

Prelude — Time as a Human Habit

Human beings are born inside time—not because time first appears as an explicit concept, but because every ordinary layer of human experience is already organized around it. Memory gives rise to what we call the past. Perception anchors what we call the present. Expectation projects what we call the future. Long before any encounter with physics or philosophy, consciousness has already learned to inhabit this tripartite structure.

For that reason, time is not first encountered as a theory. It is first lived as habit. Events seem to arrive, pass, and leave traces behind. Awareness seems to move through a world already divided into before, now, and after. Because this ordering is so complete and so constant, time feels less like an interpretation and more like an unquestionable feature of reality itself.

As a result, time is almost never examined at its root. It is treated not as a model of experience, nor as an observer-dependent framework, but as something objectively present—something that exists whether or not any mind is there to articulate it. The conviction is so deep that it usually disappears from view. It becomes invisible precisely because it is everywhere in human thought.

This situation has a revealing historical analogy. For most of human history, the Earth felt flat. Everyday experience appeared to confirm it. Walking across land revealed no curvature. Objects did not fall away from a visible edge. The flat-Earth picture was not absurd within its perceptual frame; it was reasonable given the scale and structure of ordinary human experience.

When the spherical nature of the Earth was finally demonstrated, the planet itself did not change. What changed was the framework through which human beings understood it. The Earth had never been flat. What had been flat was human perception—bounded by scale, experience, and practical necessity.

Time may occupy an analogous place in human understanding. The world feels temporal not necessarily because time is fundamental, but because human consciousness is structured temporally.

Memory must appear prior to recollection, awareness must appear prior to anticipation, and lived experience imposes an ordering so natural that it disappears beneath its own familiarity.

From this invisible ordering arises an even deeper conviction: causality. If time flows, then events seem to follow one another. If events follow one another, then causes seem to precede effects. And if causes precede effects, causality begins to appear not merely as a useful description, but as a law written into reality itself.

Yet this entire chain of reasoning depends on one unexamined premise—that time is fundamental. If that premise is weakened, then the apparent inevitability of causality must also be reconsidered. Cause and effect may still function powerfully within human reasoning and within macroscopic practice, but that does not yet establish that they belong to the deepest structural layer of reality.

This paper begins from that point of hesitation. It asks not whether causality works in practice, but whether causality exists as a fundamental generative principle at all. If time is not primitive, but emergent, conditional, or perceptual, then causality—so tightly bound to temporal order—cannot simply be assumed as foundational.

If time is not fundamental, can cause and effect still be?

Paper A-8 approaches this question by separating human temporal intuition from physical structure. It argues that causality is not the engine that drives events into being, but an interpretive framework imposed by observers who encounter events only after those events have structurally completed themselves. To understand why causality feels inevitable, one must first understand how deeply time has become a human habit. Only then does it become possible to see that what feels most unavoidable in experience may not be most fundamental in reality.