but you're older
Shorter of breath and one day closer to death

Every year is getting shorter
Never seem to find the time
Plans that either come to nought
Or half a page of scribbled lines
Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way
The time is gone
The song is over
Thought I'd something more to say
(Pink Floyd – Song text 'Time')

While I was looking on the internet for the lyrics of this song from the famous Pink Floyd album 'Dark side of the moon', I saw the connotation that the lyrics are somehow psychedelic. This might be true as the album is from the beginning of the seventies, in the midst of 'Flower Power', at which time a lot of drugs were used. It is clear that the abuse of alcohol and drugs have something to do with filling an emptiness, a 'quiet desperation' as Pink Floyd calls it. This can alter your consciousness of time. With 'speed' and cocaine time seems to be passing much quicker and you are highly alert. This can lead to a psychosis in which you can become delusional. Your thoughts can take flight and you can get very frightened, even paranoid. With marijuana time can pass slower and you can make a relaxed impression. This can cost you a lot, because it can last. Then you might suffer a permanent loss of concentration. With alcohol and heroin you can get so enslaved, that these drugs are your master and you experience no control anymore.

Emptiness and depression have a lot to do with each other. It is well known that many people come to seek help for 'demoralisation'. Some say it is the majority. Before, they would seek help of a pastor because of this, but in this time of secularisation people seek help in the health service.

They want to get out of this depressed state, when they feel that they are knocked down by life. They may have experienced bad things happening to them, or have witnessed this with their loved ones, or they are tired of what is going on in the world. Demoralisation is a good word, as we all need a purpose and a goal in life which give us a reason to go on. We may not know anymore why we are here and what we are supposed to do. Especially if we don't have the feeling that our presence counts and is appreciated, we can think that we might as well stay in bed and let time pass without doing anything. We can sometimes get the feeling that we might as well not be here at all. Then we may long for death in order to get peace, and even think about how we can end our life. It is very worrying that depression has become worldwide illness number 1. Probably this has to do with a feeling of emptiness in our time, that we are not able to be 'filled' anymore, and we don't feel fulfilled ourselves. As Augustine wrote, we can only be fulfilled by the Lord. Only then can we be at rest, although this doesn't promise us a quiet life. He meant that we can live in harmony if we live with God. We may realize then, that we don't possess time, we receive it. We may give it into the hand of the Lord again and ask Him what to do with the time He gave us.

That's why it is good to know that the song 'Time' returned on the Pink Floyd album ending with the following lyrics, words about 'home' that remind me that we are in fact citizens of the Kingdom of God. The lyrics are:

Home, home again
I like to be here when I can
When I come home cold and tired
It's good to warm my bones beside the fire
Far away across the field
The tolling of the iron bell
Calls the faithful to their knees
To hear the softly spoken magic spells

The elevated state

I don't think it is necessary to find a song text for this state. Nowadays, almost every song is about being in love. What is a better example of this state? We blossom when we are in love. We see the other person at his best and in this light we get another perspective of ourselves too. We are beloved. This is what gives us wings and we don't walk anymore but sway or even fly.

Is this the state that the apostle Paul means in his hymn about love in 1 Corinthians 13? It is faith, hope and love, but the greatest is love.

If we remain in our Lord Jesus, we may be assured that we are His beloved brothers and sisters and will receive love from Him. When we realize that the fundamental of our love is His love, we will understand that our own natural love is poor in comparison. In the Bible, Jesus told us that we experience more love and joy if we realize how much grace we have received from Him. Love is the keyword for life as we can see in the Golden Rule: we can love our neighbour and ourselves if we can see each other through the eyes of the Lord. Then we don't see each other only as we are, but also how God has meant us to be. If we pray for love this enriches us.

A friend of ours who used to teach at a school, was regularly asked by his students how he could be so patient and loving all the time. He said honestly that he got up early every morning and prayed that he would receive everything that he needed for that day, especially love. In this way he is an honest witness to the Lord, to Whom also we can always reach out for the love that we need for our fellow human beings. Then we receive exactly what we need, like the Israelites in the desert. They received fresh manna every day.

We can be very thankful that we don't have to expect anything of ourselves, but everything of the Lord, who is so much greater and higher than we are. He knows all of us so much better and more than we know ourselves. We may always see each other through His eyes, with our unrealized possibilities. We may always have hope for each other and pray for this every day.

A traumatic past

We can't be always so open towards the future. In some way we are all traumatized. Some people are much more traumatized than others. We are not only traumatized by actions of others. It can be as traumatizing if we are neglected. Every human being is made for receiving and giving love. Already little babies respond to the attitude of the mother with a smile. They can give joy to the parents and other people. When they are a bit older, they also can reach out their arms if a parent enters the room. This is a sign that a baby likes to be picked up. In China, there are a lot of handicapped babies and baby girls that were abandoned. The reason for this is that people were not allowed to have more than one baby and most people wanted to have a healthy little boy. The babies that were abandoned went to special children's homes. There, they received their food, but nobody cared for them and they were never cuddled. I heard this from Christian missionaries who tried to get

entrance into these homes at least once a month. It was known that a great number of those babies died. This is because they didn't receive any love and because of that, they lost every joy of life and even passed away.

So, being left alone can be as traumatizing as being physically, mentally or sexually abused. Both kinds of suffering are very bad and disturbing. They can also cause developmental problems, such as a disturbance in the ability of being attached to other people. This can be permanent. It is also known that the brain develops less and sometimes in a different way because of trauma or neglect. Then, we may not speak of a PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) anymore, but of a Traumatized Personality, due to the severity and duration of what has happened.

The trauma can be so severe that a person can't cope with it. Parts of him may split off then, which might happen every time the abuse occurs. Somebody can live his life apparently in a normal way, but is actually only surviving by denying what is happening. In this way a child can go to school and do the things that society expects him to do, but somehow these children don't prosper at all, which can be called a failure to thrive. Sometimes this condition leads to a dissociative personality; this used to be called a multiple personality. Fortunately this term has been abandoned, because it was assumed that there wasn't one core personality anymore, but many personalities that should all be treated. Now, the idea is more that parts of the personality are denied or split off and thus vanish into the subconscious.

Especially, the condition of dissociation is triggered if something in the present reminds the person of what happened in the past. This can be anything. During those moments he is usually frightened. He might feel caught in the most frightful moments of the past again, while being powerless to liberate himself from these. Usually the memories are so vivid, that they seem to be the reality and for this reason the real reality seems to fade during those moments. Because a person suffers during those moments, it is most important to bring someone back to the reality of the here and now. You may ask him to look at you, you may call him by his name and speak in a reassuring way. You may tell the person, that this is not the past anymore and that you would like him to return to the present. If bad things happened to him when he was a child, it is good to tell him that he is an adult now and that the circumstances have changed.

For instance, I met a girl for therapy, who was abused by an unknown man during her childhood. He used to wait for her next to the playground where

she came regularly. He was very warm and kind to her. This is usually how such people win the hearts of lonely children. Also, this girl was threatened, that something bad might happen if she would tell her parents about what he was doing. She felt worthless, a toy for this man, and couldn't have normal communication with her parents. Several times when she talked about what happened to her she became dissociated and it was difficult to bring her back. This is a sign that she wasn't ready yet to deal with her past. First, it was necessary to affirm her in the present and to stabilize her present life. If we try to give a place to the past in the present, when the time isn't ready yet, we are capable of harming someone again, as we don't follow their natural pace. Nowadays, there are many people, mostly with good intentions, that are inclined to have people deal with their past. However, if traumatised people are pushed too much, they have to deal again with people who don't respect their limits and even step over them.

It is the here and now that should be respected at all times. That is the time that counts the most. I think that the success of EMDR, which is an abbreviation of 'Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing' is partly due to remaining in the present by moving the eyes from one side to the other or by hearing sounds in one ear and the other. In this way someone is able to think of an image of the past while staying in the present at the same time. By doing that he can learn to tolerate this image while not needing to flee from it. He can learn that he and his life are no longer dominated by it. Then he is truly liberated of the influence of his past. The past isn't the present anymore, but really becomes the past again. Of course the past has shaped someone, but he is free again to choose the life he wants for himself. In this way, God can also have a liberating role for people. They usually can't answer the question why He let bad things happen to them, but they experience or feel that He was with them after all and He will always be there for them. He is the only one that never abandons them and will not harm them. He even can turn the situation around, so that good things can come out of the worst. For example, they may discover that they turned out to be a good and loving person, that has a lot to give to others, despite of all they experienced.

Fear of the future

An older friend of mine had to go into hospital. She had to have surgery on her ankle. The condition of her ankle was so bad, that she could hardly walk anymore. So, she didn't have much of a choice. But she had a bad feeling about going to the hospital. She was afraid that something would happen to

her, and she would not return home anymore. Fortunately her feelings deceived her; she returned home safely after surgery. In Holland we have the expression: "Often one suffers the most by what one fears, but that will never happen. So, one has to bear more than the burden that God gives" (Nicolaas Beets). This is reality for a lot of people. Especially, if we have a more rigid or independent personality, it is very frightful to think that we might be more dependent on other people in the future. This might be the worst case scenario in our imagination. Most of the time fears of the future lead to less satisfaction in the present, as they tend to get a hold on people and influence the quality of their present lives. It can be of such an influence that people fantasise about being dead, so that they don't need to live through the suffering. They may lose their appetite, or they may wake up early in the morning because of these fears, or have other troubles in sleeping. Anxiety thus has an overlap with depression. Time can feel like passing very slowly, because there isn't much joy left anymore.

Worries in the present

If we worry in the present time, we can't loosen up. We might imagine all kind of bad things that can happen to ourselves or our beloved ones. In a manner of speaking, we see the world as if we look through dark glasses, so that everything seems dark. Of course those things that we worry about could happen, but they aren't inevitable. It is like Jesus said in Matthew 6 from verse 25: " I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ... For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." It is for all of us a challenge to surrender our lives to God. Then we can let Him, as our Creator, lead our lives, trusting Him that He will provide us with all that we need.

God, who is our Liberator, as he revealed Himself already to His people in Egypt, is nowadays still our Redeemer. By His Son, Jesus, we can be truly free of our worries and also of our past. If we are honest, we are not only victims, traumatised as we are, but also offenders by doing wrong to our fellow human beings. In this we all carry our guilt from the past. That's why it is so liberating, that we know to be forgiven if we turn to our Saviour Jesus. This

can make us really happy. Moreover, we can realize that we don't have to be afraid. We know our destiny, the Kingdom of God. We know that death seems to end all time, but in truth is not the end. Jesus is truly risen and has broken all the bonds of death. He means the abolition of all borders. Also His love in the present is unlimited. He loves us all so much that it cost Him His life. He gave His life, so that we can live and be with Him for always. And by putting our present in His hands, we know that we can lead a more holy life by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. In this way we can fully live our lives in the present, with God and each other. In summary, based on what Jesus said in Matthew 28: 20 "If looking back hurts and looking ahead frightens, then look beside you; I am going with you, I am always with you, every day".

Time and eternity

For us, human beings, time is a relative phenomenon. This means that we always have a relationship to time. Time can consume us, but we also can be ahead of our time or organize our time in a fruitful way. This can all happen. In Germany, in the Eiffel, I once saw an expression on a house which says it all. In German: "Die Zeit eilt, teilt und heilt"; translated in English: "Times hastens, separates and heals". Time always passes and it separates people from each other through death or life, which can hurt a lot. But time also heals all wounds, which can be a consolation. This can be literally true, which doctors count on, but it can also be said psychologically of broken hearts, a sign of pain which originates from social hurting.

In health care the best-known model is the biopsychosocial model of George Engel. People have their bodies (the biological dimension) and doctors usually try to cure diseases or otherwise help people adapt to a new balance, caused by some physical disturbances. Although most processes in our bodies are happening unconsciously, people experience themselves as a conscious person (the psychological dimension) who has liberty to move and to choose freely. The social dimension is even larger as it encompasses more individuals who are usually inter-connected in some way. But this model doesn't seem sufficient to explain the main dimensions of human life. It seems worthwhile to add another dimension, that is about the meaning of life and values. For religious people the highest value is the relationship with God. The best term for this dimension seems to be 'spiritual' as this word is apt for general meaning and inspiration but also suitable for the Christian inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the idea for inter-personal care, which also includes pastoral care, is to speak of a biopsychosocialspiritual model, abbreviated as BPSS.

It is interesting what Johannes Schroots wrote in his 'Handbook of Psychology of Adult Development & Ageing'. He writes of development and ageing on a biological level, in which there is a biological age and also a biological clock of metabolism for instance, which is usually slowing with age. There is also a personal time in which we organize our days, in which we experience that time is rushing, or passing slowly, depending on whether what we are doing is new or if we like it. For instance, the first day of our holiday often seems the longest as there are so many new impressions. Then we have social time; for instance an 8 hour working day and meal-time, which in Holland is mostly at 6 o' clock, but in Mediterranean countries some hours later. May be all those times are de-synchronized, or may be they are in phase with each other.

Mostly, time is speeding up, the older we get. This is probably due to the fact that, if we are young, we have a lot of new experiences, which gives the impression that the time is passing by more slowly. Moreover, the time that is still left gets relatively less in comparison to the time that has already passed. It might be an interesting thought to add spiritual time. This would be the time from the perspective of the Lord. It is comforting to know with Psalm 90:4, that time is different for God than for us: "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night". With Him we are now already part of His Eternity, in which we may always dwell in His presence. It is the time of God, the *kairos*, the right moment, that makes our time high-quality time. With God, our time is encompassed in His time, in eternity. As believers, we can say together with the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 19 "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Positively said: We have a very bright expectation of the future. In this future, everything will be fine. There will be no negative conditions anymore, like evil and suffering. Christ, our Saviour, has overcome all this. Everything will be restored. This means that we know of another time, of eternal life, which Christ wants to share with all of us, because of His unlimited grace and love. In this way everything is relative, namely related to God. We may experience what a friend always says in times of trouble: "In the light of eternity...". Then, life can be as sad as before – Jesus cried over Jerusalem – but it is more bearable at the same time.

This is well expressed in the Bible text of Romans 8: 38 and 39, which is the greatest consolation in life and death for me. These verses show that we can put everything, the things of the present and the things to come, in the hands of our loving God: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Finally, I would like to illustrate this thought with another Song. This time a Gospel song, which is about surrendering our time to His time. It is called:

In His Time

In His time, in His Time,

He makes all things beautiful, in His time.
Lord, please show me every day
As You're teaching me Your way
That You do just what You say
In Your time.

In Your time, In Your Time

You make all things beautiful, in Your time.
Lord, my life to You I bring
May each song I have to sing
Be to you a lovely thing
In Your time.

(Diana Ball)

Thank you for your attention,

Margreet de Vries-Schot