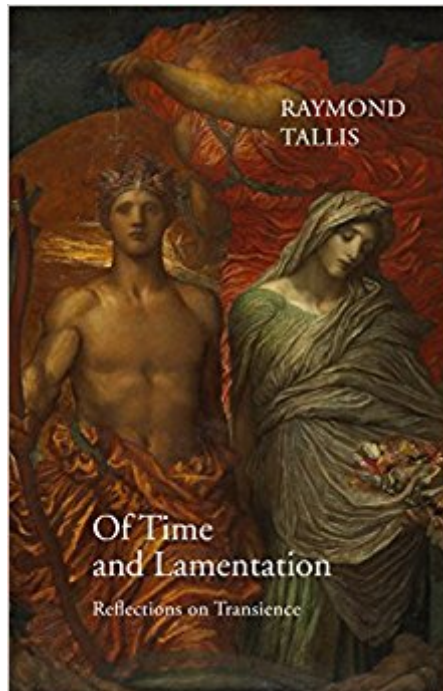


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# Of Time And Lamentation: Reflections On Transience



## Synopsis

Time's mysteries seem to resist comprehension and what remains, once the familiar metaphors are stripped away, can stretch even the most profound philosopher. In *Of Time and Lamentation*, Raymond Tallis rises to this challenge and explores the nature and meaning of time and how best to understand it. The culmination of some twenty years of thinking, writing and wondering about (and within) time, it is a bold, original, and thought-provoking work. With characteristic fearlessness, Tallis seeks to reclaim time from the jaws of physics. For most of us, time is composed of mornings, afternoons, and evenings and expressed in hurry, hope, longing, waiting, enduring, planning, joyful expectation, and grief. Thinking about it is to meditate on our own mortality. Yet, physics has little or nothing to say about this time, the time as it is lived. The story told by caesium clocks, quantum theory, and Lorentz coordinates, Tallis argues, needs to be supplemented by one of moss on rocks, tears on faces, and the long narratives of our human journey. Our temporal lives deserve a richer attention than is afforded by the equations of mathematical physics. The first part of the book, "Killing Time" is a formidable critique of the spatialized and mathematized account of time arising from physical science. The passage of time, the direction of time and time travel are critically examined and the relationship between mathematics and reality, and the nature of the observer, are explored. Part 2, "Human Time" examines tensed time, the reality of time as it is lived: what we mean by "now", how we make sense of past and future events, and the idea of eternity. With the scientific reduction of time set aside and lived time reaffirmed, Tallis digs deeper into the nature of time itself in the final part, "Finding Time". Questions about "the stuff" of time — such as instants and intervals — about time and change, and the relationship between objective and subjective time, open on to wider discussions about time and causation, the irruption of subjectivity and intentionality into a material universe, and the relationship between time and freedom. For anyone who has puzzled over the nature of becoming, wondered whether time is inseparable from change, whether time is punctuate or continuous, or even whether time, itself, is real, *Of Time and Lamentation* will provoke and entertain. Those, like Tallis himself, who seek to find a place at which the scientific and humanistic views of humanity can be reconciled, will celebrate his placing of human consciousness at the heart of time, and his showing that we are "more than cogs in the universal clock, forced to collaborate with the very progress that pushes us towards our own midnight".

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There is hardly a thinking person who has not been struck, at some stage in life, by the deep mystery of time. How is it that things come into being and then pass away? What is a moment, and what flows as the moments succeed each other? What is it to exist in time, and is time another dimension, like the three dimensions of space? Can time be recaptured, replayed, or is all time unredeemable? Does time as described by the theory of relativity square with time as experienced by you and me? All these questions and many more besides well up in the minds of thinking people as soon as they begin to reflect on the nature of time, and in this book Raymond Tallis spells them out clearly, systematically and sympathetically, so as to give the fullest examination to date, both of time as part of the fabric of reality, and of time as the condition of self-conscious experience. He does not solve the mystery, but his argument deepens it in a fascinating way. Written with scholarly rigour and lively humour, this study of the greatest source of our metaphysical anxieties will provide hours of pleasure and instruction to all who delve into it. (Sir Roger Scruton, Senior Fellow, Ethics & Public Policy Center, Washington DC) There are few contemporary thinkers who possess either the breadth of Ray Tallis's knowledge or the depth of his scholarship. There are fewer still who can write so cogently and insightfully about the human condition. (Kenan Malik, author of *The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics*) 'You affirm', wrote Albert Einstein to his best friend Michel Besso, that the transition from 'lived experience to objectivity' is accompanied by suffering, which if one interprets as a physicist is tied to irreversible processes'. The physicist befuddled by the complexity of the question simply replied, 'I do not know how to help you'. Now Raymond Tallis takes on the challenge, bravely going where few have

ventured, investigating the painful nature of time's passage, one intimately felt yet stubbornly denied by numerous scientists. *Of Time and Lamentation* is an important philosophical investigation, at the same time personal and scholarly. It is a bold and original experiment where art and poetry are given as much importance as science, measurements, equations. (Jimena Canales, Thomas M. Siebel Chair in the History of Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and author of *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson and the Debate that Changed Our Understanding of Time*) This is an absorbing book that will reward the patient reader with a deeper insight into the problem of time, if not its solution. (Andrew Crumey Wall Street Journal)

Raymond Tallis trained in medicine at Oxford University and at St Thomas' Hospital London before becoming professor of geriatric medicine at the University of Manchester. He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences for his research in clinical neuroscience and he has played a key role in developing guidelines for the care of stroke patients in the UK. From 2011 to 2014 he was Chair of Healthcare Professionals for Assisted Dying. He retired from medicine in 2006 to become a full-time writer. His books have ranged across many subjects from philosophical anthropology to literary and cultural criticism but all are characterized by a fascination for the infinite complexity of human lives and the human condition. *The Economist's Intelligent Life* magazine lists him as one of the world's leading polymaths. His most recent book, on the subject of mortality, *The Black Mirror* (2015), was widely praised.

This is a wonderful book. It is written from an old man's perspective. It is also a difficult book. Tallis is a polymath. The range and variety of reference material he cites is astonishing. Contemplating the end of consciousness, Tallis attempts to reconcile time as understood in science with lived time, the time of everyday living. Is the cessation or surrender of consciousness the end of life? Tallis sees the possible. If you undertake a reading, be patient. Limit your reading to a few pages at a sitting. Here is a work of an exceptional man, summing up a life time of thinking.

Recently several booklets have been published to clarify the notion of time in the light of the latest knowledge of physics: *The Time Reborn* by L. Smolin, *The Now* by R.A. Muller and *The Order of Time* by C. Rovelli. It is a demonstration of great interest in this topic, which concerns not only scientific but also cultural aspects in general and above all existential. Tallis's book, 708 pages, addresses all these aspects in a comprehensive, arguable and clear way. Underlining how time can not be reduced to a single mathematical dimension, but viewed from different points of view; None of which

prevails but must be integrated into the different contexts of research or life. A pleasant and stimulating reading for all those interested in the subject, accompanied by an impressive bibliography and notes system. A five star book surely. Florindo Pirone

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