

## **IV. Time, Imagination and Memory**

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20 h, biweekly, seminar for PhD students

### **Course Description:**

I know what time is until someone asks me to put it into words. St. Augustine said it roughly that way. It is difficult to know what time is beyond our experience of it, so we must begin to address the mystery by asking the question "how do we experience time?" Then we may move to the more difficult issue "what is time, such that we experience it as we do?" Then we are met with so many more questions: Assuming that there is more to the nature of time than our *experience* of it, what part of it do we experience? What part or aspects of time, if any, do we create? Are there possibilities for temporal experience we haven't had but might have? How can we know the experiences we have are not illusions? Does time flow? Does the past really accumulate, or is it gone? Does human memory really depict past time? When we experience images of things not currently in our senses. Are we remembering them? If so, where are they? If not, what are they? The questions go on and on.

To get some footing in this slippery subject, let us take stock of a few things we can be confident about. Human consciousness and human culture develop together. Human activity creates alterations in our objective living conditions, through technologies and manipulations of material conditions that then persist across generations, and human consciousness then lives its way into the newly formed reality and builds upon it further. The "master key" to this process of creating culture is imagination. Given what we have created, it is evident that human beings to reach forward into the possible, into the future, and give structure and meaning to possibilities that are not yet actual, and to act in ways that bring the imagined possibilities into concrete being. How do human beings imagine what is not present to them, what might be, but is not? How do they connect these imaginings with the inheritance they find in their present senses, the external evidence of a past reality they must "remember" in order to use and interpret? If the organization of the culture is a collective prompt to believe in the reality of the past, is that a kind of memory? Or is memory a subjective response to the overwhelming presence of the past in our senses?

We will study this process of time-imagination-memory, its structure, its genesis, and its importance, with special focus upon the pivotal role played by the image. It is my contention that all cultural functions of imagination have a basis in a primordial, common (unindividuated) mythic consciousness and the way it projects imagination into the possible. I argue that reason itself is a highly refined imaginative function, as is memory. There are three types of images, those taken as present, those taken as past, and those taken as future. But the limits of taking any image as belonging to one or another of these orders (the settled, the unsettled, and the possible) are very much in question. We can do with images what we ought not do, for our own health and that of others. But why can we misuse images and distort time? I argue that human sanity is a matter of taking the proper cues from the present world of sense images and joining these images to certain commonly selected images held as the epitome of the shared past, and also to certain privileged images treated as genuine possibilities for future action that is continuous with the other two sorts of images.