

UNITED WISDOM

Physical Time and Lived Time

World and Consciousness

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Epigraph

> *the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back*

William James, The Principles of Psychology, Chapter XV, pp.609–610, original English, 1890. This is a complete grammatical clause excerpted from a longer sentence; James continues by explaining the breadth of the experienced present. The image concerns perception, rather than the geometry of physical time.

What this article is about

We can know exactly how long a conversation lasted and still not understand its place in a life. We can name a train's arrival time without describing someone's experience of waiting on the platform. It is easy to turn these differences into an argument about which kind of time is real. A more useful beginning is to identify the questions: what are we measuring, what are we experiencing, and what decision are we making? This article compares Einstein's conditions for measurement, Bergson's philosophical duration, and James's description of the perceived present. They do not form a single doctrine. Together, they help us recognize the limits of chronology while retaining its necessity. Within the UW direction Path, a calendar records the allocation of available hours, while an account of experience opens a discussion of their content. Neither decides our priorities or removes our constraints.

I. Two questions about one conversation

Imagine two people meeting after a long separation and spending forty minutes together. One describes the meeting as a brief pause between other commitments. For the other, these minutes were the first occasion on which something previously unspoken could be said. A clock does not have to choose between their accounts: it answers a question about the interval. Their stories address what happened, what each expected, and what changed for each. If someone says there was too little time, it helps to ask whether they mean the number of minutes, an unfinished conversation, or a wish to continue the relationship. Otherwise, the participants may argue about different things.

This distinction does not require us to declare inner experience a special physical substance. For a discussion of life, it is enough to recognize that a time record and an assessment of an event concern different subjects. Two meetings can occupy equal spaces in a schedule and carry different weight in a decision about the future. Even someone's own account is not a final assessment: today they may see a turning point where, a month later, they see one

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episode in a complicated process. The account deserves attention, alongside examination of circumstances, promises, and consequences. Acknowledging its importance does not make every interpretation infallible.

Here a practical UW question begins. Instead of speaking generally about lacking time, we can separate the available interval, the activity's content, and its relation to a chosen direction. Sometimes hours really are scarce: travel and necessary work leave a narrow opening. Sometimes an opening exists, but the task remains undefined. Sometimes an activity was chosen deliberately and still needs reconsideration. These situations call for different responses. Combining them under one word can lead someone to demand more discipline where assistance is needed, or to seek profound meaning where a simple scheduling agreement would help. The distinction keeps the question concrete and makes room to name an actual constraint.

II. What makes shared time possible

In §1 of Einstein's 1905 paper, a local clock reading differs from coordinating distant events. Clocks at A and B are synchronized through a stated rule involving a light signal. Section 2 compares relatively moving systems and their judgments of simultaneity. This is a specified physical problem involving coordinates, clocks, signals, and assumptions. It does not describe how long waiting for an answer feels. The observer participates in a procedure for defining time; their mood cannot take the place of a reference system. Physical relativity does not make every personal account of time arbitrary or equally correct.

An ordinary meeting rarely requires us to construct this procedure afresh. Its structure nevertheless helps explain why shared time cannot simply be replaced by personal feeling. If someone believes a conversation lasted a few minutes while a record shows forty, two different statements may be involved. They may have estimated the interval incorrectly while accurately describing how unnoticed its passage felt. Clarifying this does not dismiss experience or require the clock to match an impression. For another person to arrive, finish work, or arrange travel, a shared temporal reference is needed. It supports coordination between people who do not share a consciousness or experience the encounter identically.

The practical conclusion is modest. A shared activity benefits from a stated beginning, end, and understanding about rescheduling. These details do not replace the meeting's content; they make room for it. A discussion of depth gives no right to occupy someone else's evening without agreement. One person's feeling about time does not cancel another person's waiting. Conversely, keeping precisely to the interval does not establish mutual understanding. Time as an agreement connects actions, while the quality of contact remains another subject. Both questions matter particularly when participants bear different costs of waiting or changing their plans.

III. What a list of minutes leaves out

In Chapter II of Time and Free Will, Bergson contrasts experienced succession with a numerical representation of time. His melody example concerns how a new note belongs with preceding notes rather than simply filling another slot. The pendulum discussion distinguishes counting from the interpenetration of states. The edition used here is F. L. Pogson's English translation, the 1913 exemplar, pp.99–125. Bergson also makes stronger philosophical claims about consciousness; these remain his position. This passage does not establish that physical measurement is wrong or that the external world exists only for an observer.

Consider an original illustration, rather than an experiment by Bergson. A musician has an hour scheduled for rehearsal. During it, they work on a difficult passage, hear its connection with the rest of the phrase, and try playing the whole. A record of three intervals helps organize the work. Adding their minutes does not explain what became clearer between the first and last performance. An account of the process can describe a transition absent from the table. This establishes no special law of learning: the rehearsal might fail, and a changed impression might not mean improved performance. It shows which questions an accurately completed table still leaves open.

For a discussion of priorities, this boundary matters more than a claim that numbers obstruct living. Numbers can reveal how much available time travel takes or how many meetings are already scheduled. Without them, it is easy to promise the impossible. The difficulty arises when a number becomes an answer to every question about an activity. An hour spent is not automatically progress, usefulness, or closeness. An unallocated hour is not automatically a loss. Assessment requires criteria appropriate to the activity and a person's decision about what matters. Describing duration adds content to counting, without supplying a ready-made scale of value or making every intense impression a sound life choice.

IV. A present in which succession can be heard

In Chapter XV of The Principles of Psychology, pp.605–610, James describes the perceived present as having some duration. His saddle-back image connects what has just passed with what is being perceived. He discusses the specious present through a quotation from E. R. Clay; James's own image should not be attributed to Clay. This is a historical account of experience. It establishes no universal number of seconds, current brain mechanism, or treatment. The limited point used here is that experiencing succession cannot automatically be represented as acquaintance with entirely isolated instants.

In conversation, the latest sentence can change our understanding of the previous one. A question initially sounds reproachful; a clarification shows that the speaker is asking for help. Understanding the second remark does not require deleting the first or moving it into another

physical time. The relationship between parts changes in the current interpretation. That interpretation can still be checked: the speaker may confirm the request, correct it, or decline to discuss it. A new sense of coherence is not always accurate. We can construct a persuasive account that does not match what was said. Experience therefore needs feedback and distinctions between heard words, expectations, and subsequent explanation.

Within Path, a whole day or year need not be the unit of reflection. A meaningful question may arise within one completed conversation, walk, or work activity. Its scale should follow the task, rather than a promise to discover a universal present. One successful evening is insufficient for examining a recurring commitment. A monthly table might obscure a particular request. Choosing the scale becomes part of the decision: what are we trying to understand, what information is needed, and whose participation matters? James's historical image opens a question about connection while leaving the appropriate size of a practical inquiry undecided.

V. Where the comparison must stop

Bergson and James enable a discussion of connected experience without speaking with one voice. Bergson's distinction between duration and numerical representation belongs to a philosophical argument with its own commitments. James is considering the perception of temporal succession. Their accounts can be compared around the inadequacy of an isolated instant while preserving their different aims and concepts. Einstein addresses another problem: defining temporal relations within a physical description. The shared word time is insufficient for a unified theory. The absence of such a theory does not prevent reading these authors together, provided the comparison identifies where an explanation stops answering the question being asked.

For example, a feeling that waiting has slowed cannot be explained by a relativistic formula merely because both discussions use the word relativity. Such an explanation would require an appropriate physical situation, defined quantities, and a check that the model applies. An account of waiting usually concerns how an interval was experienced. That is another subject. Likewise, feeling that much happened in an evening does not establish that more physical time existed. The event can be recognized as full without that conclusion. Precision protects experience itself: it need not pretend to be a measurement to deserve attention, and measurement need not explain an event's meaning.

Nor should each author be assigned a convenient half of the truth, as though physics dealt with a surface and philosophy alone disclosed genuine reality. That is a separate metaphysical thesis requiring its own argument. This comparison makes a smaller claim: different questions receive different kinds of answer. Measurement serves coordinates and coordination; an experiential account concerns content; evaluating a priority concerns choice under conditions

and obligations. Connections between them are possible without being automatic. A conversation's importance does not by itself mean the next conversation should last longer. Establishing that requires the wishes and possibilities of everyone involved.

VI. A calendar records possibility rather than meaning

Imagine someone who wants to paint regularly and reserves an evening each week. After a month, four entries appear in the calendar. They record allocated intervals only insofar as the record is accurate. They do not reveal what happened within them: drawing, preparing materials, discussing an idea, or waiting for quiet. Content can be named separately without treating preparation as failure. This may clarify which resource is needed next. Access to a place might be the issue, or choosing a small, finishable activity. Alternatively, the original wish may no longer correspond to the person's current interest.

This inquiry need not turn every interest into a project requiring reports. It makes sense when someone actually wants to understand a mismatch between an intention and a possibility. Sometimes recognizing an evening's value without an outcome is enough. Sometimes a tangible piece of work is wanted, and a personal criterion of completion is needed. These decisions belong to the participant. The article sets no common standard of fullness for rest, learning, friendship, and earning a living. If the calendar becomes another tribunal of self-judgment, detailed recording can be abandoned. Questions can also be distinguished in ordinary conversation, without a table, scores, or a mandatory daily procedure.

Hours also prevent us from romanticizing a shortage of resources. If travel occupies the evening, an additional description of experience will not create space for painting. If using a room depends on another person's agreement, an inner decision alone will not open its door. A priority can be clear while the opportunity is absent. Action then concerns conditions: can an obligation move, access be negotiated, support be found, or the current impossibility be acknowledged? The answer can be no. That does not demonstrate insufficient depth of desire. A discussion of time must preserve this possibility, or a philosophy of duration becomes an unfair demand to find resources entirely within oneself.

VII. Experience adds a question to the allocation of hours

Suppose someone discovers that much of their time goes to activities they regard as secondary. A first explanation may be that they have chosen priorities badly. The record does not reveal how freely these activities were chosen. They may sustain income, fulfil an agreement, or maintain access to necessary assistance. Before demanding a reorganization, their function must be named. An unpleasant obligation can have an important reason. A pleasant activity can remain unavailable because of conditions the person did not choose. Experience helps reveal tension between a wish and the week's arrangement without resolving it in place of examining actual dependencies.

The next question concerns what the person's own word important means. It may refer to a chosen direction, another person's urgent request, an expected outcome, or a promise already given. These meanings can conflict. A rule allocating time only to meaningful things cannot remove that conflict. Rest and caring for someone may both matter; so may learning and paying current expenses. Choice requires acknowledging losses and negotiating where others are affected. The intensity of an experience is not a decisive vote. Quiet, ordinary work can also correspond to a commitment and a chosen path.

Rather than assessing an entire life from one evening, a limited next question can be formulated. Which activity should be retained? Which obligation needs a clearer agreement? What can be reduced without transferring its cost to someone else? Which change is currently unavailable? These questions guarantee no correct decision, but make discussion assessable. A person can distinguish an intention from an agreement, a trial from a continuing arrangement, and their own capacity from hoped-for assistance. This is an original UW application, not a concealed recommendation by the historical authors. It gives a priority concrete expression while preserving the right to decline, reconsider, or keep the week unchanged.

VIII. Two kinds of time between people

When people plan a shared activity, each brings a schedule and a history. For one, rescheduling means a small rearrangement. For another, it means a wasted journey or losing a rare free evening. They can value the activity equally and experience waiting differently. Coordination starts with available conditions, rather than assuming that shared importance automatically produces a shared pace. It helps to state how much time someone can offer, how much notice they need, and what happens if the plan changes. These details allow a substantive response without comparing the depth of anyone's feelings.

Afterwards, the event's content can be discussed separately from punctuality. A meeting ends on time, but someone has not asked their question. Another participant believes the

conversation is complete because every agenda item has been covered. Nobody need be declared to feel time incorrectly. The participants can ask whether the question was known beforehand, whether a separate conversation is needed, and whether they wish to continue. If there will be no continuation, that too should be stated clearly. Respecting experience does not promise unlimited access to another person. Respecting shared hours does not require treating every substantive question as closed when the scheduled interval ends.

In close relationships, making quantity of time the sole proof of attachment is especially unhelpful. It can be an important condition for meeting, but the reason for a small number of hours is not contained in the number. A long evening together guarantees neither attention nor agreement. A specific need can be discussed instead: an uninterrupted conversation, help with a defined task, or a visit agreed in advance. The other person retains the right to respond, offer an available form, or decline. Lived time becomes a subject of mutual understanding without becoming a universal accusation. Depth can be expressed through a precise request and acknowledged boundaries, without a competition in duration or a demand for identical feelings.

IX. What a record can and cannot establish

For reflection, two short records of one activity can be used. The first contains its actual beginning, end, and circumstances. The second contains a personal account: what could be considered, what remained open, and why the activity matters or no longer matters. These fields should not be added into a common score. Forty minutes and a sense of completion have different meanings. An unknown time can remain approximate, and difficulty describing content can be acknowledged. The aim is not an attractive journal. It is to preserve distinctions otherwise lost in expressions about wasted time or a day passing too quickly.

Such a record remains limited evidence. It does not establish that a future meeting will reproduce the experience, that memory is exact, or that the chosen activity is objectively more important than others. An account can change after a conversation or new information. The original record remains useful if its status is preserved: how the event was understood then. A subsequent decision should also consider what could be independently confirmed, such as a fulfilled promise, access to a place, or a participant's agreement. Personal reporting and external checking can complement each other without becoming interchangeable evidence. Remembering an evening's quality does not confirm someone else's commitment.

Recording need not continue if it consumes too much attention or turns ordinary activities into continuous self-assessment. One episode, a conversation with a participant, or a brief note before altering a schedule may suffice. No benefit from daily observation is established here. A practical tool makes sense in relation to one's own question. Once the question is settled, an additional procedure may be unnecessary. If the problem concerns working arrangements or

access to assistance, a journal cannot replace changed conditions. This limit avoids adding a new duty to study every minute and leaves reflection a proportionate place among life's other activities.

X. A priority without a single scale

A life's direction cannot be derived from a stopwatch or an impression's intensity. The first identifies availability and supports coordination; the second may draw attention to previously unnoticed content. Between these facts and a decision stands a question about values, conditions, and obligations. A person may choose an activity that does not feel vivid every time because they consider it important. They may revise an earlier choice as information changes. A priority becomes clearer when what should be retained and the cost of change are named. It remains a decision that can be discussed and examined through its consequences.

The comparison supplies language for different questions while preserving their independence. Einstein's definition draws attention to procedures and conditions in physical description. Bergson's argument opens a philosophical question about what numerical representation leaves out. James's account concerns the connectedness of perceived succession. None provides a calendar or a list of our most important activities. A contemporary application begins when a reader connects these distinctions with a situation. That transition should be owned as an application: proximity to famous names and verified primary passages does not give it extra truth.

The discussion can therefore end with a concrete, undramatic decision. Keep the meeting's interval but name the question beforehand. Leave an evening free of an outcome requirement. Clarify access to a needed place. Acknowledge that the schedule cannot currently change. Or retain it because it meets actual obligations. Such decisions remain serious without a powerful experience. They connect available hours, experienced content, and a chosen direction through action for which the person remains responsible. Physical and lived time need not merge to help formulate a precise question about one's life.

What this means in practice

Choose a recent activity about which you actually want to understand something: a conversation, work meeting, or free evening. Do not select a painful episode merely to complete an exercise. Name the question: clarify duration, understand content, or decide how to arrange next time. Without a question, no record is needed. This is a UW reflection proposal; its effectiveness as a psychological intervention is not established here.

Record available temporal details separately: approximate beginning and end, travel, waiting, and coordination requirements. Do not adjust duration to fit an impression or demand

unavailable precision. Then describe the experience in ordinary words: which question was voiced, what remained unfinished, and what changed in understanding. Separate what another person actually said from an assumption about their intention. The records receive no common score and are not compared as equivalent quantities.

Check conditions for a possible change. Is there an available interval, access to a place, and another participant's agreement? What depends on you, and what needs negotiation or support? If a change affects someone else's time, make a specific request that allows refusal. A clear priority is not a promise to overcome every constraint. Sometimes a reasonable outcome is to name the current impossibility and preserve an intention without immediate action.

If a next step is available and wanted, choose one: clarify a meeting time, prepare a question, alter a small part of the schedule, or leave it unchanged. Afterwards, check only what you wanted to learn. There is no requirement to demonstrate that the day was lived with maximum fullness. The exercise makes different kinds of information visible for a proportionate decision. It can stop after one episode; the number of notes does not measure depth, discipline, or the rightness of a life's path.

Key quotation

> *I merely count simultaneities, which is very different.*

Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will, Chapter II, p.108, F. L. Pogson's English translation, 1913 exemplar. A complete clause excerpted from the sentence about observing a clock. The difference concerns counting simultaneities and duration within Bergson's philosophical argument; it does not declare physical measurement invalid.

Connections between traditions

Texts and locators	What the comparison reveals	Boundary
Einstein, §1, clocks A/B; Bergson, II, pp.107–110, pendulum	Identify the question each description addresses before comparing answers.	Clock coordination and experienced duration are not interchangeable measurements.
Bergson, II, pp.100–106, melody; James, XV, pp.608–610, perceived present	Both invite inquiry into relations within succession.	Bergson's philosophical duration differs from James's psychological description.
Einstein, §2, moving system; James, XV, p.610, judgment of impression order	Disagreement requires an identified subject and conditions of comparison.	Physical simultaneity is not explained by perceptual error; perceptual error is not a relativistic effect.
James, XV, pp.605–607, connected succession; Einstein, §1, distant events	An ordering relation needs its own grounding.	Connected experience and light-signal transmission supply different evidence; this is a methodological analogy.
Bergson, II, pp.104–110, counting oscillations; James, XV, p.611, symbolically conceived intervals	Counting an interval and discussing its content are distinct tasks.	The two records are an original UW proposal, without an established productivity benefit.
Einstein, Introduction and §1; Bergson, II, pp.115–121, mechanical representation	Question, assumptions, and purpose determine an explanation's scope.	Philosophical criticism of representation is not an experimental refutation of physics; doctrinal unity is not asserted.

Primary sources

1. Albert Einstein, On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies, 1905; W. Perrett and G. B. Jeffery translation in The Principle of Relativity, Methuen, 1923; John Walker electronic edition. Introduction and §§1–2, pp.1–5: simultaneity and the comparison of reference systems. This material does not explain psychological duration. Electronic-edition provenance.

2. Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will, authorized English translation by F. L. Pogson; George Allen & Company / Macmillan, 1913 exemplar. Chapter II, pp.99–125: duration, melody, pendulum, and numerical representation. The author's philosophical assertions retain that status; the later relativity debate is outside this article.

3. William James, The Principles of Psychology, XV: The Perception of Time, original English, 1890; Christopher D. Green electronic transcription, York University. Pages 605–610 and the

opening of p.611: connected succession and the perceived present. This historical account establishes no current universal perceptual duration.

Tags

time, physical time, duration, lived time, simultaneity, synchronization, clocks, measurement, reference system, Einstein, Bergson, William James, perception, present, succession, melody, pendulum, qualitative difference, numerical representation, philosophy of time, historical psychology, life priorities, Path, calendar, obligations, coordination, available conditions, personal reflection

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