



Why Are We Running Out of Time?, by Jacob Needleman

Technology itself is not the cause of our problem of time. Its influence on our lives is a result, not a cause -- the result of an unseen accelerating process taking place in ourselves, in our inner being. Whether we point to the effect of communication technology (such as e-mail) with its tyranny of instant communication; or to the computerization, and therefore the mentalization of so many human activities that previously required at least some participation of our physical presence; or to any of the innumerable transformations of human life that are being brought about by new technology, the essential element to recognize is how much of what we call "progress" is accompanied by and measured by the fact that human beings need less and less conscious attention to perform their activities and lead their lives.

The real power of faculty of attention, unknown to modern science, is one of the indispensable and most central measures of humanness -- of the being of a man or a woman -- and has been so understood, in many forms and symbols, at the heart of all the great spiritual teachings of the world.

The effects of advancing technology, for all the material promise they offer the world (along with the dangers, of course) is but the most recent wave in a civilization that, without recognizing what it was doing, has placed the satisfaction of desire above the cultivation of being. The deep meaning of many rules of conduct and moral principles of the past -- so many of which have been abandoned without our understanding their real roots in human nature -- involved the cultivation and development of the uniquely human power of attention, its action in the body, heart and mind of man. To be present, truly present, is to have conscious attention. This capacity is the key to what it means to be human.

It is not, therefore, the rapidity of change as such that is the source of our problem of time. It is the metaphysical fact that the being of man is diminishing. In the world as in oneself, time is vanishing because we have lost the practice of consciously inhabiting our life, the practice of conscious attention to ourselves as we go about our lives.