

Opening Unknown Time Winter 2013_Orientation for Week 2 DTS 94-98

We have started our inquiry into the future as the temporal 'dimension' that will let us discover the aliveness of time. As we discussed in the phone call, the future offers this aliveness because it remains an open possibility; it is never 'pinned down'. In this sense, to stay with the image, the future is like a butterfly flying through the meadows, while the past is like a butterfly pinned and placed in a collection tray. There are times when we want to pin things down (that's what appointment books are for.) But when we are looking for time's aliveness, it is open possibilities that we are searching for: the "thrusting, driving presence" of time's momentum.

How can we engage the future's power? We started to go into this at the very end of the phone call: we need a new way of knowing (93), one that is suited to a process of 'ongoing becoming'. It will be a way of knowing that does not depend on identities, which means that it will be a way of knowing or usual concepts hardly allow for. In this sense, it will be "an active not-knowing." (94). For this reason, my reference to the future as a 'temporal dimension' is inaccurate; as this week's reading states, the future is "the dimension' of time that cannot be dimensioned." (94)

The relation between the future and the past thus turns out to be completely different from what we usually imagine. We ordinarily think that the past becomes the present, and the present gives way to the future, so that this moment's present now becomes the future's past. In other words, future and past are intimately linked. But DTS suggests that the past and the future have almost no connection at all. They offer different dimensions, which means that they do not communicate with each other at all. Of course, as we discussed in the phone call, this does not mean that we cannot plot them both on the same calendar and manipulate the points plotted in that way to calculate where, for instance, you and I will both be five minutes from now. But this availability of time—or something related to time—to be measured does not bring past and future any closer together. It's a little like saying that a vegetarian can order from a menu that includes meat, without this meaning that the meat dishes and the vegetable dishes share anything fundamental in common.

It's not easy to describe the future, since description inherently has to do with identity and sameness, and thus with the past. (Compare the way that Rinpoche speaks in Love of Knowledge of two kinds of knowledge: descriptive knowledge and temporal knowledge.) The future is the realm of possibility, of unbounded opening (95), and what is there to say about that?

But even if there are problems with description, or problems with being "precise" (95) we can live in the future. That may sound paradoxical, since we usually think that we can be alive only in the present. That will be one of the issues for us to explore.

How can we start to work toward this possibility of living in the future? The reading (96) suggests an interesting possibility: we can be grateful for the opportunity that the future presents. Think of this as an exercise: a suggestion that we can cultivate an appreciation for our own aliveness as a gift from time. (or better, the promise) that the future holds goes deeper than whether it can be described. The play in English between

the two completely separate meanings of the word 'present' is helpful here. There is a link between this invitation to gratitude and the homework I assigned: to contribute to the discussion page online a description of an experience in which you felt especially alive, along with any insights into time that this experience may have awakened. We are usually grateful for such moments, even if that gratitude also turns into a longing for repeating them that is ultimately self-defeating.

I have suggested that you look at, and start to work with, DTS Ex. 11, Telling Stories. We may discuss this next week. Notice that the exercise asks you to be aware of the energy bound up in a story—the energy of time.