

Letter from the Editors

Dear reader,

We could hardly have chosen a more challenging theme for last year's San Marino Symposium than the subject of time. After following three days of discussions among renowned scientists and scholars, and having gone through one year of preparation of these proceedings, we remain perplexed by a feeling that despite some progress, we are still far from achieving a profound understanding about the nature of time.

Time has always fascinated and eluded every great mind and deep spirit who applied itself to investigate the ultimate mysteries of the world, and every generation that followed seems to have done little more than revisiting the trails pursued by its forefathers. It is an attribute of all great landscapes — true for those of the natural world as much as for those of the mind — that no matter how familiar they may become, nothing is emptied of their mystery.

To say, nevertheless, that nothing has evolved in our view of time is untrue, even if we remain close to Saint Augustine in his answer to the fundamental question, *Quid est tempus?*: "What is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it, I do not know." In the 2013 Symposium time was approached from its complementary dimensions or manifestations — the cosmological, or physical time; the psychological time; and the historical time — and it was clear that its nature cannot be approached if not by following the interlacing threads of this rich and complex tapestry.

The evolving theories of physics, as well as the advances in modern experimental psychology, have given important steps in encapsulating a certain sense of "time", within a framework that is well equipped to describe specific aspects of its manifestations. They do it from the indisputably inseparable but distinct perspectives of time as a cosmological quantity and time as a dimension within the mind's perception. By reflecting on those and their interrelations, already some picture emerges from that tapestry which can be contemplated, if not fully grasped in its entirety.

The great novelty which for us has emerged from the discussions, if not as an ultimate explanation, at least as the discovery of a golden thread to follow within the work, is the historical time. If the notion about the nature of time is built on the continuous dialogue and the foggy inter-connections between the temporality in the succession of natural events and our framing of those into a logical and meaningful unfolding, then it was over history that this has emerged and developed.

The idea of time and its perception has probably emerged along with man himself, as it cannot be dissociated from the notion of conscience. From its initial calendarisation (expression of a limited circumscriptions of time to the realm of measured successions) to the more advanced conceptualisations of a "reality of time", to the maximum intuition of the trans-temporal, that is, that which is beyond time, the "eternal", as the logical origin and sustainment of time — all this came through the natural and cultural history of man.

No serious attempt to an answer for the question "What is time?" can be given that neglects this supreme dimension, for time is both "natural" and "human", and history is the synthesis between both. Scholars would probably read this as concerning the history of ideas, whereas christian tradition would recognize here an echo of the Incarnation: as T.S. Eliot wrote, "a moment in time, but time was made through that moment: for without the meaning there is not time, and that moment of time gave the meaning."

But perhaps the most synthetic and immediate image we can make of time from this Symposium, came through the experience of "musical time", as presented to us by the composer Roberto Andreoni. In the words of Stravinsky, "music celebrates the friendship between humans and time." For in the end, time is exactly this for man, a companion, which carries along all that matters: the memory of our past, the freedom of our present and the hope for our future, filling with meaning the gap between our beginning and our end, slowly revealing and renewing the sense of everything up to its fullness, at the right hour when every man conquers, through the conclusion of this friendship, the prize of his existence.

Enjoy your time.

The Editors. ■