

Session 3, Winter 2014 Orientation to Week 4

We all ‘take for granted’ that time passes from one moment to the next; chapter 14 of LOK, the assigned (but not discussed) reading for last week aims to show that this theory—because that is what it is—does not really make sense. This analysis could be thought of as ‘softening us up’ for exploring alternatives, a little like leaving a dirty dish in the sink so that the water can loosen up the dried-up scraps of food that cling to it.

Usually we assume that we do experience the movement of time passing from moment to moment. But do we really have this experience, or is this just our way of making sense out of what experience? We say, “This happened, then that happened, so there must have been a linear link between this and that.” Suppose, then, that experience does not really give us a clear answer about whether time moves from moment to moment. How could we investigate further? *When It Rains* (52) asks us to look for ways to *change* the typical movement of time passing in our experience. This is very much related to the practice of trying out ‘variations’ on our usual experience.

LOK Exercise 14 could be understood as one such variation. We are asked to look for the moments between moments, “on an ever smaller scale.” I hope you try this out on your own. Here I want to explore some questions that may arise when you try this variation on ordinary, inhabited experience.

First, how is the practice of looking for “moments between moments” related to the practice of looking for the space between thoughts, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago? *When It Rains* (53) suggests that the two practices are similar, but a better answer might be that they are both similar and different. The difference is that while space seems to differ from the two thoughts that it separates, the moments between two moments are like what they separate. In fact, that’s just the point. Put another way: finding the space between thoughts is difficult, because all you ever see when you look is another thought. But finding the moment between moments is easy, since you are just moving from one moment to the next.

But this raises a new question. As soon as you find a moment between moments, the moment you’ve found has become the next moment in the sequence of moments, and now it’s now longer ‘between’ at all. So how can you do the variation/practice? As soon as we look for it, the ‘between’ disappears (which makes the practice more like ‘Space between Thoughts’ after all).

So how can you do the variation? One way might be to start by identifying a stream of similar moments. For instance, suppose I watch my breath. With that as my focus, there is a moment of breathing followed by another moment of breathing. Now I have a fixed sequence of moments, and I can look for moments that fall between the moments of that sequence (for instance, random thoughts and sensations.)

There are a couple of problems, though. One is that in order to do this variation, I end up

turning the breath—or the act of breathing—into something solid or fixed. That seems to be necessary in order to find a ‘between’, but is this approach really fruitful? Another problem is that if I use this strategy, I can only go ‘down’ one level, rather than looking on ‘an ever smaller scale’.

So perhaps this approach to the variation doesn’t get us that far. Still, it does help us understand some of the issues involved in the linear-sequence model. If we want to go further, LOK Ex. 22, assigned for this week, offers another variation: instead of looking for moments between moments, we want to try looking for ‘transitions’ between moments. Does this suggestion take us back more in the direction of the space between thoughts?

In doing this analysis, I don’t mean to say that the purpose of doing variations is to lead to more conceptual issues. Instead, the point is that variations are themselves a form of inquiry. They may lead to questions you can put into words, but they may just open up experience in new and interesting ways.

With that in mind, here are some variations to practice during the week. Don’t feel bound by these possibilities—let your interest guide you, and reinvent the variation as you go along. In other words, have fun!

- 1) Listen to a continuing sound (the hum of the refrigerator or computer, the wind through the trees) as though it all took place in one moment.
- 2) Listen and see at the same time: in the ‘same’ moment. You can listen and see the same object/event (e.g., a car going by), or different objects (e.g., the door knob and the plane overhead).
- 3) Refer the moment when a new experience arises back to the moment before you have the experience. Is there a connection?

For those of you doing written assignments, just write something about your experience with one or more of these variations.

The link between last week’s reading and this one is stated at the bottom of p. 179: “In conventional understanding, the self occupies each successive moment.” If the moment-to-moment model breaks down, the self has no natural place to rest—no temporal home. What might the implications of this change be? The distinction between two kinds of time is helpful in exploring this question, and we will look at it in the next phone call.