

Towards the End of the Week: The Tyranny of Time

Paul Cudenec

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Some of the units we use to measure time just can't be argued with. The spinning of the earth or its orbit around the sun are clear reasons for the existence of a 'day' or a 'year' — and even a month is more or less in tune with lunar reality.

But the same just can't be said for a 'week', an oddity of which the origins and purpose are obscure. The biblical reference to the 'seventh day' of rest does not mean that the seven-day week has been anything like universal over the centuries.

The ancient Egyptians used a ten-day week and the Mayan calendar used a 13 and a 20-day period. Lithuanians used weeks of nine days before adopting Christianity. In other words, there's nothing natural about the week. It's an enclosure of time, an artificial construct imposed on the world by a succession of centralising, controlling forces from the Roman Empire, through the Christian Church and the British Empire to the global techno-business hegemony of today.

We have now reached the point where the seven-day week has completely enchained us to its rigid cycle of routine and the limited horizon with which it has been stifling humanity for far too long. When we wake up each morning, what we are really experiencing is a new day, a day we have never experienced before. But the first thought that enters our heads on regaining consciousness is whether this day is a 'Monday', a 'Saturday' or a 'Thursday'.

It seems that each of these days already has its own character before it has even unfolded. And what lies ahead of us in the future is in reality a series of un-lived days which are but blank canvases on which we can paint our dreams and our lives.

Instead of that, we see nothing but short, brutal closed loops of 'days of the week', tired and familiar clichés through which we have trudged time and time again in our sadly confined lives.

This is of course ideal for those who would keep us as their slaves on a perpetual treadmill of production, for those who fear the moment we raise our gaze from the factory formula of routine and catch a glimpse of the free-time world which should have been our lifelong playground. From early in life, children are taught to mould themselves into the authoritative contours of the official week. "Tuesday is painting day. Friday is dressing up day."

When they start school, they are also forced to swallow the biggest lie of all — the weekend. The weekend is good, we are told. It is special. It is something to be celebrated. It is our freedom. And yet its true role is to confirm that the other five days of the week are set aside for slavery.

By the time children come out of the education treadmill, they no longer question this, no longer dare suggest that the finite days of their unique, precious, existence on this earth belong to them and to nobody else.

As would-be liberators of the human race, we must look beyond superficial changes in social organisation. We must dig deep to uproot the imagination of our species from the dank heavy sterility into which it has grown embedded.

We must not waste a single minute calling for shorter working hours or fewer working days. We must aim higher in our attack on temporal tyranny. It is time we looked as far ahead as the end of the week!

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