

Afterword

The week's communications and deliberations concentrated on dQ/dt and how we could enhance our detection and interpretation of such occurrences, whether Q were a distance, an emission of energy, a velocity, a brightness, an orbital property or a spectroscopic feature. For us mortals, the derivative of Q is in respect of Time—yet rather little attention was paid during the week to Time itself. Maybe that was just as well. As was said by way of introducing the Astronomer Royal to give the public lecture, *From Microseconds to Eons*, Time is ever-present yet always elusive. It flies and yet it drags. We never seem to have enough of it, yet it can weigh heavily on our hands. It is free but it is priceless. You can't own it but you can spend it. Einstein said bluntly that the only reason for Time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.

Time is the commander of all things. Certainly, Time (like tide) waits for no man (or woman), and it absolutely cannot be driven backwards. Yet its benign features must not be overlooked: Time when cloaked as the seasons governs and assists the growth of plants for food; Time oils and maintains our circadian rhythms, and Time signals the moment to stop work.

Astronomers have struggled to measure Time for a variety of civil and nautical purposes, and some of the first observatories were built in order to provide time-signals for ships and railways. Nowadays we leave the actual measurement of civil Time to a specialist service. But the implications of Time, and its irreversibility, are key features of all discussions and hypotheses about the creation of the world, of the solar system, of the Galaxy, and of the universe itself, however many of it there may be. The physics involved extends from the most rapid we have ever heard of, and then a bit shorter, out to the longest we can possibly imagine, and then some.

As mortals, we are very conscious of Time's command. Generations give way to their successors, and new fashions, new skills, new technology and new ideas, while challenging to the senior populations who grew up not knowing them, are an inseparable part of life to those born into the more endowed systems. The conventions that we tried to overturn in this Symposium were in fact an attempt to unshackle our thought processes from the somewhat entrenched patterns of yesteryear and to open fresh doors that could inspire or capture in other ways. How well we succeeded, only Time will tell, but one of the most blatant banishments of convention was the decision to invite one of the very junior members of the SOC—and a female one at that—to give the “After-Dinner” speech at the banquet evening in Wadham College. That she rose to the occasion superbly with all the required blend of wit, humour and candour belies the fact that she had had only a couple of days to think it up. But what was undoubtedly the climax was her closing message: variability is going to be pursued as Generation Y thinks best. Our very able representative of Generation Y will therefore have the last word.

R.E.M.G.
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