

Time as the Sacred Medium: *Chronos*, Chores, and the Thoreauvian Response

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Time is the most expensive of the things that exist.

– Theophrastus

1 The Question of Time

To argue that time is sacred is to swim upstream against three strong philosophical currents: existential resignation, blissful unawareness, and aesthetic surrender. Each poses a serious challenge to any ethic that would value time as a resource.

First, the **existentialist** or **nihilist** objection: time will be spent regardless of how it is regarded. The end is certain. To curate one's schedule is mere vanity in the face of absurdity. As Camus writes, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." If life is absurd, why would time-management matter?

Second, the **ignorance-is-bliss** challenge: is it not better to be unaware of time's finitude? Self-consciousness introduces dread. The animal does not count hours, nor does the sage who forgets the self. Might not awareness of time's value be more curse than gift?

Third, the **aesthetic surrender**, exemplified in Taoism and wabi-sabi: one should drift, not strive. Order is unnatural. To choreograph time is to deny the beauty of spontaneity and decay. To budget minutes like coins is unbecoming of one who would merge with the Way.

2 The Thoreauvian Response

Thoreau does not ignore these voices. He has heard them all, but chooses a different reply:

"The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it." (Thoreau, [1854](#))

This is not an accountant's ledger, but a moral audit. To Thoreau, time is not merely scarce; it is *sacred*. The deliberate life is not an efficient life but an *examined* one. Chores, when approached with attention, become rituals of spiritual grounding.

Against **existential despair**, he proposes clarity. If death is coming, how much more important to know how we have lived. He does not pretend immortality; he insists on *presence*.

Against **ignorant bliss**, he offers intentionality. True peace, for Thoreau, comes not from evasion but from radical simplicity: the kind that knows each moment, each act, and claims it fully.

Against **aesthetic drift**, he balances minimalism with agency. The broom is not used to deny entropy, but to *honor* the space in which life unfolds. The floor is cleared not in fear of chaos, but in devotion to being awake.

3 Toward a Philosophy of Sacred Labor

In this light, chores are not interruptions of living but its very form. Sweeping, chopping, mending – these are the actions by which one encounters reality without pretense. They are the interface between body and world. As the Zen master would say: “When hungry, eat. When tired, sleep. When dirty, clean.”

Thoreau's doctrine, then, is neither neurotic productivity nor quietist surrender. It is *spiritual intentionalism*. If time is what life is made of, then the way we spend our time is the way we spend our soul.

This view resonates with Camus's idea of absurd clarity (Camus, 1942), the Taoist principle of non-action in *Tao Te Ching* (Laozi, 600), and Zen's embrace of the mundane (Suzuki, 1970). Even the aesthetic of impermanence in wabi-sabi acknowledges time's erosive beauty (Koren, 1994), while Theophrastus provides the foundational maxim (Theophrastus, 1992).

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