

Leach, E.R.

"Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time"  
in Lessa and Vogt

1. "Time" as a word has a great many different meanings and connotations. These can roughly be reduced to two notions.

- 1.1 Repetition.

- 1.2 Nonrepetative process that is irreversible. This view stressed in Western thought.

- these are equated not on basis of empirical experience, but because of social necessity and religion. Eg. deny death by saying it is followed immediately by a new birth. Think of time as cyclical because we want to deny death and the end of the universe. A psychological (hence religious) denial.

2. Notions of time:

- our inclination to think in linear time or in cyclical time based on geometric metaphores, but time is not geometrical.
- in primitive societies the analogies are more oscillations, such as the weaver's shuttle. This is not cyclical. Characterized by discontinuity, not continuity (as in cycle and line). Time has no "depth" at all. All past is equally past and is simply the opposite of now.
- religion equates nonrepetative with repetative: eg. death is analogous to the night time of life.

3. Thesis: One type of animism involves a particular conception of time, and therefore the associated myths which justify a belief in reincarnation are also representations of time itself.

- 3.1 Oscillation of time postulates the two poles, but also a third element, mobile and vital that goes back and forth. The analogy here is sexuality: Male - Female and seman for the Greeks.

- the beginning polarity as in Greek Cronus story, is beginning not of world but of time, the beginning of becoming.
- schematic form:

A1

B1

A2

B2

- Cronus created time by separating A from B and creating the initial arrow. The beginning of life is also the beginning of death.

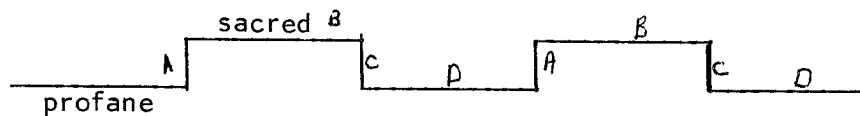
#### 4. Why festivals and rites of passage.

##### 4.1 How do we perceive time? Not directly but by inference.

- by repetition
- by aging, entropy. birth to death.
- the rate, how sensed? Growth fastest in early stage of plant. Time seems to go slowest when we are young. Regularity of time is an abstract notion.

##### 4.2 Pendulum time: succession of alternations and full stops. Opposites.

- Durkheim: time a temporary shift from normal-profane to abnormal-sacred.



- each has 4 stages:
  - a) rites of sacralization or separation (death to secular)
  - b) marginal state. Ordinary time stops. Suspended animation.
  - c) desacralization or aggregational. Reborn into profane and incorporated
  - d) normal time of secular life.
- festivals: one important function is ordering of time. Without them we have little or no sense of it.
- if secular times begin and end with festivals, festivals themselves have their own beginnings and ends.
- problem of role reversals. A and C seem opposite, as are B and D. So the contrast with 1) more formal vs. 2) masquerade vs. 3) role reversal.
- thesis formal and masquerade form opposite and correspond to A and C while Role reversal characterizes B. Time has stopped, death has become life, secular becomes sacred.