

Agency and the Speed of Time:

Conceptual Contributions Through Husserl and Recent Neuroscience

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Abstract

This essay explores the concept of perceived time and defends the view that the speed at which we experience temporal flow can be explained using a theory of directed attention. More specifically, in this text I propose a close examination of the phenomenon that, under certain circumstances, people sometimes report the feeling that time may appear to slow down. According to neuroscientist David Eagleman, the feeling of duration shares an intimate link with memory. Eagleman approaches the problem via the concept of temporal resolution by designing an experiment that aims at detecting any possible increase in the rate at which we sample the world when in critical situations. I take issue with Eagleman's explanation involving memory by arguing that such an explanation is at odds with Husserl's account of the experience of temporal flow. Indeed, the memory theory that Eagleman endorses implies that the concept of time be understood as a succession of time-slices, a view which, Husserl argued, cannot give rise to our impression that time *flows*. I set out to provide an explanation of the slow motion phenomenon that can be reconciled with the views concerning the experience of temporal flow, which Husserl develops in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. To do so, I turn to a competing model of felt duration that relies rather of the amount of attention one directs toward the passage of time to explain the phenomenon. I also choose to shift the debate from critical (fear provoking) situations to the context of sport to show how the active (and voluntary) involvement of the subject with the world can influence the experience of duration. This text also touches on the subjects of cognitive science and neuroscience by introducing Francisco Varela's neurophenomenological account of the Husserlian concept of the specious present. Hence, the concepts of protention and

retention are given a new 'naturalised' explanation that helps to emphasise the importance of protention in understanding the experience of temporal flow.