

1-1-2015

## What is Time Anyhoo

Ronald S. Green  
*Coastal Carolina University*, [rgreen@coastal.edu](mailto:rgreen@coastal.edu)

Mary Green  
*University of Oregon*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/philosophy-religious-studies>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ronald S Green and Mary Green. "What is Time Anyhoo" *Adventure Time and Philosophy: The Handbook for Heroes*, edited by Nicolas Michaud, Chicago: Open Court (2015) p. 155 - 167. ISBN: 9780812698589

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Humanities and Fine Arts at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy and Religious Studies by an authorized administrator of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@coastal.edu](mailto:commons@coastal.edu).

# 15

## What's Time Anyhoo?

MARY GREEN AND RONALD S. GREEN

**W**hat then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to someone who asks, I don't know.

—SAINT AUGUSTINE

*After narrowly escaping the destruction of the Land of Ooo at the hands of the Lich, Jake returns to the Time Room to visit his buddies Prismo and the Cosmic Owl. Jake, being the hungry hero that he is, just wanted to enjoy a sandwich and have a nice soak in the hot tub. Little did he know, he was about to get an earful of the true nature of time.*

**JAKE:** Three, two, one, go. We're three nice dudes, havin' fun! We got warm bubble water on our buns! I love this spa, and that's a fact! But if I stay too long, I get a pruny back! [*Joins Prismo and Cosmic Owl in beat boxing.*] Poooh, haka pah a poooh, haka haka pah, a poooh.<sup>1</sup>

**PRISMO:** Have another pickle, Jake. I'm glad you called me to bring you back and hang out.

**JAKE:** Yeah man, you're still, like, a strong number three on my Cool Guys List. Hey Prismo, man, does your big TV get any more channels besides the monkey paw network?

**PRISMO:** You call it. Right now, we're sitting in the only room outside of time and space, so even the sky's not the limit.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoting Jake from "Finn the Human."

Just one more perk of being almighty.

**JAKE:** Okay. Let's start by having another look at alternate-wish-world-Finn with the nose and all.

**PRISMO:** I still have that one on the previous channel button. Here it is.

**JAKE:** Whoa. You know, it's funny, man. Finn once told me he saw the same junked-up stuff in a dream mirror: he had the same one arm, the same mad uglies and everything. But, how could he have seen it way back then, Bro? I mean, he didn't even make that wish till a lot later.

**PRISMO:** There's no *then* or *now* in the Time Room or anywhere else without the waves sent out from here. The Time Room is at the center of the Multiverse. It's the only place that's outside of time.

**JAKE:** That's a little freaky. What is this Time Room? No, wait! There's no time anywhere else without the waves sent from this room? I thought time was like a thing . . . you know, like a sandwich, something you have and, like, as you use it up, it kinda disappears.

**PRISMO:** Well, there are a lot of ways of thinking about time. We'll just call that one "Jake's sandwich theory" of time. But there are other ways of understanding time.

**JAKE:** Okayyyy, . . . so then, what's time, anyhoo?

**PRISMO:** Well, it's really hard to understand, even though people have tried. You have your "sandwich theory," but some people have come up with the A-theory of time and others have the B-theory of time.

**JAKE:** Huh?

**PRISMO:** Well, look at Finn on the screen. The A-theorists say there is the past, the present, and the future. You saw mad ugly mirror-Finn in the past, you see alternate-wish-world-Finn on the TV in the present, and you will see a jar of pickles from me in the future.

**JAKE:** I love me some pickles. *Mmmm.*

**PRISMO:** A-theory is how we ordinarily think of time. It says

the past and future are not as real for us as the present and that the past is fixed though the future can change. It's an internal view of time, from your perspective. You've already experienced mirror-Finn, so you think of that as the past. You're watching Finn on TV right now, so it seems like the present. And you're thinking about getting pickles soon, in the future.<sup>2</sup>

**JAKE:** I *am* thinking about the pickles.

**PRISMO:** The B-theory of time doesn't mention past or future, or even present. It's different. To the B-theorists the fact that you can remember the past but can't remember the future is just the fault of having a not-so-perfect brain.

**JAKE:** Wait, Bro . . . You mean I should be able to remember eating this pickle *before* I eat it!?

**PRISMO:** Well to the B-theorist, you are wrong when you think of the future as less real. It is just as real, and the fact that you can't remember it just is, well, like a brain hiccup . . . The B-theory doesn't explain time in the ordinary way but almost as it would be seen from a Glob-eye perspective: all at once. I can see Finn on TV, mirror-Finn earlier, and you eating pickles later. Kind of like if I show you a bunch of screens on the TV at the same moment, each one showing Finn at a different moment. So if you believe A-theory, you believe that future hasn't happened yet, but if B-theory is right then because of the way you perceive time, it's basically just your brain's fault that you can't remember the future. So the A-theory and the B-theory are very different.

**JAKE:** Far out. Which theory's right?

**PRISMO:** Oh, it's not that simple. A-theorists don't all agree with each other, and neither do all B-theorists. For example, from the A-theory came Presentism and the growing block universe.

---

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the tense logic of Arthur N. Prior, expounded in *Past, Present, and Future*.

**JAKE:** Huuhh?

**PRISMO:** Two different ideas about linear time. Presentists say only the present exists.<sup>3</sup> The growing block universe says the past is real, and more of the world is coming into existence in the present, growing like new blocks. But they say the future isn't real.<sup>4</sup>

**JAKE:** Oh, man. Me an' Finn have seen the future a lotta times and usually you're there, too, Cosmic Owl.

**COSMIC OWL:** Whoo.

**JAKE:** Didn't *anyone* think they're all real—past, present, and future?

**PRISMO:** You *know* they did! Remember how I said there are a couple of different kinds of B-theory? One of them, eternalism, says events in the future are already there, and there's no flow of time.

**JAKE:** That's just like my croak dream, man, when I went up in a rocket with Banana Man. No one can change your croak dream, not even Finn. You just gotta embrace it. You can't stop deatheny.<sup>5</sup>

**PRISMO:** Well, maybe *you* can't. If you think so, you might like the time theory called four-dimensionalism. It's also a variation on B-theory.

**JAKE:** Whoa, whoa. Last time I heard "four-dimensional," I was on the being-sucked-in end of a black hole Finn blew with a bubble blower.

**PRISMO:** Don't worry, this isn't about Finn's kind of 4D stuff where space is a fourth dimension like the other three. In this, the fourth dimension is time. It says that things have three parts, one in the past, one in the present, and one in the future. All three are equally real. They look at it like this: the Jake we see now is not the whole Jake, and neither is the Jake that was in the Time Room chasing the Lich. The Jake chasing the Lich was like the left-headed

---

<sup>3</sup> Dean Zimmerman, "Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold."

<sup>4</sup> Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense, and Causation*.

<sup>5</sup> A quote from "The New Frontier."

side of the Ancient Psychic Tandem War Elephant.

**JAKE:** Ancient Psychic Tandem War Elephant! Let's make a wish!

**PRISMO:** Remember, wishes always have those ironic unexpected consequences . . . Anyway, if the Jake chasing the Lich was like the left-headed side of the Ancient Psychic Tandem War Elephant, the Jake here now is like its right-headed side. It's both the Ancient Psychic Tandem War Elephant, but as many pieces stretched across the fourth dimension of time.

**JAKE:** Right on! Sitting in the Time Room like this, that does seem kinda right. It's like a bunch of times are happenin' and different versions of the same time are all going on at once. Your pad is pretty neat man. But, what's up with the Time Room?

**PRISMO:** Booko explained it about as well as the Multiverse can be explained.

**JAKE:** Huh? What'd Booko say about the Multiverse?

**PRISMO:** Watch this while I cook. [*Pushes a button on the remote and Booko appears on the TV screen.*]

### What Booko Said about the Multiverse

Our present time is only one time among others. We call it alone present not because it differs in kind from all the rest, but because it is the one we inhabit.

—DAVID LEWIS, *Counterfactuals*, p. 86

**BOOKO:** Ahem. At the center of the multiverse is a dimension called the Time Room, believed to be the quasi-corporeal dwelling place of the almighty Prismo. The Time Room is the single dimension that exists outside of time. The Time Room produces time waves that are experienced by other dimensions. Some dimensions have permanent links that allow travel to and fro. Others become linked temporarily by naturally-forming Worm Holes. And others can become linked artificially by magical portals, torn open by items of great power. Once the last gem is inserted into the *Enchiridion* it will have the power to create a portal

to any dimension in the multiverse. An activated portal creates a time dilation in which either end of the portal experiences a temporal synchronization allowing for the safe passage of particles [*Deep, elaborate breath*] through a non-local region of space-time.”<sup>6</sup>

**JAKE:** I don’t know what the Björk he’s talkin’ about.

**PRISMO:** This should help. [*Hands Jake some food.*]

**JAKE:** Bacon pancakes help everything! I love you, Prismo.

**PRISMO:** Oh yee!! [*Laughs and blushes.*] Well, it doesn’t really matter exactly what Booko said. Basically, all that other stuff means is this: there are a lot of ideas about the Multiverse. Just to look at a few, we can start with the Many-Worlds Interpretation. It basically says that each event that *can* happen *does* happen on different worlds. Each event is a branch point that splits into countless different outcomes. The Lich taking Billy’s body was a point that became different branches like different worlds. In one, branch Billy died; in another branch he didn’t.

**JAKE:** So, when you put those bacon pancakes in front of me, in another world, I *didn’t* eat them?

**PRISMO:** I know it’s hard to believe. Usually we think that all possibilities disappear when one action happens. Like, you ate the pancakes, so the possibility of *not* eating them is gone. But this theory says that anything that *could* have happened *did* happen and that all possible histories and futures are real. Scientists even gave mathematical proofs that this is true.<sup>7</sup>

**JAKE:** Whoa, algebraic . . . and delicious at the same time.

**ICE KING:** [*Appearing suddenly on the TV screen.*] So if everything possible exists, that means that me and all my princesses are together and I’ll never be lonely again! Everything happening in my imagination zone is really,

<sup>6</sup> Booko in “The Lich.”

<sup>7</sup> Everett, “The Theory of the Universal Wavefunction.”

really, real somewhere in the Multiverse . . . Me and Neptr basking in the sunset as father and son, even if I can't remember him . . . Me and my princesses doing nothing but smooching and eating a whole bunch until we get fat and die. I told you, Gunter!

**GUNTER:** Whac.

**JAKE:** Heeey! What the floe? How come Ice King can see us through the set?

**ICE KING:** [*To himself, on screen.*] Stanky old wizard eyes. Is this real?

**JAKE:** Dude, Cosmic Owl, is the Ice King right and somewhere he's with Princess Bubblegum, and all?

**COSMIC OWL:** Nah, he's just a sociopath.

**ICE KING:** Ad hominem, ad hominem!

**PRISMO:** [*Mutes the Ice King*] Even though some people believe that all possibilities are real in the Multiverse, that's just not the way it works. Here, let me remind you on screen. [*Pushes a button on the remote to replace Ice King on the TV screen with a previous image of himself in the hot tub.*]

**PRISMO:** [*Speaking from the TV screen.*] You see, Jake, there are rules to this stuff. If Ice King marries Princess Bubblegum, think of all the stuff that will be different after that, and all the stuff that would need to be different to lead to that marriage. So. Memories will be destroyed, babies will not be born. Potential worlds could be evaporated by-your-wish!<sup>8</sup> [*Jake looks a little distressed*]

**PRISMO:** [*not on the screen, but in the hot tub.*] You're not going to be sick again are you?

**COSMIC OWL:** Whoo?

**JAKE:** [*Takes a moment to gather himself and his thoughts and then looks relieved.*] Blubbpf . . . Naw Bro, I'm okay now, I just needed to digest some stuff! Hey! These bub-

---

<sup>8</sup> "Jake the Dog."



bles are as fragile as my old perception of reality!

**PRISMO:** Those can't be hot tub bubbles. The jets aren't even on . . .

**PRISMO AND COSMIC OWL:** Ewww! Uugh!

**JAKE:** Hee, hee, hee.

**PRISMO:** [*Wishing he could actually forget some things tries to leave the "bubble incident" behind them, tragically, as a supreme being, he cannot.*] . . . Others have the notion that in lots of situations things could have turned out differently. They call these different outcomes "possible worlds," and say that those worlds are just like ours, but with different things happening. They say these actually exist, but what we call "actual" depends on what world we're in. So, if someone asked them how many worlds there are and what is going on in those worlds, they can't say because their answers would be from their imaginations rather than from those worlds.

**JAKE:** Okay, okay, I see. Different timelines but maybe not everything. But what's going on *here*, man, in the Time Room?

**COSMIC OWL:** Alright, I shouldn't be telling a singular this, but yeah, all the timelines are connected here and the past, present, and future of all the timelines are connected. Shoko's missing arm, Farmworld Finn's missing arm, both replaced by mechanical arms, both being abandoned by their parents, just like Marceline was, all raised by others.

**JAKE:** That's crazy biz, man. I still don't know what the Time Room is, Glob dog it.

**COSMIC OWL:** Outside of time and space, beyond three-dimensional understanding.

**JAKE:** Dude, you sound like Finn that time he put on Glasses of Nerdicon, . . . uh, I think. What *did* Finn say that time he put on the Glasses of Nerdicon?

**PRISMO:** Let me tune that in. [*Pushes a button on the*

*remote.*]

## What Finn Said That Time He Put on the Glasses of Nerdicon

I do see a possibility of showing that the timeless reality would be, I do not say unmixedly good, but very good, better than anything which we can now experience or even imagine. I do see the possibility of showing that all that hides this goodness from us—insofar as it is hidden—is the illusion of time.

—JOHN MCTAGGART, *The Relation of Time and Eternity*

But if time, as immediate consciousness perceives it, were, like space, a homogeneous medium, science would be able to deal with it, as it can with space . . . all the relations which cannot be translated into simultaneity, i.e. into space, are scientifically unknowable.

—HENRI BERGSON, *Time and Free Will*

**FINN:** Ladies and Gentlemen . . . and *Princess* . . . [*Winks at Princess Bubblegum, who waves back*] I'm here to talk about multi-dimensional bubbles! But I'm not *just* going to talk about blowing bubbles! I'm going to blow . . . your . . . minds!

**PRINCESS BUBBLEGUM:** Hmm?

**FINN:** [*Revealing bubble creator*] This is a bubble-blower of my own design. With this, you can blow bubbles in different dimensions. [*He sets the device to two dimensions and blows a bubble with no depth.*] This two-dimensional bubble casts a one-dimensional shadow. [*He sets the device to three dimensions and blows a normal, everyday bubble.*] A three-dimensional bubble casts a two-dimensional shadow. [*He sets the device to four dimensions and blows a three-dimensional shadow that appears to be a projection of a four-dimensional tesseract.*] A fourth-dimensional bubble casts a three-dimensional shadow . . . IT IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION! [*The audience is amazed.*] Beyond space!! Beyond time!!

**PRINCESS BUBBLEGUM:** Finn, . . . that would mean you've created . . .

**FINN:** Yes, . . . A BLACK HOLE!!!<sup>9</sup> [*Prismo pushes the pause button on crazy, open-mouthed Finn laughing on screen.*]

**JAKE:** Awww! I think I'm getting wacked out poo brain.

**PRISMO:** Here, eat this egg—it's brain food.

**JAKE:** Ah, yeah!

**PRISMO:** Some philosophers have said that you can't understand time using space analogies or by thinking about it analytically at all, like all those A-theorists and B-theorists we just talked about. Instead, you have to just experience it. That means, time doesn't really exist in any way you can think of rationally. Just like Finn says in the rant.

**JAKE:** Right on, man. I *told* Finn not to use that science junk. Instead, he used it to say we can't understand things.

**PRISMO:** So here it is, the Time Room. Because of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, some scientists came up with the idea that time moves differently for people traveling at different speeds. They proved it by sending an atomic clock in a rocket around the Earth and then comparing it to a synchronized clock that had stayed on Earth. The clocks showed different times when the rocket came back. They also found that the speed of time was affected by gravity. The more gravity, the slower it goes. And you know what has the most gravity, don't you?

**JAKE:** An everything burrito?

**PRISMO:** A black hole.

**JAKE:** Huh. [*Speaking to Finn on the TV screen.*] I believe in you, buddy.

**PRISMO:** If you enter a black hole, time goes slower and slower until you get to the middle, where it stops completely.

**JAKE:** But you can't enter a black hole. I was almost the first one who died trying not to.

---

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from "The Real You."

**PRISMO:** Maybe. But maybe we're in a black hole right now.

**JAKE:** Huh?

**PRISMO:** According to a fancy-named idea called "black-hole cosmology," the universe is all the inside of a black hole, which is one of many black holes making the Multiverse. And do you know what's in the middle of our Multiverse?

**JAKE:** The Time Room!

**COSMIC OWL:** The only place beyond time.

**PRISMO:** The Theory of Relativity says that even though it seems to us that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, space is actually curved. We only *think* it is straight because we see things in three dimensions. That is to say . . . [*Pushes the rewind button than the play button on the remote.*]

**FINN:** [*On the TV screen.*] IT IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION!

**PRISMO:** [*Pushes the pause button again.*] Did I mention time behaves differently in different places because of gravity?

**JAKE:** I don't know.

**PRISMO:** According to this theory, space isn't really 3D; it's 4D. By adding a fourth dimension that's the same as the other three, scientists showed mathematically how curved space is. One of them said that the fourth dimension is time.<sup>10</sup> Later, others said the fourth dimension is one of space like the other three, and time was a way to measure change in matter.<sup>11</sup> Either way, although things are four dimensional, we see them as three dimensional, because . . . [*Pushes the rewind button than the play button on the remote.*]

---

<sup>10</sup> This was Hermann Minkowski (1864–1909), Einstein's teacher.

<sup>11</sup> The article by Sorli, Klinar, and Fiscaletti, listed in the References.

**FINN:** [*On the TV screen.*] A fourth-dimensional bubble casts a three-dimensional shadow . . . IT IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION!

**PRISMO:** I should also tell you that different places in the Multiverse are not as far apart as we might think they are. That's because space is not straight and long; it's curved and according to this theory, places in space that seem far away can be connected with worm holes, momentarily synchronizing time between those universes. So, it doesn't take that much time to travel a great distance. That's an illusion.

**JAKE:** My belly's fully. [*Yawning.*]

**PRISMO:** You see, my cube here at the center of the Multiverse acts in the same way as a worm hole. It's shaped like a Menger Sponge that connects the different dimensions through the different openings in the cube. It also repeats patterns over and over again. . . . [*Pushes the rewind button then the play button on the remote.*]

**FINN:** [*On the TV screen.*] Everything *small* is just a small version of something *big*!! I understand *everything*!!

**PRISMO:** [*Pushes the pause button again.*] That's how the Lich came into the Time Room from one dimension through that opening, and left to another dimension through that other opening.

**JAKE:** [*Asleep.*] Zzzz.

**PRISMO:** It's also how you get home again. Sleep tight, Jake.

**COSMIC OWL:** [*As Jake fades out of the Time Room.*] Woo.

[*Finn, back in Ooo, pulls Jake out of his pocket and rouses him.*]

**FINN:** You awake yet, little guy?

**JAKE:** Huh? Where am I?

**FINN:** You fell asleep in my pocket again.

**JAKE:** *Burrrrrp.*

**FINN:** Oh man, bacon pancakes.

[*So, there you have it: a sleepy dog, his best friend, and the true*

*nature of time. Wait, you mean you still don't understand how time works? That's okay; nobody does.]*

EDITOR'S NOTE: In an ironic twist of fate, not long after this conversation, Prismo died at the hands of the Lich. We will miss him . . .

*[Hey, guy, wait a minute, the time room is timeless. So it isn't like there is a "time" after my life in the Time Room. All you have to do is remember the past like it is the present, forget the present like it was the future, and reflect on the past like it will be the future. Easy. If you want to come back and hang out some time. Call me. I'll make pickles! —P]*