

**STORIES FOR CHANGE**  
**TIME IN SOCIETY**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Time is the context we use and measure with a calendar or a clock. It can be physical – time that is objective – and psychological – time that is mind-dependent and subjective. Time is familiar to everyone, yet it is hard to define and understand. Science, philosophy, religion, and the arts have different definitions of time, but the system of measuring it is relatively consistent.

In philosophy, time relates to different things and concepts. According to Plato, time is related to physical events like movement (of the body) and therefore, can be used to identify a day. Sir Isaac Newton saw time as objective and mathematical accurate as it did not depend on others. On the other hand, John Locke, Rene Descartes, and David Hume argued that time depends on the mind. Aristotle supported the idea of time is subjective and further proposed that there is no time without a soul. According to Buddhist Philosophy, time takes place in our consciousness – the existence of and the interaction between matter, functions of our senses, the process of knowing, and the feeling that occurs in our knowledge. To put it in other words, time in philosophy is a concept we try to explain through different contexts, interpretations, and senses.<sup>1</sup>

In science, time is defined as the progression of events from the past to the present into the future. If a system is unchanging, it is timeless. Time can be considered to be the fourth dimension of reality, used to describe events in three-dimensional space. It is not something we can see, touch, or taste.

Although time can or cannot be explained, it affects the life of every single being in society. According to Karl-Heinz Kohl, Director of the Frobenius Institute, an example of how time has changed the life of our society is best shown in the expansion of the railway in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. With the rising of capitalism, it was necessary to adopt time zones and thus introduce people to the concept of progress and time.<sup>2</sup> In other words, what is occurring today belongs to an epoch that started when industrial capitalism positioned clock time as the absolute indicator of cost, productivity, and profit.<sup>3</sup> Today we – as a society – have internalized time as a dutiful discipline and often do not question its existence and importance.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Bunnag, "The concept of time in philosophy: A comparative study between Theravada Buddhist and Henri Bergson's concept of time from Thai philosophers' perspectives," *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* (2017).

<sup>2</sup> "Conception of time in different societies," *Intercontinental Academia*, <http://intercontinental-academia.ubias.net/news/conception-of-time-in-different-societies>.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Klikauer, "Critical Reflections on Time and Capitalism," *tripleC* 14, no.2 (2016): 451–456.

## 2 WORKING TIME REDUCTION

In 1930, the economist John Keynes predicted that 100 years later, everyone would work no more than 15 hours a week.<sup>4</sup> Thus he argued, the biggest problem of 2030 will be how to deal with all the leisure time. And looking at the development in the centuries before, his conclusion was very understandable: the average workweek has already decreased from around 70 hours in the 19th century to less than 60 hours at the beginning of the 20th century, and in 1927, Henry Ford introduced the five-day workweek in his factories.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1980s, this development came to an end. The number of working hours per week stagnated for around 40 hours. At the same time, some countries even saw a slight increase, especially in the total working hours per family, due to women entering the workforce without men reducing working time.<sup>6</sup>

Bregman would argue that this is unfortunate as a reduction of working time would solve several societal problems: it would reduce stress as well as CO2 emission, decrease the risk for accidents and unemployment, increase emancipation, give the aging population a chance in the labor market and even tackle inequality in wealth.<sup>7</sup>

A team makes similar conclusions of social scientists at ISF Munich, which fabulates a 30-hour workweek with the same payment as before. One aspect they predict to improve with this measure is the quality of consumption. This means that consumers take more time deciding which products to buy and buy more sustainable, repairable, and long-lasting products. It would also give consumers more time to enjoy and thus value their products, both material and non-material, such as e.g., cultural events.<sup>8</sup>

The relation between work, payment, and social responsibility can be seen anew in the light of the outbreak of COVID19. When people are advised to stay home as a measure for public health, the question arises, who is paying – in the US, this led to the public covering paid sick leave for employees. At the same time, some politicians propose a temporary universal basic income.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," in *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Macmillan and CO, Limited, 1933).

<sup>5</sup> Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists: the Case for a Universal Basic Income, Open Borders, and a 15-Hour Workweek*, (Amsterdam: The Correspondent, 2016, 47).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Stöger Ursula et al., *Arbeitszeitverkürzung Als Voraussetzung für Ein Neues Gesellschaftliches Produktionsmodell* (Munich: ISF München, 2016, 48-50).

<sup>9</sup> Edward J. Moreno, "Lawmakers Call for Universal Basic Income amid Coronavirus Crisis," *The Hill*, March 13, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/487485-lawmakers-call-for-economic-stimulus-ubi-amid-coronavirus-crisis>.

The video series “What do you take time for?” aims to address this very issue on a more personal level, showing impacts of having more or less time on the daily life.

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