Understanding the Novelty of Time

by Terence McKenna

I suggest that we have entirely misunderstood the character of time.

We are not being pushed by the force of causal necessity.

We human beings, like the rest of nature, are reacting to the siren song of the transcendental object at the end of time.

We are on a collision course with an event for which there is barely language to describe.

I would like to suggest that what is happening on this planet is that time is actually speeding up.

Our species is under the influence of a kind of strange attractor which is moving us through the temporal medium at an ever-accelerating rate.

This is a law of the universe, though not one recognized by science.

The early universe immediately after the hypothesized "Big Bang", was an incredibly simple place.

There were no organisms, there were no molecules, there were not even atoms, there was only a pure plasma of electrons.

As the universe cooled, levels of complexity crystallized out successively, each one building on the previous level of complexity.

Eventually the temperature in the universe dropped low enough that electrons could settle into stable orbits around atomic nuclei.

Then you get atomic physics.

Those atoms condensed into stars and eventually the temperature and pressure in the center of stars was sufficient to trigger fusion, and heavier elements, like iron, sulphur, and carbon, were cooked up in the cores of the stars.

Once you have carbon, with its four-valent bonding, you have the possibility of molecular complexity; an entirely new domain of complexification.

Not to belabor the point, but quickly out of molecules come highly complex polymers, out of highly complex polymers come early replicating molecules, from them come prokaryots, the earliest living cells, non-nucleated, then the nucleated cells, the eukaryots, then clusters of colonies of cells, the earliest organisms, then more complex organisms, eventually higher animals.

Out of them, binocular, bipedal primates with an opposable thumb.

Out of them, language-using, ushrooms-using, orgiastic humans.

Out of them, history, cities, warfare, hierarchies, writing, mathematics, music, and in the twentieth century this all knits together into some kind of global organism.

Now, the disgrace of science is that it denies the importance of this phenomenon.

For science, the most important phenomenon in the universe is the move toward heat, death, and entropy.

Physicists barely notice that life represents an amazing and persistent exception to the rule that all thermodynamic systems run down.

Life has achieved the miracle of a stability far from entropy through the miracle of metabolism.

Notice that when complexity emerges out of simpler states, each ascent to the next order occurs more quicklythan the process before it.

The effect is that of being in a kind of tightening spiral, one of William Butler Yeats's gyres.

We are wrapping ourselves around a cosmic end point of some sort, and this is what I call the transcendental object at the end of time.

It beckons across the dimensions, it throws an enormous shadow over the enterprise of human history.

This is what drives the guru to make his statement, this is what kindles the messiah to his mission,this is what inspires the painter and the dreamer and the musician.

There is an enormous source of affection and concern for humanity which is calling us toward it, across the plains of lower dimensional time and space, and the miracle is that through perturbing our neurochemistryin ways which Shamans have always done we can turn to the last page, as it were, and can see there that the entire process was actually toward a good cause.

We are moving toward the most profound event a planetary ecology can encounter.

We are about to witness the freeing of life from the chrysalis of matter.

This is what our privilege and our destiny is; to be the final generation of people with one foot in the material realm of the battered primate and one foot on the ladder to godhead.

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