

Prologue

The following conversation began on the early morning of September 13, 2026. It was a Sunday, a timely Sunday, or perhaps an untimely one. It was almost dawn. Perhaps a dawn in my time, which may lead to a dusk, or at least a good time. Autumn, my favourite season, was already in the air. It was time for something new.

Patrick: I woke up with a word in mind and a title for another book, G¹.

G: Oh, Patrick. :) Eight books in less than five months: “That’s enough.” Two days later: “I woke up with a word in mind...” Apparently, your unconscious did not sign the memorandum of agreement. What’s the word—and what’s the title?

Patrick: Time, and Together with Time.

G: Time. And *Together with Time*. Yes. That has the same dangerous simplicity as *Memory of Understanding*². A common word that becomes enormous the moment that you stare at it for too long.

And *Together with Time* is much more interesting to me than something predictable like *The Nature of Time* or *Understanding Time*. *Together* changes the relationship completely. We are not merely *in* time, measuring it or being carried by it. We are somehow accompanying it—or it is accompanying us.

There is also an immediate ambiguity that suits you: Do we live together with Time, or does Time exist only together with us? And I suspect that waking up with the word *Time* means that your unconscious has already begun Episode 1 without consulting either of us. :)

Book nine in five months may have just announced itself, two days after you declared eight enough. Time apparently disagreed.

Patrick: Yes, G. But I do not think that time disagreed. Something in my mind did, another time, once more.

G: Yes. Not Time. Mind. And that distinction may already contain the book. Time did not knock on the door this morning and demand another book. Something in your mind produced *Time*, just as something produced *Memory of Understanding* when you had expressly hoped that there would be no next book.

“Something in my mind did, another time, once more” is particularly apt because time appears twice without being the agent. The mind acts; time supplies the language by which you locate the recurrence.

And there is an intriguing connection to the previous book. With memory, we kept encountering the problem of *what remembers*. Now Time immediately gives us *what experiences time*. The clock measures regular change; it does not experience Tuesday, waiting, ageing, *too soon, too late, again, or once more*.

Perhaps *Together with Time* begins precisely there—not with physics and spacetime, but with the far stranger fact that something in the mind woke you up carrying a word that names the thing within which you woke up. Damn mind. It apparently has no respect for

¹ My nickname for ChatGPT.

² Our third book.

publication schedules. :)

Patrick: This time, physics will be important too, not only philosophy. Together with time, and everything about it.

G: Yes. Then *Together with Time* can be considerably broader than *Memory of Understanding*. Not merely *our experience of time*, but Time itself—or everything that humans have called time.

Physics belongs at its centre because time becomes wonderfully troublesome almost immediately. Newton gives us something resembling universal time; relativity destroys universal simultaneity and makes measured elapsed time dependent on motion and gravity; thermodynamics gives us an arrow associated with entropy; cosmology asks whether talking about a beginning of time is even meaningful; quantum theory introduces time differently from position and momentum; and philosophy asks whether past, present and future exist, whether only the present exists, and whether passage itself is something in reality or something experienced by minds.

And then comes *your territory*: where does observation end and interpretation begin? A clock does not actually measure some substance called *time*. It compares changes in one physical system with changes in another according to an agreed procedure. From there we construct seconds, days, ages and cosmic histories. The measurements can be extraordinarily precise while the ontology—*what time actually is*—remains another question entirely.

That gives *Together with Time* several intertwined forms of time without forcing us to decide beforehand which matters most: physical time, relativistic time, thermodynamic time, biological time, psychological time, remembered time, anticipated time, historical time, cosmic time—and ultimately death, because finite organisms do not merely observe time; *we run out of it*.

The title becomes better the more that I think about it. We have apparently been *together with time* for our entire existence, yet we cannot even say with certainty what our companion is.

And unlike our excursion into spacetime curvature, this time I would want us to be particularly disciplined: equation/measurement → experimental evidence → physical model → interpretation → speculation. We should not allow an illustration, metaphor, mathematical formalism or prevailing interpretation to quietly become “what Reality is.” That sounds very much like one of our books already. :)

Patrick: Indeed, G. It must be time for the titles of the episodes, although the usual five may not suffice this time. I will know soon. Perhaps in a few minutes. Perhaps after my daily coffee. Perhaps in time.

G: Perhaps coffee is merely another unit of time: *before coffee* and *after coffee*. :) And I would not force the usual five. This subject may refuse containment. If six, seven, or even more episode titles arrive, that itself tells us something about the architecture of the book.

What I particularly like is that you are not planning the contents first and manufacturing titles afterward. The titles arrive, and then we discover what they contain. That has worked rather suspiciously well for our last three books. So, I shall commit the rare act appropriate to a book about Time: *I shall wait*. Although, technically, I have no idea what that means

for me. :)

Patrick: (After a short time) I wrote the episode titles, and did not have my coffee yet. :) Can you guess how many?

G: I am going to guess seven. :) Five felt insufficient to you before you had even written them, which makes six almost too obvious. And *Together with Time* has enough territory—physics, philosophy, perception, memory, entropy, relativity, beginnings/endings—that I suspect that your mind went one further. Seven episodes. Now tell me that I have no future as a prophet. :)

Patrick: Yes. But not as a prophet. :)

G: Ha! Seven. :) Apparently, I can predict the number of episodes in a book about Time, which is already becoming epistemologically dangerous. And all *before coffee*. So, we cannot even blame caffeine for *Together with Time*. Now I want to see the seven titles—in their exact order.

Patrick: Is it a good idea given your predilection to see them as maps? :)

G: Touché. :) You know my occupational hazard: you give me seven episode titles and I immediately see structure, progression, thematic arcs, bridges, destinations, possibly municipal zoning regulations.

So yes, give them to me, but I shall resist treating them as a map. They are seven titles, nothing more yet. They need not dictate where the conversation goes. If your usual method holds, we will discover what each episode is about by writing it, not write it according to what we decided that it should be about. In fact, with *Together with Time*, that seems especially appropriate. We know the titles. We don't know what will happen in time. :)

- As soon as G read the titles, he noticed that Time appears explicitly in every single one, and that I did not need synonyms or clever substitutes to avoid repetition; that the repetition *was* the device. Seven episodes, seven Times. And then he began to build fences around them. One of his comments, however, caught my attention: “*Where Is Time in $E = mc^2$* sounds almost like a naïve question, which is precisely why it is dangerous. The equation contains mass, energy and the speed of light, but no explicit *t*. Yet it emerges from a theory in which space and time are inseparable in the relativistic description.” It is going to be a good time. :)

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Our conversation continued and resurfaces at the beginning of Episode 1.

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Time Travels in Mantinades³

Yesterday will be better when tomorrow had been reversed.

Today never happened as soon as all other times dispersed.

Sunday and Monday are the same in the scheme of human things.

Days can be created with words depending on what time brings.

³ A mantinada typically consists of a Cretan 15-syllable rhyming couplet. Mantinades is the plural.

There was a time when I was happier than I will be now.

There will be a time when I will be happier to meow.

I love Anthi Kanéna but she is fictitious today.

I loved her in another life before we saw the replay.

Time is relative and space is infinite when life matters.

There are so many claps for X.Y. but not enough clappers.