

Part I

What is Time?

Time is about God and the universe and all things human. Time is everywhere and it permeates everything: the cosmos, our solar system, the earth's past, present and future, socio-cultural existence. As such it has suffused knowledge since the dawn of humanity. It has occupied such a central place in the history of ideas and cultural practice because the temporality of being confronts us with the immemorial, existential issues of life and death, origin and destiny. What then is time? We know that the clock tells us *the* time, but it does not tell us what time *is*. We live time, we experience it daily as an integral part of existence. We know it intimately and yet the answer to this simple question seems extraordinarily difficult.

Questions about the nature of time have occupied thinkers for thousands of years. Few of them, however, have achieved consensus on their answers. In fact, as you will see, their conceptualizations of time are as varied as the theories of nature and culture, the perspectives on society and the belief systems that have existed across the ages. Today these ancient beliefs and understandings of time form the bedrock of tacit knowledge on which we conduct our daily lives as children and parents, teachers and students. Even social scientists charged with the explanation of social life tend to take time for granted, leaving it unaddressed as an implicated rather than explicated feature of their theories and empirical studies.

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Some notable exceptions to this norm are discussed in these pages.

In part I of this book I explore some of the most significant answers to the question, ‘What is time?’ Here our journey takes us to knowledge practices shared by many cultures: to prehistoric myths and rituals, ancient stories and theories concerned with human origin and destiny. Along the way we meander through the philosophical theories of ancient Greece and the Middle East, religious thought from the Middle Ages and Enlightenment philosophies, and finally theories of the industrial age, which we consider in a bit more detail.

The book begins with collective representations of archaic knowledge. In ‘Time Stories’, the question ‘What is time?’ is addressed in the form most suited to the subject matter. It is told as myths and stories so that form and content may cohere as an integrated whole. The structure of this first chapter moves from a time embodied in deities to time as the creation of God or gods. It identifies the progression from a period of atemporal bliss to one of toil in finite existence and from paradise lost to anticipated redemption. Pivotal to this first chapter is the encounter with finitude and change, a theme that is central to this book and will be revisited most explicitly in chapter 4 where practices of time transcendence are investigated.

Time stories are followed by time theories, oral by written accounts, holistic collective representations by more focused and detailed thoughts attributed to individual thinkers. Chapters 2 and 3 trace the development of time theory from Greek philosophy to the founders of social theory. The enormous wealth of material covered in ‘time theories’ has made some kind of division essential. As with all categorizations the line of partition is somewhat arbitrary, with some theorists fitting their respective allocations better than others. Irrespective of the specific distinctions between approaches to time, however, in this book theories are treated as stories by alternative means – emanating from identifiable named sources and directed at a more select audience, but stories nevertheless. The narrative form therefore changes in accordance with the particular account of time theories presented here.

INTERLUDE

TIME IS

Time is
Time is order
Time is endurance
Time is stability and structure
Time is persistence and permanence
Time is repetition, cyclicity, rhythmicity
Time is beginning and end, pause and transition
Time is difference between before & after, cause & effect
Time is life & death, growth & decay, night & day
Time is change, transience and ephemerality
Time is evolution, history, development
Time is flux and transformation
Time is process & potential
Time is mutability
Time is chaos
Time is
Time is speed
Time is duration
Time is simultaneity
Time is Chronos & Kairos
Time is past, present & future
Time is the succession of moments
Time is memory, perception & anticipation
Time is commodity & exchange value
Time is the measure of motion
Time is *a priori* intuition
Time is instantaneity
Time is a resource
Time is money
Time is gift
Time is
Time is flying
Time is passing
Time is continuing
Time is marching on
Time is waiting for no one
Time is vanishing like a dream
Time is going on forever
Time is evaporating
Time is becoming
Time is times
Time is

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Time Stories

Gods of Time

Sun and Moon

Re, Egyptian sun god and ruler of time, changed his shape with every hour of the day, making visible the repeating processes of the sun's cycle: rising as a scarab, descending into the darkness of the underworld as a crocodile and re-emerging at dawn in the form of a double lion.¹

Sūrya, sun god of India, rides through the skies on his chariot. He resides at the centre of creation between the manifest and invisible worlds. As maker of the day and eternity he is the supreme soul, spirit and source of time.²

In China the sun god, Shen Yi, and the moon god, Heng E, are husband and wife; as yang and yin they symbolize the two complementary forces of the universe. Their daily tasks concern the eternal ordering of time. On every fifteenth day after a New Moon Shen Yi visits Heng E, giving the full moon its bright glow.³

Tarreq, the Inuit moon spirit, is responsible for fertility and propriety and controls the patterns of animal migration.⁴

Sky and Underworld

Every evening at nightfall, Nut, the Egyptian goddess of the sky, devours the sun god Re, the creator and complete one,

and every morning she gives birth to him. She is the mother, the source of death and resurrection, home of the dead from which new life springs forth.⁵

Light and Energy

Aion, Greek god of time and eternity, is lord of light and dark, all-embracing spirit and gatekeeper of the realm beyond. Originally the source of all living beings' vital fluid, Aion is energy, the dynamic aspect of existence and the lifespan.⁶

India's Lord Shiva is called 'great time' and 'all-devouring time'; he embodies universal energy, both active and destructive. In his threefold form he is Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer and Kalaruda the destroyer. Kali, goddess of destruction and all-pervasive power of time, is a further aspect of Shiva. She is the destroyer who activates the creative powers of Shiva. Through his dance Shiva awakens inert matter, animates the inanimate world and brings forth the cycles of time: birth and death, creation and destruction.⁷

Fire and Water

Omotéotl, Aztec creator god, lord of fire and lord of time, is mother and father of everything, provider and supporter of all life on earth. He is the light that illuminates things and the mirror that reflects all being.⁸

The Celtic goddess Nantosuelta, whose name means 'stream', is one of two sources of life. The other is Sucellos, the striker, god of solar power who softens and thaws the earth to bring forth life. In the interplay between sun/fire and water, the two primary sources of life, the rhythm of the seasons is created.⁹

In Egyptian Heliopolitan cosmology, Nu or Nun is god of the primordial water, the wild undifferentiated chaos from which the sun god and all life emerged.¹⁰

Oceanos-Chronos, Greek god of the primary substance and the eternal river of time, controls all change. He is creator and destroyer of everything. As water Oceanos encircles

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the world, forms its boundary and is the origin of all things.¹¹

Deities of Magic Moments

Nike, Greek goddess of victory, represents the pivotal point on the scales, the magical moment when a game or battle turns to victory. Nike appears and disappears suddenly.

Kairos, Greek god of lucky coincidence and the right moment for favourable action, has to be grasped firmly or he escapes and the magical moment is irrevocably gone.

Fortuna, Roman goddess of good or bad luck, bestows fortune blindly, not taking account of whether or not the recipients of her attention deserve what she has in stall for them.¹²

In the Beginning

In the creation myth of ancient Persia, finite time begins with the rule of Ohrmazd, the all-powerful good spirit. Finite time emerged from and was created by infinite time.

Except Time all things are created. Time is the creator; and Time has no limit, neither top nor bottom. It has always been and shall be for evermore. No sensible person will say whence Time has come. In spite of all the grandeur that surrounded it, there was no one to call it creator; for it had not brought forth creation. It then created fire and water; and when it had brought them together, Ohrmazd came into existence, and simultaneously Time became Creator and Lord with regard to the creation it had brought forth.¹³

Enûma Eliš, the creation myth of ancient Mesopotamia, tells of a struggle between the principal deity, Marduk, and the water goddess Tiamat. Marduk's eventual victory brings to an end chaos and anarchy. From the fragments of Tiamat's torn body Marduk creates the cosmos and from the blood of the demon Kingu he forms the first humans. To ensure the continued maintenance of order over chaos, every New

Year this battle between the primordial forces has to be re-enacted.¹⁴

In Maori mythology, 'Io dwelt within the breathing space of immensity. The universe was in darkness with water everywhere; there was no glimmer of dawn, no clearness, no light . . . And he [Io] began by saying these words: "Let there be light into Tawhito, a dominion of light, a bright light." Darkness became a light-possessing darkness and at once light appeared. Now a great light prevailed.'¹⁵

Australian Aborigines depict their beginning in the following way: 'Once the earth was completely dark and silent. Nothing moved upon its barren face . . . Inside a deep cave below the Nullarbor plane slept a beautiful woman, the Sun. The Great Father Spirit gently woke her and told her to emerge from the cave and stir the universe into life.'¹⁶ This took place in Altyerrengge, 'dream time' [and space],¹⁷ the realm of the great Spirit Ancestors who formed all beings from the same life essence, creating a network of kinship that encompasses the non-human and the non-empirical world, past, present and future. After the creation of humans the Spirit Ancestors retired to Altyerrengge from where they continue their engagement with the daily life of humans and related creatures. The souls of all newborns come from that realm and the dead return to it.¹⁸

Geronimo tells the story of Apache origin thus:

In the beginning there was darkness on the earth. At that time 'all creatures had the power of speech and were gifted with reason'. The bird led by the eagle wished to admit light into the darkness but the beasts led by a nameless monster wished the darkness to remain. There was a great battle when the eagle dropped an enormous stone upon the monster. Then the light came into darkness. Man too had a part in the struggle. A boy killed with arrows a dragon that had been devouring the children of men in the darkness, and the boy became the father of Geronimo's people.¹⁹

In Icelandic mythology the world was created by the interplay between fire and ice. 'In the beginning, so the story tells, there was neither land nor sea nor sky, only a vast chasm of emptiness called Ginnungapap.' North of Ginnungapap there

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formed plumes of freezing mist that turned into the land of ice, and south of Ginnungapap flames danced on the blackness to form an ‘all-consuming sea of fire’.

Fire melts ice and ice quenches fire, and in the middle of Ginnungapap was a place that was neither biting cold nor searing hot but mild and gentle as a summer’s day. Here warm breezes from the south caressed the ice from the north as a minstrel strokes the strings of his harp, and under their soft touch the ice began to yield its hardness and to melt, and in the first trickling drops of melted ice the seeds of life stirred.²⁰

In the Book of Genesis (1: 1–6), the first day of creation is described in these words:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.²¹

The New Testament, in the Prologue to the Gospel According to John, relates a different beginning, an origin tied to *logos*, the eternal principle and universal agent of creation which is conceived as unifying logic, the word and God.

In the beginning was the Word:
the Word was with God
and the Word was God
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came into being,
not one thing came into being except through him.
What has come into being in him was life,
life that was in the light of men;
and light shines in darkness,
and darkness would not overpower it.²²

In the scientific age of the twentieth century, physicists informed us that the universe emerged with the ‘big bang’,

an explosion of intense heat and light. With this first splitting of a primeval atom, some physicists suggest, the universe began to differentiate and expand. 'Ever since the beginning, gravity has been amplifying inhomogeneities, building up structures, and enhancing temperature contrasts – a prerequisite for the emergence of the complexity that lies before us and of which we are part.'²³

Paradise and the Fall

In the beginning, before time began, humans lived a life of plenty, a life in which they knew neither suffering nor toil. This state or realm was variously called 'paradise', 'Dreaming' or the 'Garden of Eden'. Ageing, illness and death had not yet entered human existence. People walked freely and without fear among the wild beasts. It was a time of spiritual and material plenitude, a world radiant with light and beauty. The air was filled with heavenly scent and music. In this realm the parent God/gods mingled with innocent, childlike earthlings. The separating boundary between heaven and earth had not yet been drawn.²⁴

This blissful existence before and outside time was tied to certain conditions laid down by God/gods. As long as these preconditions – often in the form of rules and commandments – were adhered to, continuity of the carefree life in paradise was ensured for all.²⁵ It was the deliberate or accidental actions of humans – eating from the tree of knowledge, disobeying the rules, annoying God/gods, cutting vital links – that brought to an end the state of paradise. Separation has taken two forms: the withdrawal of God/gods from the earthly paradise to inaccessible parts of heaven, and the banishment of humans from the realm of innocence before time.

The consequences of the fall have been devastating. Heavenly bliss and the cornucopia were replaced by fear and toil, atemporal being by temporality and finitude, growth and decay. Eternal spring gave way to seasonal variation, immortal existence to earthly being, to birth and death, ageing and disease. Mortality and finitude became a feature of life – faced and feared; the hero's death revered. The battle with time commenced.

Encounters with Death

In Norse mythology the gods of Asgard retained their eternal youth by eating the golden apples supplied by Idun, keeper of the apples of immortality. When Loki betrayed Idun and delivered her to the giant, Thjazi, who imprisoned her in a fortress in the land beyond the rainbow, the gods lost their protection against the ravages of time. Faced with their rapid disintegration, Odin forced Loki to rescue Idun from captivity in the land of giants. On Idun's safe return, 'the gods reached into the basket and took of the apples, and they ate, and they ate and they ate . . .'²⁶

In the epic of Gilgamesh²⁷ the ruler of a small Assyrian kingdom found in Enkidu another man he could respect. Gilgamesh and Enkidu became close friends and went on many adventures together, slaying monsters that had plagued the forest and threatened the city. One day the goddess of the city asked Gilgamesh to make love to her. Knowing that this would bring forth his death, he refused. His life was saved but that of his friend was taken instead. Enkidu became sick and died. Confronted with his friend's death, Gilgamesh lamented:

Enkidu, I weep for you like a wailing woman. You were the axe by my side, the sword in my belt, the shield before me. I will also die and worms will feast on my flesh. I now fear death and have lost all my courage.²⁸

Through his friend's death Gilgamesh was faced with his own mortality. Deeply unsettled by that knowledge, he sets out on a quest for eternal life. He searches across all time and space, encountering beings from the distant past and faraway places, only to find that humans cannot achieve everlasting life for themselves, that immortality is a gift of the gods. The journey has tempered Gilgamesh's spirit, endowed him with wisdom. At the end of his quest Gilgamesh knew that there was no permanence, that all things must pass, that everything has its time and season.

Osiris, god-king of ancient Egypt, who reigned at a time of peace and justice, was murdered by his jealous brother

Seth, who dismembered him and dispersed Osiris's body parts across the entire kingdom. These were discovered and gathered up by Isis, wife and sister of Osiris. Together with Nephthys, her sister, and with the additional help of numerous gods, Isis was able to reassemble Osiris's body, wrap him in his own skin and reanimate him. With the natural order restored and his integrity re-established, Osiris was able to rise again and take his rightful place in the land of immortals as Lord of the Dead.²⁹

Journeys to the Otherworld

The story told by Homer in the *Odyssey* is of a quest not for immortality but for the safe return to mortal existence after extensive encounters with the deaths of friends and foes during the long war against Troy.³⁰ On the perilous journey home, which lasted a full ten years, Odysseus encountered many dangers and temptations. He met lotus-eaters, a Cyclops, the master of winds, cannibals, an enchantress, the ghosts of the dead, sirens, sea monsters and a goddess. For Odysseus death was not only a danger but also a lure. As he was drawn into the beauty and ease of life in the otherworld of witches, sirens and goddesses, so the life and wife that he sought to return to receded further and further into the distance, faded into the shadow, became less real. 'To break the spell of death he must embrace finite existence.'³¹ He had to choose life and love as a mortal over death and love as an immortal.

Dante's story in the *Divine Comedy* is one not of deeds but of experience, of an encounter with the immortal spirit.³² One day, in the middle of his life, Dante found himself lost in a forest, meeting a leopard, a lion and a wolf. The immortal spirit of the Roman poet Virgil offered to guide him home. The path however was to lead through the realms of hell, purgatory and heaven. Dante followed reluctantly through the gateway that told him to abandon all hope. In hell he found the spirits of the driven and obsessed, those whose lives had been full of violence and fraud. Their punishment was that they were unable to die and thus had no hope of

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achieving final peace. Their anguished state was eternal, without time.

In the story purgatory was a large mountain with seven stations, one for each of the seven deadly sins, which had to be conquered. Hope re-emerged because in the realm of purgatory actions have consequences. This meant that time, the passage of time, became of the utmost importance. Virgil encouraged Dante to hurry, scolded him for lingering and reminded him that today never comes again, that the time appointed to us must be put to better use. Souls, he explained to Dante, find themselves in the realm of purgatory not just for past bad deeds but also for missed opportunities. In life you cannot attain fame with a careless attitude to time. You cannot achieve a status that will outlast you if you do not use your allotted time to best advantage:

‘Now must thou thus cast off all sloth,’ said the master, ‘for sitting down or under blankets none comes to fame, and without it he that consumes his life leaves such trace of himself as smoke in air or foam on water.’³³

As Dante climbed higher and higher he became ever lighter, delivered from the weight of the deadly sins and associated cravings. At the summit of the mountain of purgatory Dante was so light that he could ascend into heaven. From this point onwards, not Virgil but Beatrice became his guide. Her presence marked the turning point between his old and new spirit life. With Beatrice at his side, Dante was fired by the eternal, timeless ‘love that moves the sun and the other stars’.³⁴

Cycles of Renewal and Regeneration

An Aztec myth tells of the battle between sun and moon. According to this story, in the beginning there was only the moon and her four hundred brothers, the stars, all of them children of the mother goddess, Coatlicu. Coatlicu was murdered by her children for bringing shame to the family of gods, by being impregnated by an unknown force. The child of this union was the sun, who avenged the death of his mother in a fierce battle with the gods of the night. The sun

was victorious and transformed night into day. This drama is re-enacted daily, with the sun 'shooting his arrows of light into the night sky and banishing the darkness'.³⁵

The Babylonian goddess Ishtar, queen of the sky, went in search of the spirit of her beloved Tammuz, god of vegetation and corn, who was cruelly murdered. On her journey to the realm of dead souls and land of no return, which was ruled by her sister Erishkigal, Ishtar faced many perils and torments. While Ishtar was imprisoned in the netherworld, nothing could grow and flourish on earth. The desolation on earth became so great that the gods pleaded with Sîn, 'lord of magic and master of the waters that nourish the world and contain all wisdom', to intervene. A deal was struck that restored Ishtar to her former power and beauty and allowed Tammuz to return to the living. There was, however, one condition: Tammuz could only spend half the year in freedom, and the other half had to be spent with Ishtar's sister in the otherworld.

When Tammuz was with Ishtar on the earth, the goddess rejoiced and nature and man flourished. But when he returned to Erishkigal below, Ishtar grieved and all signs of life died.

This is how it has been from the beginning of time and this is how it will be to the end.³⁶

A very similar explanation for the seasons is given in Greek mythology. Pluto, King of the Underworld, abducted Persephone, daughter of Demeter and Zeus, to be his queen in the shadowy dark of his kingdom. Many a day the distraught Demeter wandered across land and sea in search of her beloved daughter, until one day a nymph was able to tell her of Persephone's fate. In her anguish, Demeter, the goddess of fruitfulness, cursed the earth. Her tears fell as plague on fields and beasts. People wasted away in the ensuing famine. To bring the devastation to an end Zeus gave a ruling that should appease both his brother and his wife. He decreed that Persephone would spend half the year with Pluto and the other half with her mother. Joyful was Demeter and glad was the earth of her joy: the scorched earth and withered trees blossomed, mountains were again clothed in green, the fields bore fruit and all was well. But every year darkness and barren-

ness returned when Persephone rejoined Pluto in the shadowlands of Hades, until, in spring, she was returned to her mother's arms and the earth began to breathe again.³⁷

In Indian mythology, the universe is recreated in ongoing cycles of creation and destruction that have no beginning and no end. The story of the 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk'³⁸ explains what had happened when at the beginning of the second cycle certain elements were still missing, the most important of which was amrita, the sacred butter, source of the gods' supremacy. To obtain the amrita the gods had to churn the great ocean of milk until it turned to butter. Clearly this was a task they could not complete on their own. They had to call on the help of their enemies, the demons. With the promise that they would share this source of their power in exchange for the demons' assistance they were able to set to the task. They uprooted Mount Mandara and used Vāsuki, King of the Serpents, as their rope. After one thousand years of turning the mountain, the coveted missing treasures began to emerge from the ocean of milk: the Sacred Cow, 'wetnurse of everything living', the Goddess of Wine, the perfumed Tree of Paradise, the Nymphs of Beauty and Grace, and last but not least the amrita. The plan of the demons to steal the amrita for themselves was foiled and the supremacy of the gods over creation was restored.

Beyond Death: Resurrection and Redemption

In the Christian stories of the life of Jesus as told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus dies on the cross and rises from the dead. Jesus bids his disciples to remember that he will be with them 'always, to the close of the age'.³⁹ Jesus's second coming is told in the Book of Revelation. Three times John records the words of God: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega.'

In his presence earth and sky vanished, leaving no trace . . .

The sea gave up all the dead who were in it; Death and Hades were emptied of the dead that were in them; and everyone was judged as his deeds deserved.

Then death and Hades were hurled into the burning lake. This burning lake is the second death; and anyone whose name could not be found written in the book of life was hurled into the burning lake.

Then I saw a *new heaven and a new earth* . . .

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God . . .

Then the One sitting on the throne spoke: Look. I am making the whole of creation new . . .

The curse of destruction will be abolished . . .

And night will be abolished; they will not need lamp-light or sunlight, because Lord God will be shining on them . . .

I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the First and the Last*, the Beginning and the End.⁴⁰

Reflections: Myth for Today's Theory and Practice

Why start a book on time with mythological stories about origin and destiny? What could we possibly hope to glean from ancient predecessors' preoccupations with death and their concern with the otherworld? What relevance could stories about gods, paradise and mythical heroes have for understanding our own contemporary condition, for comprehending the nature of our lives of schedules, deadlines and time pressure?

As the chapters in this book will show, the pertinence of these mythical tales is manifold. The stories confront us with aspects of time and the temporality of being that have tended to slip out of sight with the industrial way of life. They bring to the fore concerns with origin and destiny, with the meaning of human being and the role of time for human existence. They address matters concerning the finality and contingency of being and non-being and consider the place and role of humans in the cosmic scheme of things. They acknowledge that transience and finitude place limits on human being, define it as less than perfect, create fears and anxieties. The stories and myths explain the earth-bound condition and its

transcendence, give answers to questions about who we are, define the purpose and meaning of our being in the world. With respect to those primary questions about existence, these ancient stories have lost none of their pertinence over the hundreds and thousands of years of their retelling. Moreover, they give us vital clues about the origin and nature of human culture.

Thus, with the deification of time, archaic cultures have acknowledged the key role of time for all existence. Through their gods they have identified time with the sun and moon, with light and energy, fire and water. They have recognized that time permeates everything and have acknowledged its importance for the creation and destruction of life, for birth and death, growth and decay. The mythological stories operate simultaneously at three different temporal levels: the human level, which includes both individuals and society, the cosmic level of stars, planets and the universe, and the spiritual level which encompasses the otherworld of deities and dead spirits, heaven and hell, paradise and nirvana. It is the human level which is the most explicitly bound by the finitude of earthly time. The cosmic level is marked by cycles of eternal return and renewal, while the spiritual level is beyond time – it precedes and transcends earthly time. Meaningful life, the myths suggest, is one that is integrated into these three realms of being and that manages to connect the associated times of existence. In mythical stories the finitude of human life is therefore related to the never-ending cycles of the cosmos as well as the eternal realm of God/gods and the spirits of the dead.

In mythology individual birth and death are related to collective beginning and end, origin and destiny. Individual birth, the change from a safe environment to the painful expulsion into an uncertain world, is paralleled by the collective loss of paradise and the beginning of earthly human existence. Since death cannot be lived through, that is, since death is outside the realm of experience, knowledge about the end of life is often sought in its beginning. Across the ages in most cultures creation myths tell of a blissful timeless existence followed by the fall from grace and with it the beginning of time. Death emerges with the expulsion from paradise, just as the process of dying begins with birth. Human being, time, birth and death become inextricably intertwined.

To escape the 'curse of time' and the terror of non-existence, of nothingness after death, people have chosen different solutions to the existential dilemma. The spirit of the dead returns from whence it came, back to the realm of Dreaming, for example. Alternatively, it emulates the planetary path of eternal return; is resurrected or reincarnated; or goes before a heavenly court to be judged worthy of ascent to heaven or to be condemned to hell. The first solution is marked by an effort to return to hallowed origins; the second by integration into the cosmic scheme of things, with eventual deliverance to the spiritual realm; and the third by progression towards a future state, the nature of which is dependent on actions during one's lifetime. No matter how the afterlife is conceived, it seems that meaningful existence is tied to the belief that life does not end with death. This entails finding a relationship to that which cannot be experienced and encompassed.

The mythological quest for eternal life therefore becomes a quest for knowledge: knowledge about death and about what lies beyond. Only the spirit,⁴¹ however, can probe the realms beyond time. Only the spirit is free to explore the world beyond death and thus able to provide a guide to deeper existence and enlightenment. However, some advances in this spiritual quest, it seems, have been accompanied by an inescapable distancing from nature and an ever-widening gap between body and spirit, earth and otherworld, between human life in finite time and spirit existence in an atemporal, eternal realm. This separation laid the foundation for later philosophical theories of Greek antiquity in which Plato posited two separate realms: the one covering phenomena, that is, things extended in time and space that are subject to change; the other encompassing *noumena*, eternal ideas as the form or essence of phenomena that fall outside the temporal realm of earthly being. The distancing of human being from nature, brought about by the foreknowledge of death and the quest for immortality, moreover, facilitated sociocultural activity as a means to transcend the earthly condition. One of its cultural products, the natural science of our own age, was in turn to locate immortality in the body with the theory that genes ensure individual immortality.⁴²

Culture arises with the relationship to finitude as inescapable human condition, for 'death', as Reaney points out, 'is the midwife of creative change, of transcendence'.⁴³ Through cultural activity people create a world that endures beyond their personal lifespans, a world that renders mortal being immortal. Thus Dante's story and the legends of classical heroes press the importance of fame as that which outlasts a person and makes their life worthy of being preserved in legends and folk tales. As I show in chapter 4, pyramids and cave art, myth and writing, ritual and religion are all cultural means to transcend individual being beyond its allotted earthly time. All are responses to the inevitability of finitude. To understand the temporality of contemporary life, therefore, takes us not only on an exploration of time in theory and practice but also on a deeper quest for knowledge about the temporality of human being.

INTERLUDE

REPRESENTATIONS OF TIME

Cycle

The time of the cycle is process
The time of the cycle is rhythmicity
The time of the cycle is life and death
The time of the cycle is cosmic creativity
The time of the cycle is change-continuum
The time of the cycle is sequence and duration
The time of the cycle is repetition of the similar
The time of the cycle is intersecting before and after
The time of the cycle is bounded by observers' timeframes
The time of the cycle is past & future expressed in the living present

Spiral

The time of the spiral is Tao
The time of the spiral is dynamic
The time of the spiral is a journey
The time of the spiral is development
The time of the spiral is symbol of eternity
The time of the spiral is projection and destiny
The time of the spiral is encoded pasts and futures
The time of the spiral is binding duration and progression
The time of the spiral is yin & yang, immanence & transcendence

Circle

The time of the circle is stability
The time of the circle is timelessness
The time of the circle is created eternity
The time of the circle is repetition of the same
The time of the circle is duration and endurance
The time of the circle is past & future in the present
The time of the circle is memory, ritual and anticipation
The time of the circle is extending the now to origin & destiny

Point

The time of the point is origin
The time of the point is stillness
The time of the point is eternal now
The time of the point is the vertical axis
The time of the point is the beginning & end
The time of the point is unifying the one and all
The time of the point is indivisible, atomic & absolute

Line

The time of the line is spatial
The time of the line is historical
The time of the line is projective
The time of the line is irreversible
The time of the line is before & after
The time of the line is tied to a beginning