

Genealogy of the Instant: Plato's ἐξαίφνης, Paul's καιρός, and the Emergence of Kairological Time

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Abstract: This paper aims at a genealogy of the concept of the instant (the time of the event) by tracing the relation between Plato's notion of ἐξαίφνης ("the instant") and Apostle Paul's use of καιρός ("the critical or opportune moment"). While Paul is often interpreted as synthesizing Greek philosophy with Jewish messianism, I argue that the Greek element is already divided between two distinct concepts: the metaphysical instantaneous time of the event and the practical temporality of timely action. This duality allows the conjunction with Jewish mystical apocalypticism and ultimately gives rise to a new structure of time that I call *kairological*, which later becomes decisive for the philosophical lineage of thinkers of the instant like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Derrida.

Keywords: instant, *exaiphnes*, *kairos*, Plato, Paul, kairological time

Introduction

The figure of the Apostle Paul, as noted by several commentators, including Heidegger, Taubes, Badiou, and Agamben, has played a decisive role in a number of fundamental philosophical attitudes of Western modernity toward subjectivity, universalism, time, and history. His influence on the concept of the instant as the time of the event is unavoidable, insofar as specific features of his thought remain consistent in practically all subsequent authors dealing with the topic. This paper aims to outline its specifics. Although I agree with the widely held interpretation that Paul synthesizes Greek philosophical thought and Jewish messianism, I will argue that the Greek element is already a mixture of two concepts, hitherto understood as disparate—ἐξαίφνης and καιρός—the initial moment of time and the moment of epistemological enlightenment; and the time when conditions are right for the realization of a given action or decision. The connection between these concepts

makes possible the combination between the Greek understanding of time and the central Jewish mystical idea of the event as a twofold (divine and human) process.

The result of this double synthesis, or two syntheses, is that the event both retains its duality and also manages to fit into a less mystical and more philosophical framework, thanks to the modified Greek conceptual apparatus. The structure of the time of the event is close to that of the Greek instant [ἐξαίφνης], but with the key difference that it is doubled or postponed from the beginning to the end of time, thus acquiring a typically eschatological character, where the future becomes the privileged temporal mode, insofar as it gives meaning to the other two.

Both ἐξαίφνης (“the instant”, “suddenly”) and καιρός (“the right, critical moment”) are words from everyday language that acquire a special status in ancient philosophy. Ἐξαίφνης is a Platonic concept that marks the unfolding of the One into multiplicity and has a special connection with the process of higher knowledge, while καιρός is from rhetoric and signifies time that opens up possibilities, allows itself to be “seized”, and whose seizing leads to a practical action for which there is no pre-existing rule. Both denote qualitative, not quantitative, time.

My analysis will proceed in three steps. First, I will reconstruct the function of ἐξαίφνης in Plato’s late dialogues, where it marks the negative element of transformation and the passage between opposites. Second, I will examine the Greek notion of καιρός and its development as the site of practical action and decision. Finally, I will show how Paul transforms the two into an eschatological and messianic temporality that both interrupts chronological sequence and demands an active response. The aim is not to provide a theological or political reading of Paul’s epistles but rather to describe the formal ontological structure of the instant as it emerges from this genealogy.

Ἐξαίφνης — Platonism and the “Moving Image of Eternity”

The Greek adverb ἐξαίφνης, translated as “suddenly”, “the instant”, or “abruptly”, appears 36 times in the Platonic corpus. It is found in crucial passages from Plato’s middle and late periods, such as *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Letter VII*, *Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*, and *Statesman*. This frequency and placement signal its technical significance. In pre- and contemporaneous literature—in Homer, Aesop, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Thucydides, Herodotus, Isocrates, Aristophanes, and

Xenophon—the term was widely used to denote an unexpected turn for the worse, often in a military context. Plato, however, repurposes it philosophically, elevating it to a central concept describing fundamental processes. He employs it primarily in two contexts:

1. **Ontological** — to describe the process of the One’s multiplication into the Ideas and the visible world;
2. **Epistemological** — to describe the success or failure of philosophical knowledge and revelation.

In both cases, it serves as the linking element between different levels of being, facilitating a transition. The descent of the One into the plurality of Ideas and further into the flux of the visible world happens spontaneously, outside of any temporality. Yet it is this very act that creates chronological time. Conversely, the soul’s ascending knowledge that starts from the sensual realm and ultimately achieves the One is completed through an instantaneous epiphany, which is only partially conditioned by the efforts of the knower. However, the descent of the deluded soul into chaos, the visible, and matter is also instantaneous.

Cimakasky argues that Plato single-handedly adds a semantic nuance to ἐξάφνης, using it in the sense of cognitive enlightenment. However, this thesis is questionable since his contemporaries already used the adverb in a similar way. It is clear, however, that Plato begins to use it technically, even articulating it [τὸ ἐξάφνης] to emphasize the significance of his gesture. Furthermore, it seems that something of the older usage of a turn for the worse is also preserved—not only concerning the soul, but also insofar as the very multiplication of the One, although necessary, is a sign of the ontological degradation of the visible world.

Plato does not have a clearly defined philosophy of time. The most famous and widely discussed definition is from *Timaeus* 37d, where it is said that time is “a moving image of eternity.” In order to understand this definition, as well as its context, it is necessary to trace what, according to Plato, makes the representation of eternity possible—this is not addressed in *Timaeus*, as the dialogue deals with the emergence of the visible world solely from a cosmological perspective. The causal and dialectical origin of time is the subject of another later dialogue, *Parmenides*, which draws attention to the possible criticisms and objections that the doctrine of the One could give rise to, although, as usual, Plato’s own position remains unclear. It is in *Parmenides* that the most significant uses of ἐξάφνης are found. The text is usually divided into two parts:

1. An introduction, which outlines the difficulties surrounding the problem of participation—how things from the visible world can participate in eternal essences (Ideas);

2. The *exercise* [γυμνασθῆναι], which presents several different hypotheses aimed at clarifying the difficulties presented in the first part.

Ἐξάιφνης appears for the first time at the end of the second hypothesis (156c–e) in a passage devoted to the conditions of possibility of change:

But there is no time during which a thing can be at once neither in motion nor at rest. On the other hand it does not change without making a transition. When does it make the transition, then? Not while it is at rest or while it is in motion, or while it is occupying time. Consequently, the time at which it will be when it makes the transition must be that queer thing, the instant [ἐξάιφνης]. The word ‘instant’ [ἐξάιφνης] appears to mean something such that from it a thing passes to one or other of the two conditions. There is no transition from a state of rest so long as the thing is still at rest, nor from motion so long as it is still in motion, but this queer thing, the instant [ἐξάιφνης], is situated between the motion and the rest; it occupies no time at all, and the transition of the moving thing to the state of rest, or of the stationary thing to being in motion, takes place to and from the instant [ἐξάιφνης].

The instant reconciles the contradictory characteristics of the fundamental ontological principle, described in the first and second hypotheses (the One is both finite and infinite, in itself and in others, etc.). The relationship between time and the One is described similarly: in the first hypothesis, it is said that the One cannot be part of time or be in it (141d), and in the second (155e), that it cannot be foreign to it, since it encompasses everything. It seems that the One is subject to change in time, but this change, paradoxically, happens outside of time. Ἐξάιφνης determines this. Its first characteristic is “strange” (ἄτοπος—literally “not in place”, but also “extremely puzzling”). Then it is said to be “in between” [μεταξύ], a mediator between movement and rest—not in time, but at the beginning and end of every change, ensuring the transition.

According to Plato, the empirical assumption that movement begins in time must be reconsidered. Both the beginning and the end of change must be outside of time and not part of it. The instant in which

change occurs is not in time in the sense that it has no duration, nor is it part of it (past, future, or present). However, as Rangos notes, the instant belongs to time in the same way that a point without dimension can be “part” of a line. Just as a line is not formed by accumulating a series of points, time is not constituted by adding a series of instants. Points do not possess the most important characteristic of a line, namely extension, and therefore cannot form a line quantitatively, but qualitatively they are its condition of possibility, insofar as it would not be a line without them. It seems that ἐξάφνης functions in a similar way—as a boundary between two states or between a state and a process, which allows them to form a continuity, simultaneously connecting and separating them, insofar as the same “point” is the end of one and the beginning of the other. What determines the instant is not discussed. It seems necessary and unconditional, insofar as time already is, and the whole exercise proceeds from within it toward its cause.

This premise is consistent with the axiomatic nature of the participation thesis—the One participates in the sensible world as its cause and model, and the sensible world participates in the One insofar as it strives to imitate it. This argument is derived purely logically throughout the dialogue and is not put into question. Instead, Plato’s goal is to show how participation occurs operationally. The One in itself is not in time but in eternity, understood as intense infinity. But insofar as it spontaneously multiplies in matter, this eternity is set in motion and acquires duration, i.e., the character of time, which is extensively infinite, and therefore quantitative, precisely because of the qualitative instant that proportionizes it. The instant solves the problem of how a discontinuous continuity, such as time, is possible. It itself is not time and “is” not at all, insofar as it is not a being. Returning to *Timaeus* and its famous definition, what is often overlooked is its second part: time is “eternal but moving according to number.” The parts of time are a proportion set by eternity (proportionality). The instant is what allows proportionality to become proportion. It is ontological and forms the basis of dialectics, not physics, and does not measure movement; instead, movement is measured according to it.

Ἐξάφνης is also used to describe an epistemological transition that allows or prohibits the *anamnesis*—knowledge as recollection. Here, I will focus on three important examples that are sufficient to illustrate how ἐξάφνης fits into Plato’s epistemology: the process of acquiring

knowledge in *Letter VII*, the erotic ascent from *Symposium*, and the allegory of the cave from *Republic*. The uses of the adverb elsewhere correspond to one of the variants described below. Knowledge is described similarly in Plato's texts, with several motifs standing out:

1. It requires some form of exercise [γυμνασθῆναι]—dialectical, mathematical, or erotic. This is also noticeable in *Parmenides*, which serves as a pedagogical model of what such practice should look like.

2. True knowledge, as well as error, is reached in an instant—through an incalculable and abrupt culmination of the efforts of exercise in the first case, and through chaotic striving in the second.

3. What enables knowledge is the kinship of the knower with what is known. Through this kinship, the known can indicate itself.

4. Knowledge, the principle of being, and the instant are connected through the metaphor of light. This metaphor, with its components of principle–instant–light–knowledge–vision, is one of the most enduring in the history of philosophy.

In *Letter VII*, the epistemological process is presented in a distinctly technical manner, even if the letter claims (341d) that metaphysical truths are generated in the soul “suddenly [ἐξαίφνης], like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark.” This is followed by a description of four elements of knowledge, the fourth being knowledge itself, that make a fifth one knowable, which, however, is not dependent on them (341e–342d). While the first four elements give access to predicates, the fifth enables a knowledge of an object's being. This being is not expressed linguistically, but is seen. The text does not trace the transition from the fourth to the fifth element. It only specifies that the fifth is accessible only to those who are good by nature, and nothing can make the ones who are not see (342b).

Knowledge, therefore, is a capacity for vision that is given to a chosen few and is revealed suddenly only after prolonged practice in the first four elements. The text does not make it clear what exactly holds the affinity between the object and the soul that perceives it, but the instant once again allows the transition from one to the other in a manner similar to that in *Parmenides*. The difference is in the direction of the movement—just as the One manifests itself in time, so the knower makes an “upward” movement toward the being of that which he knows (which ultimately leads to the One as the first cause). This “upward” movement is revealed as permitted and conditioned by the “downward”

movement of the One and is possible because of the instant. Ἐξαίφνης in this sense has a self-referential character—illumination is both an insight into the structure of being and into one's own participation in it.

The question of repetition remains open. Insofar as knowledge does not happen once and for all, it seems that epiphany should be repeated. On the other hand, if the grasping of the ἀρχή is a singular act, then every subsequent instant should be a recollection of the recollection of the ἀρχή—that is, epistemologically secondary.

This aspect is somewhat thematized in *Symposium*, although the uses of Ἐξαίφνης primarily serve to distinguish the right path of knowledge from the wrong one. As Cimakasky notes, the dialogue is structurally close to *Parmenides* in three respects:

1. In both, the narrator recounts a conversation in which he did not participate;
2. Both are structured in two parts, the second of which is divided into clearly distinguishable theses or speeches;
3. In both, Ἐξαίφνης appears only in the second part.

In the case of *Symposium*, Ἐξαίφνης formally and thematically breaks up the order of the conversation, which, until the second use of the adverb, proceeds as a gradual accumulation of truth about beauty and love throughout all the speeches from Phaedrus to Socrates. First, Ἐξαίφνης appears in Diotima's story, retold by Socrates (210e), to describe the path to knowledge of beauty, mirroring *Letter VII*—in order to see the essence of love and beauty, the lover must go through a methodical exercise that starts from the multitude of beautiful things and reaches the Idea of beauty itself. In this, he becomes “immortal” (212a) by connecting with the eternal essence of the object. A soul that is good by nature, as long as it is taught correctly, successfully completes the exercise because it is characterized by an unrelenting erotic desire for knowledge that does not allow it to give up.

This does not mean that she is incapable of making mistakes. The other three uses of Ἐξαίφνης in the dialogue show precisely this. The adverb is used:

1. when Alcibiades' company bursts into Agathon's house (212c);
2. when Alcibiades learns that Socrates is also there and has taken his place next to Agathon (213c); and
3. when Socrates takes his place next to Agathon again and a new rowdy company bursts in, conclusively disrupting the order (223b).

Agathon and Socrates are clearly not merely participants in the dialogue, but allegorical figures representing the Ideas of Goodness and Beauty, respectively. These Ideas overlap but do not coincide. Alcibiades and the chaos he brings can thus be seen as the embodiment of a soul that possesses the spark of knowledge but has not been cultivated according to the prescribed path. Therefore, he cannot distinguish one Idea from another. Bursting in, Alcibiades seeks Agathon (“the cleverest, the most attractive”) to crown him. Sitting between Agathon and Socrates, he separates them, but then gets sidetracked and turns his attention to Socrates, delivering a speech in his honor instead, which makes everyone laugh. Socrates then criticizes him, saying that his speech should have been about Agathon (the Good). Agathon returns to Socrates, but soon after, a new group arrives.

Alcibiades is knowledgeable and seeks goodness and beauty, but due to his incorrect practice, he fails to see them and understand why Socrates (who has studied correctly) takes his place next to Agathon. Alcibiades uses Diotima’s dialectical syntax but speaks of images rather than the Idea itself—and therefore errs. He is an example of the instant as a marker of the error. Something of the structure of true enlightenment remains—unpredictability—but there is no order and clarity, only confusion. If true knowledge involves distinguishing truth from falsehood, Alcibiades remains entirely in falsehood, without recognizing it. From this point on, the dialogue falls apart. Although Agathon temporarily returns to Socrates, the arrival of the second company puts an end to the conversation.

In *Republic*, the adverb is used analogously—three times in the myth of the cave—bringing together all the aspects discussed in *Parmenides*, *Letter VII*, and *Symposium*.

The allegory of the cave in *Republic* (514a–517a) illustrates the effects of education, or lack thereof, on human nature. Socrates begins his story with a description of “strange” [ἄτοπον] prisoners in a cave who, like us, are blind to the illusory nature of what they call reality. If a prisoner were to be freed, he would “suddenly” [ἐξαίφνης] be disoriented and, due to the glare of the light, would not be able to recognize the real objects, and would flee from the source of light because it would cause him pain (514c). This position is close to that of Alcibiades in *Symposium*, in that he begins to reflect on beauty and goodness abruptly, without having heard the speeches of the others, which leads him to con-

fusion and total blindness to the true source of light (the One). However, if the prisoner is instead forced to climb toward the exit until he gets outside, he would again be unable to “suddenly” [ἐξαίφνης] recognize anything of the real objects, and would have to spend time methodically getting used to them (516a). Thus, he would gradually be able to look directly at the sun itself and would not want to return to life in the cave. However, if he returned, his eyes would be “suddenly” [ἐξαίφνης] once again enveloped in darkness, and he would appear ridiculous to the others because he would not participate in their trivial disputes about the shadows (517a).

There is a noticeable structural similarity between the description of the soul in *Republic* and that in *Symposium*—in both cases, it is characterized by lack [ἐλλειψις] and desire [πόθος]. In *Symposium*, it is represented through Eros as always craving what it lacks, neither completely mortal nor completely divine, while in *Republic*, its affective part [ἐπιθυμία] is in constant tension with the rational [λόγος] one. Its full realization occurs when it renounces its lower desires and ascends to the Good or the One. There is also a structural similarity between the soul and the instant, insofar as they fall under the definitions of ἄτοπος and μεταξύ, but the instant seems to be pure negativity, insofar as it itself possesses no divine spark, nor is it pulled in opposite directions, but only provides the transition from one opposite to another.

From all the examples discussed so far, it seems that ἐξαίφνης is used terminologically and consistently to describe the transition from one opposite to another. It makes possible the difference that ensures the emanation of the One, the passage of time, and the unity in recollection. Furthermore, the pre-Platonic use of the adverb as a turn for the worse is also partially preserved in cases of false knowledge and delusion. In Plato, the ontological and epistemological are differentiated from the practical—a separation that is no longer observable in the Apostle Paul. Here, ἐξαίφνης and καιρός are still thought of as unrelated to each other.

Καιρός and its dual origin

In Plato’s time, καιρός meant the right, critical moment, or the moment when a favorable opportunity for action arises. The adverb derives its meaning from two sources: archery and weaving. In archery, καιρός refers to a long, tunnel-like opening through which the arrow must pass in order to reach its target. Hence, it must be shot accurately and with the

proper force. Some researchers argue that the meaning of *καῖρός* has changed historically from concreteness to abstractness, insofar as in the tragedians, the word and its etymologically related counterparts (Homer, for example, uses *καῖριος*) are used to denote specific parts of the body, most often the head, through which a person can be killed. Gradually, *καῖρός* began to denote not the place on the body or the opening at which the archer aims, but the possibility of aiming—the correct way in which one must act in order to hit the target accurately. From here, the word became associated with proportion, the division of parts (etymologically, there is a similarity with *κείρω*, “to cut”).

A very similar word from weaving, *καῖρος*, is also related to an opening. According to Late Antiquity sources, it refers to the gap that opens at the base of the fabric through which the weaver must pull the thread with the spindle. Subsequently, as with *καῖρός*, *καῖρος* began to mean the very act of pulling, which is quick and dexterous, similar to shooting an arrow. This usage links the adverb to time—the opening is fleeting, so the shuttle must also be “shot” at the right moment. It seems that the figure of weaving fate helps to establish this meaning. In both lines of origin, the transition in connotation is from place to action and from space to time.

As White notes, since the circumstances that enable timely action are variable, *καῖρός* implies a flow of time that is composed of interruptions and that contradicts chronological or historical duration and sequence. The present is not understood as a natural consequence of a causal chain of events, but as an unprecedented moment of crisis in which a decision must be made that cannot rely on past experience. The adverb is thought of in a similar way in classical rhetoric and is widely found in philosophical texts.

Given these uses, it is logical that *καῖρός* should have some relation with *ἐξαίφνης*, insofar as both are opposed to chronological time. Contrary to expectations, there is no connection between the two, which is understandable given the categorical separation of practical [*φρόνησις*] from speculative wisdom [*σοφία*] in ancient thought. In Plato’s corpus, *καῖρός* occurs over 50 times, and in most cases in connection with the pair knowledge–action, but not once is it accompanied by a reflection on the structure of time or recollection. Getting the timing right is not an instantaneous matter—of enlightenment or understanding a universal principle—but instead of acting on the basis of

knowledge in the first four elements described in *Letter VII*. Seizing the moment is not entirely a matter of chance, as everything seems to have its own appropriate time, but it is not predetermined in the way that anamnesis is inevitable, provided that one has been trained correctly. In a situation of *καιρός*, one acts without a pre-established rule, insofar as each situation is unique. One rather sets a new rule, determined by the right time, place, degree, and appropriateness of the action, but not reducible to them.

As Levi notes, in Plato, *καιρός* connects the ethical and aesthetic spheres through the concept of proportion—seizing is thought of as understanding and applying the right measure to opposites. If *ἐξαίφνης* marks a transition from one ontological layer to another or from one opposition to another, then *καιρός* mediates oppositions at the level of historical time, and the action that results from it may have rhetorical, aesthetic, ethical, or political connotations, but it remains separate from the higher ontological–epistemological layers, as evidenced by the absence of the figure of light/vision.

Paul’s Epistles and *καιρός* as a Messianic Category

It is difficult to pinpoint when the practical wisdom of *καιρός* began to be thought of as inseparable from the ontological structure of time. Some researchers argue that this happened in Neoplatonism. However, it seems that in the New Testament, they were already merged. The figure of the Apostle Paul plays a key role in this process. In this section, I will limit myself to presenting the structure of messianic time in Paul and its formal characteristics through short readings of Taubes and Agamben. The effects of this particular understanding of time, whether theological, political, or other, will remain unaddressed.

Taubes argues that Paul appropriates concepts from Greek philosophy, emptying them of their original meaning and charging them with apocalyptic urgency through Jewish mysticism, thereby destabilizing both Hellenistic rationality and Mosaic law. In his lectures, he seeks to present the “Jewish Paul”, detached from Christian tradition, especially from the dominant Protestant interpretation that informs thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

As far as the structure of time is concerned, Taubes argues that while the beginning is most important in the Greek worldview, Abraham already understands history from the end. However, the contribution of

the Apostle Paul to messianism is not simply a shift of the point of meaning from the beginning to the end of time, but a reorientation of the destiny of humanity between the poles of beginning and end, between *πρῶτος* and *ἔσχατον*, resurrection and the Second Coming (*παρουσία*). The Second Coming is an event that, although not actual, is predetermined as eschatological through the death and resurrection of Jesus (*πρῶτος* is always-already *ἔσχατον*), and human history, both in general and in individual–existential terms, is the time that remains until the apocalypse. In this sense, the future is the privileged temporal mode, but the future is also, from a certain point of view, the past, insofar as it marks the end of time, which will necessarily come. The time that remains is defined as *καιρός*—the turning point where the earthly [Irdischem] world touches the unearthly [Überirdischem]. According to Taubes, this state of constant expectation is characteristic of the Jewish apocalypse. Gradually, in the course of history, it fades away and is replaced by speculative *γνώσις*, and the events of the end of time are transformed into parables about the path of the soul and its ascent to paradise.

In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben interprets Paul in the spirit of Taubes. His goal is to restore the messianic character of Paul’s corpus, which he believes has been erased by the Christian church. His central thesis is the distinction between “the time of the end” [*καιρός*] and “the end of time” [*ἔσχατον*]. The former is “the time that remains”, beginning with the contraction of chronological time [*χρόνος*], while the latter is the last instant that marks the very end. Thus, messianism means life in the remainder, not a description of the *ἔσχατον*. For Agamben, messianic time is an intervention in the form of chronological time, which destroys it from within, without, however, belonging to it. The messianic event has an “unidual structure” and does not occur in a transitional period between the time of the earthly world and eternity, but is the result of a transformation in the way time is understood, which allows eternity to manifest itself in it, without the two coinciding. Paul’s expression *ὁ νῦν καιρός* (“now is the accepted time; [...] now is the day of salvation”, 2 Cor. 6:2) shows the tension between the present [*νῦν*] and messianic time [*καιρός*]: they are coextensive but irreducible to each other.

To explain this, Agamben uses the concept of “operative time” [temps opératif] developed by the linguist Guillaume—an internal time of potentiality that precedes its realization in speech and thus cannot be

represented figuratively, since it gives time. In the same way, messianic time is a suspension of the chronological, in which the eschaton is already present but not realized. The messianic is not a fixed point, but a dynamic opening of the present that reformulates the relationship between action and possibility. Agamben argues that this connection between the messianic and the chronological always already exists. The task of the apostle is not to provoke the Second Coming, but to respond to it by living in the time that remains, by accepting chronological time as a remnant and restoring its internal fragmentation and potentiality. Capturing time is destroying time, “returning” it to the partiality of form, in the process of construction. It remains problematic how such a “restoration” of time can be conceived, since it cannot be represented at all. Moreover, the very contraction of time is made possible by a series of historical events that began with the birth of Christ, which limits a purely formal interpretation.

The question of the last instant also remains unresolved. Agamben defines it as internal to messianic time, but it simultaneously produces and transcends it: it is postponed in order to create the field of kairotic action and sets the goal of the entire structure. Although Paul is primarily interested in the remnant, this remnant itself is dependent on the eschatological instant that grounds it.

Καίρὸς appears numerous times in the epistles of the Apostle Paul, and not always in the phrase that Agamben draws attention to. Various classifications of its uses have been made. For the purposes of this presentation, I will limit myself to noting that the unidual structure of messianic time can be explained without the concept of operative time, but purely theologically through the Christological concept of περιχώρησις—the Son of God enters the world as a human being, but this does not make him human, even if it allows the coexistence of two natures in one hypostasis. In a similar way, messianic time can be thought of in relation to the time of the world—they are essentially different, but act simultaneously. That is why καίρὸς is used to describe the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 5:6), but also the last day (1 Cor. 4:5), as well as for the time of urgency in which the messianic community lives and must act (Rom. 13:11).

Returning to the thesis that Paul combines Greek philosophy and Jewish mysticism, it can be assumed that the combination is more complex and is permissible at the level of each of the elements. That is, in

addition to Jewish mysticism, where this is well known, Greek philosophy should also allow for a connection between the structure of time and its practical perception, although, as we have seen, paradoxicality is permissible only at the ontological level. Although the connection is not inherent to the Greek worldview, it seems that it allows the introduction of the element of the event, which connects the level of ontology with that of practice, or ἐξαίφνης with καιρός.

As Daube notes, ἐξαίφνης and its derivatives ἐξαπίνης, ἄφνω, and αἰφνίδιος are like ghosts in dictionaries because of the lack of attention given to them. In fact, this semantic core is used many times in the New Testament and in quite a few key passages. In most cases, it is associated with some form of enlightenment, as well as with imagery of the eye, gaze, and light on the one hand, and, similarly to Plato's maieutics, with birth and labor pains on the other, sometimes taking on apocalyptic overtones. In the Old Testament, "suddenly" (*pith 'om, petha'*, translated into Greek as ἐξαίφνης) is initially used, as in Greek, in the colloquial sense of a turn for the worse, but later gradually begins to be used (although extremely rarely) in a positive sense as the time of a miraculous event. Accordingly, it seems that the positive element is not entirely Jewish, but also resembles the understanding of the instant in Platonism; i.e., there is a certain semantic proximity between the two traditions in this regard. The enlightenment described by ἐξαίφνης in the New Testament is no longer cognitive in the same sense, insofar as the emphasis falls categorically on the instance that sets it, and it is not preceded by intellectual preparation. The factor of human effort is causally displaced after the event, insofar as it is set by it, but chronologically it continues to precede it, as in Platonism, at least as far as its eschatological aspect is concerned. The exercise has been replaced by καιρός, practical actions of expectation and appropriate response to the open opportunity in the messianic time.

There are two uses of ἐξαίφνης related to the Apostle Paul, but the adverb is not used by him at all. It occurs twice in the *Acts of the Holy Apostles*. In 9:3, it is used to describe the epiphany that befell the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, which ultimately led to his conversion to Christianity: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] there shined round about him a light from heaven..." In 22:6, it is also used in the account of this story to the Jews in Jerusalem: "suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] there shone from heaven a great

light round about me.” In both places, the light is described as blinding, but no longer in a negative sense. As Daube notes, in the third version of this story (26:13), when the Apostle Paul speaks before Agrippa, blindness and ἐξαίφνης are absent, which he explains by the fact that in the first two cases the subject is the light, while the third emphasizes Paul’s own experience. Suddenness seems to be used to describe a miraculous event in itself.

In the epistles of Paul, ἐξαίφνης is not used, but in a key passage from *1 Thessalonians* (5:3), its derivative αἰφνίδιος is used in close proximity to and in connection with καιρός, albeit in its more everyday sense:

But of the times and the seasons [Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν], brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. / For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them [τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐπίσταται ὀλεθρος], as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

In this case, the adjective characterizes destruction; i.e., its use is analogous to the usage described by Daube. Although in this passage καιρός is used in the sense of meteorological time, a connection between ἐξαίφνης and καιρός can still be postulated through their use to describe eschatological events. Here again, the motif of light and vision appears—the expectation of the last day by the messianic community is described as a watch through the night.

In another passage, this time from *1 Corinthians* (15:52), a connection between the motif of seeing and that of blindness can be observed in a way that is not seen in Plato:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye [ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ], at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Since there is no word for the instant as the twinkling of an eye in Greek, Daube concludes that its use in this place corresponds to that of the Hebrew *regha’*. Although this case is unique, Daube argues that the German word *Augenblick* began to be used with a similar meaning and acquired philosophical significance because of Luther’s translation of

this very expression. He also argues that the temporal meaning of the instant has an entirely different history, but considering everything said so far, it seems that from an eschatological lens, the two histories are difficult to separate.

Following Agamben's distinction between messianism and eschatology, it can be concluded that *καῖρός* is a concept characterizing the time of the end, and *ἐξαιφνης*—the end of time. There is a connection between the two insofar as there is a connection between their respective spheres, and, as I have already pointed out, eschatological time determines messianic time.

Conclusion

The genealogy traced here shows how the concept of the instant emerges not as a single, homogeneous notion, but as the conjunction of heterogeneous temporal logics. In Plato, *ἐξαιφνης* names the paradoxical moment of transition—between rest and motion, ignorance and knowledge, time and eternity. It is a negative element, marking the threshold where the two intersect but not mix. In the Greek rhetorical tradition, *καῖρός* names something different: the opportune moment of intervention, the site of decision in which action becomes possible without predetermined rules.

Paul's originality lies in bringing these two distinct strands together by exploiting a possible coherence in the two Greek notions. By fusing *ἐξαιφνης* with *καῖρός*, he constructs a temporality in which the sudden rupture of the event coincides with the demand for practical response. This synthesis makes possible a new kairological temporal structure, at once eschatological and messianic, which both interrupts chronological sequence and orients it toward its end. In this way, Paul transforms the instant into a formal structure that is simultaneously ontological (rupture of being), epistemological (illumination), and practical (decision).

What emerges from this genealogy is that the instant cannot be reduced either to a point in chronological sequence or to a purely mystical event outside of time. It is a transcendental joint that requires both a transcendent guarantee and a subjective response to operate. Thus, it marks a decisive site for philosophy: the point at which being, knowledge, and praxis are bound together through temporality.