

# Questioning Kronos

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The curtain was closed. The lights were off. Everyone was in their place, waiting to hear what signaled the start. The wait for those words, eight little and simple words, was eternal; the background music seemed to last forever. Suddenly, the crowd went silent as the long-awaited words came off the speaker: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is the third call”. The curtain opened and the first note of the song began to play. The musical number finished as the stage lights shone brightly on my face and adrenaline rushed through my body, making time stop and the outside world disappear. Of course that wait wasn’t literally eternal, the music didn’t really last forever, and time can’t actually stop, but it certainly felt like it.

Time is often perceived as a quantitative concept, associated with mathematics, physics and equations. However, this paper explores different resources that show that time can actually be so much more than it seems—from philosophic currents and the theory of relativity to famous quotes in books and movies, such as *Looking for Alaska* (2023) and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2010), as well as everyday topics like language, religion, and age—.

I know it may seem rather hard to think about time as something that’s neither absolute nor objective, but believe me when I say it has been, in fact, a long-discussed topic by many thinkers, researchers, and scientists. Just look at philosophers: some argue that time can only be understood if we rely on intuition and stop analyzing it rationally (process philosophers).

Others claim that the past, present, and future are nothing but a mere illusion (philosophers of the manifold).

If philosophy isn’t your thing, think about Einstein’s theory of relativity and the way it revolutionized modern physics: he explained how speed affects mass, time and space while gravity affects the time-space fabric. In simpler words, he basically proved that time isn’t a fixed nor rigid phenomenon. So, if two completely different areas of study share the inability to prove that time is an objective thing, then we can say that it is, in fact, subjective.

However, the ambiguity of certain time-related concepts isn’t a matter exclusive to philosophical or scientific discussions. In his book *Looking for Alaska*, John Green gives us an example of the vagueness of time: when the girl the main character loves dies in a car crash, another student tries to comfort him by telling him she didn’t suffer, as her death was instantaneous. Consumed by his sorrow, he spirals into a train of thought about what “an instant” actually means and how long it would take to die instantly if “instant” rice takes five minutes, yet “instant” pudding takes an hour.



The same thing happens in our everyday lives when we say “ahorita” (“right now”). For example, when your mom asks you to come down and you answer with “ahorita voy” (“I’ll be there right now”) but you don’t go until after a couple of minutes have passed; or when a teammate says “Lo hago ahorita que llegue a casa” (“I’ll do my part as soon as I arrive home”), but it actually takes them a couple of hours to do as promised. So “ahorita” could mean “now”, “give me a few minutes”, “give me a couple of hours” or, in some cases, it could even mean “never”. These concepts, along with so many others, show how time expressions aren’t even congruent nor trustworthy because everyone gives them a different interpretation. When we think about it, time is a complex concept to understand not only because of its extensive and ambiguous nature, but also because the way humans experience it depends entirely on each person’s perception of reality, whether it’s individually or socially constructed.

“You are alive. And you stand up and see the lights on the buildings and everything that makes you wonder. And you’re listening to that song, and that drive with the people who you love most in the world. And in this moment, I swear we are infinite”. This quote, composed of four simple sentences that hide so much meaning, is part of the ending monologue in the *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) movie.



Has any of this ever happened to you? Have you ever enjoyed yourself so much that hours feel like minutes? Or have you ever been given heartbreaking news that makes you feel as if time has stopped? Just like it happened in the anecdote used in the beginning of this paper, these phenomena didn’t happen (at least not in a literal sense) but they clearly illustrate how time is more than just a variable in an equation; it is a subjective event that can be molded. Our understanding of reality is shaped by what we experience and how we perceive it: each person’s “little world” depends on what they live and how they interpret it. At the same time, those interpretations mold our perception, so there will be no people who share the exact same reality.

The individual construction of reality doesn’t have to do only with the things we live, but it is also affected by the simple fact that we are alive. Being alive means time is passing for us, and every second that goes by represents a less percentage of the time we have lived. Confusing, right? But let me explain: Go back to when you were a kid, let’s say you were around five years old... A year seemed to last an eternity, didn’t it? This happened because at the age of five, a year represented 20% of your life. Now, imagine you are 17 years old; a year may seem like a decent amount of time because it represents only 5.9% of the time you’ve been alive. And when you’re 70 years old? I haven’t reached that age yet, but I’m sure a year will “fly by” because it would only represent 1.4% of my life. Time tends to pass more quickly as we grow older because age molds our own reality.

Just like it happens with the individual reality, when we talk about a perception that is socially constructed, there are some important factors to keep in mind. We depend on cultural and historical aspects because we learn how the world works by observing our surroundings. Just look at how different we understand time from the way

## Questioning Kronos

ancient cultures did. If traveling to another era was possible and you asked how time worked to a Greek from B.C., they would say it was controlled by Kronos, the titan of time, and that he often used it as a destruction resource. This belief was their absolute truth, and they would say our way to see it is crazy and wrong. However, thanks to technology and modernity, religion, science and many other things, now it's very hard, if not impossible, to find someone with those beliefs.

The subjectivity of time is an extremely complex concept that goes beyond a simple definition. It implies many areas of study, both humanistic and scientific, and can be shaped by many aspects of our lives, from personal experiences, language, culture, to perception of reality, age, and even religion. But no matter how differently people may perceive time, the one thing everyone is affected by is its unforgivable nature: time *happens* no matter what.



## References

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