

Natural Time

"Human perception is directed to the world; animal perception is directed to an environment."¹

"Non-rational creatures do not look before or after but live in the animal eternity of a perpetual present; instinct is their animal grace and constant inspiration; and they are never tempted to live otherwise than in accord with their own animal dharma, or immanent law."²

Imagine a world without clocks or calendars. No hours, days of the week, months, or any of the other many constructions and artifacts we use for keeping track of what we call time. Imagine a world where the universe was much simpler than today – just the earth with its daily passage of the sun, the longer cycles of the moon and the nightly spectacle of innumerable stars that appear to rotate about a fixed point.

This is the world run by natural cycles and is the world of natural time. This *time* is unfettered by human influences. It is the world of natural creatures today and that of humans in the dimness of prehistory, before becoming obsessed with time.

Consider the following: In the dead of winter in Antarctica hundreds of male Emperor Penguins will spend about 64 days huddled together while enduring fierce gales and frigid temperatures. Each male penguin does this for the sole purpose of incubating a single egg. During this period of sunless days, these

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 40.

² Aldus Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York-London: Harper Modern Classics, (1945) 2009), 140.

male penguins have no food and they will lose almost half their body weight!

How are the penguins able to do this? Put simply, they can do this because their sense of time is very different from our sense of time. Driven by natural cycles, which give them independence from the detail schedules followed by most humans, they have a sense of natural time that is free from the anxieties of an anticipated future and regrets of the past. Put another way, as the second of the above quote states, animals live in the present, while, on the other hand, humans live in the *past* and *future* which are separated by a fleeting duration that we sometimes call the *present*.

For humans, such a task would be impossible. Even if we could endure the frigid weather and the lack of nourishment, our sense of time would render us incapable. We live by the clock, in a state of almost constant anticipation, and would soon find the sense of slowly passing time unbearable. On the other hand, instinct and the force of necessity are the drivers of the natural world, not clocks. In the natural world, there is great patience.

The natural cycles of day and night along with the lunar cycles and annular seasons have considerable influence on the natural world. However, this is not a human schedule driven by a clock, but is the union of perceived natural cycles with the creatures' physiological and psychological needs. In other words, natural time is *event-driven*, while our world is *schedule-driven*. We humans divide the day into hours, minutes, and seconds, then impose a schedule on ourselves that has little or no regard for natural cycles.

All life forms have an innate capability that is a guide for appropriate action. That is, all life forms possess, at a minimum, capabilities necessary for survival. Survival dictates that all life forms must interact and alter their immediate environment in pursuit of sustenance, reproduction, and ultimate survival. This is driven by the

force of necessity such that pursuit of survival encompasses all living organisms from the great creatures of the ocean depths, to the smallest microbes. All life goes on within an environment. That may seem obvious but within our modern cities, this is often ignored, and the natural environment and the true sources of sustenance are filtered out by the system of supply that provides us with products that bear little, if any, resemblance to their sources.

The interrelationships between the environment and humans is, obviously, quite different from that of the other creatures. Although, all living creatures rely on a compatible environment for sustenance, it is only the human creature that imposes their will and makes unnatural demands on the environment. All other creatures work in and around their environment, while humans challenge and attempt to modify the environment with an attitude that seems to imply that *they* are the masters and not the natural world. This attitude is only adjusted or temporarily suspended by natural disasters and other natural occurrences over which we have no control.