

PERSPECTIVE:

Transcending the Limits of Time

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In P. D. Ouspensky's only and relatively unknown novel, *Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*, the protagonist is sent back in time to learn whether he might do things differently. Philosopher Jacob Needleman takes up this intriguing theme again, in his *Time and the Soul*, and sends his central character back in time to confront a younger form of himself. In a classic short story, "By His Bootstraps," writer Robert Heinlein has his chief character travel backward and forward in time—encountering himself in numerous interesting and philosophically challenging ways—and helping himself along, as the story's title suggests. These are but a few of a long stream of inventive fictional tales that reveal our enduring fascination with the possibility of traveling, in some form, through time.

In the thrall of what Huston Smith has called the "Modern Western Mindset," we rarely, if ever, pause to question the prevailing view of time as linear and unidirectional and in which such time-displaced excursions are forbidden. We readily recognize the logical and philosophical problems and paradoxes that would confront us, were we to consider forward or backward movements through time. In everyday interactions with

familiar, macroscopic reality, we do not encounter “violations” of the ever and only forward flight of time’s arrow.

But are things so simple? Our mythologies and indigenous traditions speak of another time (the *once upon a time* or *time out of time* of our myths, legends, and fairy tales), of The Great Time, and of the Dreamtime, which are quite unlike conventional clock time. Poets and mystics of many traditions remind us of the possibility of partaking of an Eternal realm entirely other than that of passing/running/flowing time. Every spiritual and wisdom tradition presents its own variations on alternative forms of time (recurrent, cyclic, cosmic, sacred, timeless), and each one proposes ways of escaping the bonds of ordinary time. Time, as experienced subjectively, sometimes races and sometimes plods. Physicists tell us that time is relative, and they describe a curious quantum realm of entities and processes that transcend the familiar laws of time and space, as we usually understand these.

Other Ways of Knowing, Transcending Time, and the Power of Intention

In my own experiences in psychology, parapsychology, and transpersonal studies, I have encountered indications—both in the laboratory and in everyday life—that our ordinary apprehension of time is incomplete and that, under special conditions, it may indeed be possible to transcend time. The most provocative of these findings is that it may be possible for our intentions to work “backward in time” to influence the past—or, more precisely, to influence the initial seed moments through which events came into being and eventually unfolded to become what we now know as the present.

This is a startling claim, and so it is necessary to build a foundation for the plausibility of the idea and for the actuality of the process.

- There is a large body of evidence for the existence of alternative forms of knowing that do not involve the conventional senses or rational thought. We know these as paranormal or psychic functioning, extrasensory perception, telepathy, clairvoyance, intuition, and direct knowing. These possibilities and findings are extraordinary, and skeptics have criticized them. My own view is that the evidence is strong and compelling to those who examine it reasonably and thoughtfully. Through disciplined, careful, and confident deployment of our attention (away from inner and outer distractions and toward the person, object, or event we wish to know about) and intentions (by letting them be full, firm, sincere, yet without excessive effort or attachment), we can obtain accurate knowledge of remote circumstances. These forms of knowing allow us to transcend space (because they allow us to access information and events even at great distances) and transcend ordinary boundaries (because access is not blocked or shielded by what are ordinarily physical barriers—enclosures, walls, materials, etc.). There are accounts of the practical use of these direct knowing abilities in business (as decision augmenters), medicine (in diagnosis), therapy and counseling (for increasing rapport, empathy, and understanding), and forensics (in helping locate missing objects or persons).
- There are instances in which direct knowing appears to transcend time—as we usually conceive it. There are, again, large bodies of evidence supporting accurate knowledge of future events (precognition, premonitions), and there is a smaller, but intriguing, evidence base for a direct experiencing of the past (retrocognition). Accurate precognition could be interpreted as the mind reaching into the future and bringing back information about what has not yet occurred, or it could be understood

as a future event somehow working backward in time to influence the mental contents or actions of persons in the present. In either case, precognitive phenomena are inconsistent with our usual views of time and of causality (since the “effect” precedes the “cause”).

- There is a strong evidence base for the possibility of influencing events in the physical world, directly and at a distance, through our intentions. Under certain conditions, persons have been able to directly influence both inanimate events (bouncing dice, coins, small objects, sensitive electronic devices) and living systems (the behavioral and biological activities of plants, animals, other persons, and living cell preparations), using special mental strategies of clear intention, focused attention, imagery, concentration, visualization, and gently “wishing” for particular outcomes to occur. These influences are most likely and most pronounced if there are elements of chance, indeterminacy, or free variability in what is to be influenced. This form of direct mental influence (often called psychokinesis or telekinesis) is quite mysterious, in that it seems to be goal-oriented—the influencer does not have to know mechanisms of action or details about what to do, when, to have the influence occur. The process works in currently unknown ways to help bring about the desired goals. This seems to implicate *purpose*—in a strong and important way—in the operation of the universe. It also suggests that *consciousness itself*—especially in its aspect of intentionality—can play an active, causal role in our physical world. Direct mental (psychokinetic) influences have been applied practically in the context of healing, wherein intentional aims are targeted to reduce the substrates of illness and to promote conditions favorable to wellness. Psychokinetic processes could be involved,

at least in part, in some of the improvements or recoveries occurring in contexts of mental healing, spiritual healing, intercessory prayer, and even—perhaps—in the more familiar instances of placebo effects and spontaneous remissions. Both self-healing and the helpful and healthful influence of others might be accomplished through such means. Nobel laureate physiologist, Sir John Eccles, has suggested that something akin to psychokinesis might be commonplace within our own bodies, as our mental intentions act upon probabilistic, quantum processes in the synapses of our nervous systems, to yield ordinary volitional actions.

Influencing the Past

Investigators have combined ideas from the above three areas to design experiments in which persons attempt to exert direct mental influences upon activities or conditions “that already have occurred in the past.” Inanimate devices (sensitive electronic random event generators that operate on the basis of radioactive decay) or living systems (behaviors and bodily activities of people and animals) are allowed to act freely and their activities are objectively recorded. Later—*after those activities have occurred and have been registered*—someone is shown records of the earlier, past, activities and is asked to mentally influence segments of them in particular directions and sequences that were not known at the time the activities originally occurred. Surprisingly, persons are able to succeed in these tasks. We know they have succeeded by comparing what has happened during a set of influence periods with what happened during an otherwise equivalent set of noninfluence, control periods. When the records are examined, curiously, there are more of the wished-for events during influence periods than during the control periods.

One interpretation of these findings is that present intentions somehow influence prior events—they influence the likelihood that certain things initially occurred or did not occur. The past is not *changed*, in the sense that something that happened became undone. Rather, what is influenced is the probability that something happens or not in the first place. It is as though, in cases in which nature has not yet made up her mind (cases involving random events, equally likely decisions, freely variable possibilities), the mind may intervene to bias nature's decision and slightly swerve a random process in a desired direction. These early probabilistic events—which we have called *seed moments*—are the earliest beginning stages of subsequent unfolding, growth, and blossoming of events. All processes may be most susceptible to influence during these early, decisional moments when they are small, plastic, and not yet fixed or solidified. We are aware of countless analogous processes—thin, flexible saplings are more readily bent and trained than are larger, more fully-developed trees; the brains of infants and young children are more open to the influences of learning (especially foreign languages) than are the brains of older children and of adults; it is easier to combat a bacterial infection during its beginning stages than later; and so on.

What Could These Findings Mean (to Me)?

Might we be able to make practical use of these time-displaced, direct intentional influences? In considering circumstances in which this might be possible, we are assisted by these general findings from previous research.

- The ability to exert these direct mental influences seems to be relatively widespread, present in many individuals, but in varying degrees (as is the case in most other

human aptitudes and achievements—e.g., our intellectual, athletic, musical, artistic, and other creative accomplishments).

- Many kinds of events seem to be susceptible to direct mental influence—physical events, behaviors, bodily conditions, mental activities, thoughts, images, sensations, emotions, perceptions, decisions, and, perhaps, even larger scale community or social activities.
- A variety of mental strategies have been effective, including imagery, visualization, focused attention, firm and full intentions, and gentle wishes.
- Influences have been successfully exerted upon one's own activities and bodily conditions (and even upon one's own removed and remotely situated blood cells), as well as upon the activities and conditions of others.
- Time spans ranging from about 30 minutes to over 2 months have been explored in successful retroactive intention experiments. There is every reason to expect that much shorter and much longer delays would also yield positive results.
- These direct mental influences do not always occur. This may mean that a complex “recipe” of physical, physiological, psychological—and, perhaps, spiritual—conditions or “ingredients” is necessary for their occurrence, and those ingredients may not always appear or appear in the requisite amounts. It does seem that *randomness or free variability* of the seed moments is an important ingredient or precondition, as is the presence of a strong *need* that might be fulfilled by a cooperative unfolding of a seed moment in a particular direction.

With all of this in mind, it is possible to suggest that important seed moments in our own lives, and in our work, might be influenced in a time-displaced manner, in the

service of desired “future” outcomes for ourselves and others. Deliberately and consciously or naturally and unconsciously, our present intentions might importantly influence past seed moments in our lives and in the lives of others. This is also logically equivalent to saying that our future intentions might be influencing, importantly and directly, our present seed moments and those of others around us. Could our future intentions, imagination, heart-felt wishes, and most meaningful desires somehow reach back through time to help influence the decisions we make today—to help us accomplish what is necessary for us to move effectively along our chosen paths?

Related Readings

The research studies and findings that support the possibility of time-displaced direct intentional influences are procedurally and conceptually complex. This material is described in great detail in an article by the author, scheduled to appear in the January, 2000, issue of InnoVision’s professional journal, *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*.

For extensive background information on forms of direct knowing and direct mental influences, in general, the following recent books are recommended:

Broughton, R. S. (1991). *Parapsychology: The controversial science*. New York:

Ballantine.

Dossey, L. (1993). *Healing words: The power of prayer and the practice of medicine*.

San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Radin, D. I. (1997). *The conscious universe: The scientific truth of psychic phenomena*.

San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Tart, C. T. (Ed.). (1997). *Body mind spirit: Exploring the parapsychology of spirituality*.

For wide-ranging treatments of many aspects of time, interested readers might consult the following books:

Campbell, J. (Ed.). (1983). *Man and time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fraser, J. T. (Ed.). (1966). *The voices of time: A cooperative survey of man's views of time as expressed by the sciences and by the humanities*. New York: George Braziller.

Heinlein, R. (1959). By his bootstraps. In R. Heinlein, *The menace from Earth* (pp. 39-88). New York: New American Library/Signet.

Needleman, J. (1998). *Time and the soul*. New York: Currency/Doubleday.

Ouspensky, P. D. (1987). *Strange life of Ivan Osokin*. Penguin/Arkana.

Priestley, J. B. (1964). *Man and time*. London: Aldus Books Limited.

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