

Cyclical History, Existential Entropy

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (April 2024)



Timeblades –by James Rosenquist, 2007

Time is the moving image of reality. –Plato, Timaeus

The ages of human history wax and wane. With every invention, discovery, and especially technological development, much of man's psyche, personality, memory, and wisdom is left behind, or at worst, lost.

This, I suggest, is the result of existential entropy, a condition that atrophies man's capacity and resolve to understand and know how to decipher human reality from

appearances. Existential entropy turns man into a slave of sensual impressions.

The latter condition is not captured by recorded history, for history only records events, what is essentially the surface of human action and behavior. Instead, only existential self-reflection captures the ebb and flow of the human condition through time. Though, this is only possible through self-reflection on the lived-experience-as-immediacy—what we call individual human existence. It is the immediacy of human existence that, once cultivated by individuals, recognizes history as cyclical, and thus the purview of individual persons, not collectives.

Plato knew something about man's metaphysical/existential condition and longings in the Classical Greek period, something that has been lost through the wear and tear of existential entropy: the essences that inform human existence and reality. It is naive to believe that, given the technological explosion that began in the late nineteenth century, people today resemble their progenitors in previous eras.

One reason for this is that mechanization disrupts people's ability to perceive, and ultimately, internalize space and time. While mechanization does not annihilate a person's sensibility for space and time, it can numb it, consequently diminishing its ability to aid us in deciphering reality from appearances. Like a muscle, our a priori sensibility requires resistance from objective reality to remain polished and deliver us from mere percepts to conceptual understanding.

Postmodernity's Assault on the Human Person

We measure mechanical and technological advances—in the loose sense of 'advancement'—by comparing material conditions between eras, generations, and decades. This is achieved

through comparison between periods of time. Analogy is instrumental in cataloguing linear history—before and after. As such, these comparisons only succeed in measuring physical and material characteristics of human life, in the biological sense, as this is informed by material conditions. Examples of this are settlement and agriculture in prehistory, the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, the Industrial Revolution, Space Age, and digital age.

Because of the sensual and impressionistic nature of change, it is not difficult to compare man's material condition between eras. This is often as simple as comparing the 'look' of things, a visual history of things through time, as it were.

However, most important to human existence, not merely biological life, is to take account of the effects of material changes on the human person, especially the psyche, which orients us to live, understand, seek knowledge, and enable our capacity for self-reflection. This is a tremendously difficult task, what is truly an art form. This entails measuring, a manner of taking account, of the tangible metaphysical/existential longings and sensibility that inform the human person. What happens to these through time? This is a task that is rarely recorded by historians, and definitely forgotten with the passage of time. Yet, it is existential longing that informs man's material condition, which we consequently measure as history.

An effective way to document the effect that rapid technological, cultural, and moral changes have on the psyche, morality, our metaphysical posturing of reality, and existential inquietude, or lack thereof, is to measure and record these in respectively small units or periods of time. For instance, the aforementioned changes have been drastic since, say, the 1960s, and devastating since the 1980s.

People who have lived through these era-altering changes can

attest to this, assuming they are sentient beings who pay attention to their surroundings in its immediacy and have a good memory, which enables them to compare before and after. The latter capability is an essential point that we cannot forget, if we are to be loyal to human history.

However, one clarification is warranted. It is not the case that different historical periods make man into a malleable putty that social-political and environmental conditions determine. This is not my view.

Social/political ideology and environment, we have witnessed repeatedly, especially with communism in the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first, succeed by breaking the will of people. Totalitarian forces subjugate man through mere violence. Alleged historical materialism, which is the plaything of Marxists, pretends that man can be molded—improved—through totalitarian means. Human history shows that behaviorism and social engineering only succeed through momentary violence, though violence, nonetheless. Recent history leaves no doubt that man's nature has not improved, only the standard of living that we enjoy.

Cyclical History: The Purview of Individuals, not Collectives

What is left, then, but to propose a cyclical view of history? This view sees man vacillating between more and less civility, in addition to more and less self-destructive morality, beliefs, behavior, and values. Implicit in this view is the understanding that human nature does not change. While materialists imagine they can change human nature—for what they call 'progress'—this is nothing other than the shape that the coffer of human nature assumes with the passage of time, and which is ultimately exacerbated by conditions in inhuman eras. The result is existential entropy, which culminates in existential and moral ennui.

I am not suggesting the traditional understanding of cyclical time that pertains to the seasons. Neither am I thinking about cyclical history as eternal recurrence, re-incarnation, or other such new age platitudes. I am not entertaining these notions.

Instead, I am considering cyclical history only in terms of human values, their ability to manifest as progress (linear history), as far as man's material condition is concerned. There is no need to deny material progress. The question for me in these pages is the interplay of existential entropy and existential ennui in relation to the 'inertia' of values and morality that material progress often brings about.

We must begin with the principle that human reality addresses and beckons individuals, not collectives. Because the differentiated individual is the basic unity of societal agglomeration, it is the individual qua individual for whom human reality is most pressing and poignant.

Individuals push forth inventions and material progress that everyone can enjoy. Yet this also begs the question of the moral/spiritual development of man.

Material progress has the effect of dislodging man from the capacity for seeking heuristic life lessons. Heuristic lessons must ultimately be embraced by thoughtful individuals, if these are to have any impact. Apart from thoughtful individuals, heuristic lessons are lost to the maelstrom of history. Heuristic lessons are squeezed out in a positivistic and technological age. In their place, progress promises that science, positivism, and scientism will supply answers to metaphysical/existential human concerns.

Cyclical History, Human Reality, and Existential Entropy

The effect of cyclical history on man's capacity and

sensibility in capturing the essences that inform human reality, as well as their corruption through existential entropy, warrants a brief explanation. The following symbols will be used to offer a visual aid to the text:

Linear history (clock time): Three right-pointing arrows → → →.

Cyclical history (subjective, psychological time): a circle 0, followed by a series of re-coiling smaller circles ◻◻◻◻◻◻, followed by another circle 0.

The Past (clock time): Three left-pointing arrows ←←←.

The Present: An open-ended cross ◻ that depicts forward motion toward the future (clock time), a recoil to the past (memory), an upward increase in vitality of understanding and existential reflection (lived-time), and a downward motion signifying linear history's movement away from the past (clock time).

Existential immediacy (the lived-experience): a sun symbol ☼ signifying intuitive, a priori illumination of essences that inform human existence: existential-immediacy-through-the-lived-experience.

There is no need to dispute the reality of the passage of objective time—what humans measure as clock time. Objective time can be observed and measured through its effect on physical objects, the seasons and human life. One way to measure the passage of time is to take account of the degree of decay that it causes on living things and objects. This is hardly a point of contention.

However, it is necessary to make a distinction between biological life and existential existence regarding time. As

incarnate souls, man has a body that serves as the vehicle of our spatial/temporal existence. The body is privy to sensory impressions. Space is the pivot point by which the body orients itself spatially. Human beings cannot help but to find ourselves in a given place at any given time. However, while the body is affected by time, it does not internalize the essence and meaning of time. The latter is instead the purview of the self.

Because we take the relationship of the body and space that we occupy and move through as a matter of fact, consequently man takes its relationship with time for granted. As a result, we only develop a cursory understanding of this relationship: the human body is subject to decay, corruption, and eventual death, given its sensual qualities and its many 'moving' parts, as it were.

As existential beings who are defined by the capacity for self-reflection and existential longing, time affects us differently than it does objects, animals, and the seasons. As existential beings, time affects us in ways that are readily verifiable, other than as our sensual relationship with space and time may suggest. For human beings, time is felt as lived. Time is an existential and psychological aspect of human existence that defines man as a future-oriented being.

Self-reflective beings experience time as lived: reality that is experienced through self-reflection, which signals man's interiority as existential beings. Because time is ethereal, we must not confuse our existentially lived-experience of time with mere sensory impressions (spatial phenomenon) that, left to their own devices, without being filtered through self-reflection, remain mere percepts that even animals experience, but which never advance to the level of conception. Man's existential condition appropriates human reality through conceptual understanding, not sensual impressions. This promotes understanding of time as cyclical.

Given its sensual makeup and ability to affect human reality through man's sensory perception, clock time subsumes human life to its bare minimal: biological sensations and impressions.

The problem with the view that the passage of time is linear—clock time (past) $\leftarrow\leftarrow\leftarrow$ and (future) $\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow$ —is that it forces man to contend with the world and human reality as external to us. That is, man must address the contingencies of human experience, if for no other practical reason than mere survival. However, this condition can become ossified over time, thus making man a slave to sensual impressions.

Depending on the speed of mechanization and pace of life in any given era, time has the effect of appearing to move faster than we are willing to accept. While most people come to accept a fast pace of life, others view this as an infringement on their ability to embrace self-reflection and remain true to themselves as authentic beings.

We often hear people say things like: "I don't have time for..." and "where does the time go?" The feeling that time is fleeting quickly is dictated by events and the barrage of daily contingencies that we must contend with in a mechanized society. This is what we measure as linear history (clock) time $\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow$.

On the other hand, as existential beings, man can counter the quickened pace of life in a mechanized world through self-reflection on the lived-experience \ast . This act supplies us with an enlightened sense of self that assuages our existential concerns and inquietude. It is self-reflection on the lived-experience-as-existential-immediacy that situates man in the crossroads between the past (memory) $\leftarrow\leftarrow\leftarrow$, the present (existential immediacy) \parallel , and the (future, linear history) $\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow$, properly speaking,

The lived-experience, when understood through the lens of

life-as- existential-immediacy *, is a confrontation with linear history → → →. This confrontation with linear history effectively brings us to the realization that time is a paradox that is best understood as lived-experience, rather than as linear history.

Because the past, even though no longer lived-as-present, forms part of the structure of existential immediacy in our choice-making and free will, the past-as-memory becomes a fluid aspect of our lives that affects our ability to assuage the contingencies the future presents us with. To a large extent, the past enables us to predict aspects of the future, and how we appropriate future conditions in our life.

By oscillating between the past-as-memory ←←←, the present □ as-existential-immediacy *, and the anticipation of the future → → →, man can arrive at the realization that time is cyclical 0 □□□□□□ 0. This condition has the dual effect of enabling us to understand our existential state of being, in addition to allowing us to understand human existence in relation to history-as-cyclical 0 □□□□□□ 0.

Man's existential state of being enables our realization of time as cyclical 0 □□□□□□ 0 to build a buffer zone between human life as existential-immediacy * and biological life as a sensual condition that reacts to linear history → → →. This is a viable possibility for man to cultivate authentic human existence. The realization that human existence is cyclical 0 □□□□□□ 0 removes us from the background of nature—somewhat akin to a sculpture in high relief.

Existentially speaking, our understanding of the world, other people, human events and human reality, that the lived-experience supplies us with, delivers us to the realization that history does not move in a linear fashion → → →. This is the case because while human nature and the essences that inform human reality are not changeable through the passage of time, they must contend with conditions that human beings

erroneously attempt to understand through sense impressions. This error of judgement creates the impression that human events, behavior, and reality proper are infinite in scope.

A cyclical 0 □□□□□□ 0 view of history corrects the aforementioned false impression of human reality by employing metaphysical and heuristic understanding that is reached through self-reflection on the existential-immediacy that, while irreducible to sense impressions, transcends experience by embracing the essences that serve as the ground of human reality. This understanding appropriates linear history → → → through the function and meaning of essences that inform human nature and the negative forces which attempt to deform these. This process finds it necessary to re-coil 0 □□□□□□ 0 historical values and forces in order to bring to light and retrace the dominant, though, repeatable errors, beliefs, and values that demean human existence and corrupt human reality. The recoil is the corrective to the erroneous notion that human life is a progressive linear process that is predictable and amenable to social-engineering.

Contrary to the naive belief that human history is linear → → →, the process of re-coiling □□□□□□, reflection about eras more amenable to man's existential self-reflective state of being, places man in a position to intelligently eliminate the vast array of tried-and-failed beliefs, values, and social/political experimentation that threaten to return man to an abysmal dark age.

The threat of returning man to a dark age that linear history → → → and 'progressive' social engineering values present us with in postmodernity is the lasting failed legacy of progressivism that future generations must contend with and correct for their own survival.

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