

CAN *CARPE DIEM* EXPLAIN WHY PRESENT IS NOT A MEDIAN TENSE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE?

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Abstract: This article aims at and concisely motivates, in a multidisciplinary, historical, physical, statistical and philological manner a useful re-conceptualization of the present in relation to the past and the future, the latter being, in the authors' opinion, at the origins of the deep meaning of the true aphorism *Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*. Only if seen as a whole can the arguments of *Carpe diem*'s re-significance, in a correct manner facing the knowledge and the future, shape a multidisciplinary opinion, adequate to the realities of modern scientific research...

Key words: *Carpe diem*, tense and time, present, past and future, timeline, foresight, uncertainty.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY *CARPE DIEM*?

The author of the famous Latin aphorism *Carpe diem* is Quintus Horatius Flaccus [1], and this simple truth can be proven by reading his poem, in Latin, in an ode dedicated to Leuconoe (Ode, I, XI). The aphorism certainly offered to the poet Horace himself an impressive notoriety of almost two millennia: "*Dum loquimur fugerit invida aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*" [2]. What still remains difficult to understand is how an aphorism is still preferred even now in its original Latin version, and neither in English "*Seize the day, trusting tomorrow as little as possible*" nor in Italian "*Cogli attimo, confidando nel tomorrow as little as possible*".... But in Latin, *postero futura est* as well as in English *tomorrow is the future*...

The *Carpe diem* aphorism, in the original, and especially when it is quoted completely or undistorted, as expressed by Horace, denotes a firm, almost ecclesiastical pessimism, to a greater extent than unlimited pragmatism, as re-signified by the forced taking out of the two words of the much broader context of the famous ode phrase. *Carpe diem* thus becomes either the desideratum explained in "*live the moment as if it were the last*," or lifestyle meant by "*live the day and rejoice today because you do not know how it will be like tomorrow*," finally expressing the desire to take advantage of today, of life, whenever an opportunity arises.

In an interdisciplinary logic, simultaneously philosophical, frequential and, last but not least, philological, or through the theory of communication, *Carpe diem* involves a major hypothesis according to which each person's

freedom ends where the other's freedom begins, the delimitation being argued in this historical, philosophical and philological article, and briefly evaluated in frequencies or rather in the light of the grammatical customs of the English language in particular. *Carpe diem* also imposes to an increasing extent a change, but under the impact of multiple limits exerted on ethics and moral integrity, emphasizing rather a desire to perpetuate the present world to the detriment of an increasingly uncertain future.

These few initial hypotheses are continuously and significantly distorted by the omission of the final part of the rigorous quotation of the Horatian verse: "*Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*" ... The major explanation is both psychological and behavioural, the individual naturally choosing an optimistic world, in which the future is clearly structured or probabilistically evaluated, with a mathematically justified hope for tomorrow, anticipating a life placed a little closer to the conceptualization given by Leibniz, in the sense that the present contains the past and is full of the future (today includes yesterday and they are together included in tomorrow). *Carpe diem* analyzed from a multidisciplinary perspective [3] can be re-signified for many, in a chain of inclusions of Bayesian quantified probabilities ... This article aims at and justifies physically, statistically and philologically the need to adaptively return to the origins and sense of the true meaning of the *Carpe diem* aphorism.

2. IS *CARPE DIEM* PROFOUNDLY CONNECTED TO THE FUTURE?

The historical argumentation of a modern *Carpe diem* is based on the variable with the same name, a completely different variable in relation to all the others, regardless of the nature of their content, be it qualitative or quantitative, investigated in a scientific research.

2.1 *Carpe diem* as historical variant

Such a timeline represents the very behavioural trend frozen in the present, being a concept that has exceeded the graphic stage and mainly exposes a certain and unique concretization, a variant that could be reached according to the history of an itinerary from the past to the present. Any type of timeline, retrospectively, remains a chronology of

definite variants, in definite intervals which, once reaching the present, offer an explosion of prospective variants or mirrors of a future becoming, partially certain in the short term, pronouncedly uncertain in the medium term or completely uncertain in the long run. This stringent aspect transforms the present into a historical point with the role of intersection, generating the cleavage of the variants of becoming from the past of total certainty into the future of partial or complete uncertainties.

In figure 1, we can see that from a historical point of view, *Carpe diem* is neither medially nor modally positioned, but it is concentrated in a circle or in a figurative target and subsequently asymmetrically diffusely “hung” in the net of the future, acquiring a significance dominated by the uncertainties of the same future, as far as the absence of probability scenarios of a specific timeline caught in the spider web of the open options of the past or forgotten in the synthesis of the historical becoming:

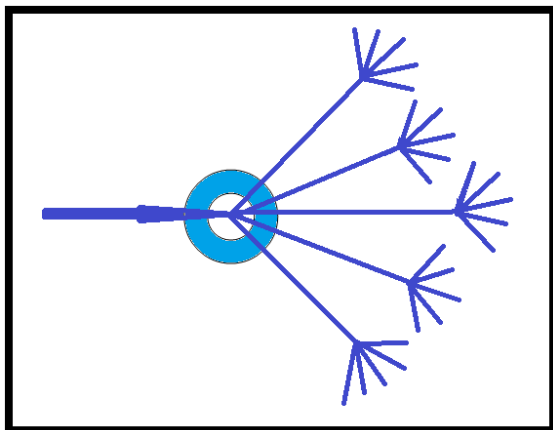


Fig. no. 1. *Carpe diem* as timeline future oriented

2.2. *Carpe diem* as time in Physics

Time or the illustrious Kronos (Cronus) in ancient history was considered a god or a divinity and thus, derived from this, classical time in physics lost any kind of ambiguity and it was completely separated from space. Timeline generated in Newtonian or classical physics was unique and absolute, generating the accord of all the observers with respect to its duration, but soon, in the theory of relativity absolute time disappeared. [4] Finally, each person as observer has his own time or his own measure for time or timeline, and absolute time of classical physics becomes subjective or relative. [5]

The multiverse begins in a homogenous or still ordered status of physical time, from past to the future orientation. Obviously and gradually time becomes heterogeneous or disordered, in all its senses. Physical time was personalized in a space of a universe in expansion, and analogy with the stationary of the *carpe diem* attitude or behaviour

from an exclusive time perspective underlined in particular as a unique time phenomenon, is only natural. Many questions can appear, partially synthesized in the table 1 [6]:

Ten major differences and similarities of temporality, derived from Physics context versus *Carpe diem* behaviour

Table no. 1

Temporal questions about the universe	Temporal questions about <i>Carpe diem</i> behaviour
<i>Physical time</i>	<i>Carpe diem (time)</i>
1. What do we know about the universe's timeline?	1. What do we know about <i>Carpe diem</i> as unique time?
2. How did that information appear?	2. How did we know about <i>Carpe diem</i> ?
3. From what direction of time does the universe come?	3. Where does the <i>Carpe diem</i> time come from?
4. Where is universe heading?	4. Where is <i>Carpe diem</i> heading?
5. Does the universe have a temporal start?	5. Does <i>Carpe diem</i> have a temporal start?
6. What happened ante the Big Bang phenomenon?	6. What happened before the <i>Carpe diem</i> moment?
7. What is the nature of physical time?	7. What is the nature of <i>Carpe diem</i> time?
8. Will physical time reach a final time (Big Crunch)?	8. Will the unique time of <i>carpe diem</i> reach an ending moment?
9. Does the universe behave as continuum?	9. Does <i>Carpe diem</i> offer a continuum behaviour?
10. Does human population have its own time?	10. Does human population need only <i>Carpe diem</i> ?

Source: Adapted from (SavoIU, Iorga-Siman, 2011, p.27).

In the physical process of a temporal dilation, an observer finds that another clock, although identical to his clock, beats more slowly than his own clock or that time has “slowed down” for the other clock, a truth valid only in the context of the observer's reference system. In Albert Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, time dilation manifests itself in two circumstances: i) in *special relativity*, the clocks that are moving in relation to an inertial reference system move more slowly (a phenomenon whose effect is accurately described by the Lorentz transformations), while the effect of the temporal dilation is reciprocal; ii) in *general relativity*, the clocks found in a gravitational field and at a lower potential work slower and the gravitational time dilation is not reciprocal.

In all *Carpe diem* type behavioural processes, the present time is unique, the past is non-existent and the future one is maximally dilated, which does not

confer any central value, but at most a derivable one.

2.3. *Carpe diem* in a statistical way of thinking

Using a Google search engine on the Internet, it is statistically found that the aphorism provides approximately 56,500,000 results in 0.79 seconds while Bing capitalizes only 4,670,000 results. At a first analysis, the excessive frequency variation of the apparently temporal concept betrays a double tendency: a) a cross-disciplinary process of expansion of the aphorism that has become a behavioural concept; b) ascending evolutionary abnormality and heterogeneity of contents granted or perceived. *Carpe diem* coexists with the Bayesian concept of statistical probability. The probability of the present in relation to the past is of the *a posteriori* type always equal to 100% as a process of becoming, while the probability of the variants referring to the future, calculated in relation to the same present naturally remains an *a priori* type most often having very low values (partially uncertain) or even unknown (completely uncertain) [7, 8, 9]. *Carpe diem* cannot position itself between the past and the future, starting from the simple explosion in the future of any tendency that transcends the past and reaches a present, which it tries to perpetuate.

2.4. *Carpe diem* in philology

From a philological point of view, can *Carpe diem* be a praise brought to the present time maximally condensed in a central, typical, essential concept, with a major median or modal role? The brief analysis of the subtleties of the “tense” and “time” relationship offers an opportunity to evaluate the philological balance in which *Carpe diem* is placed according to the communication in English, but also of the final derived behaviour.

Whenever we refer to English language either from an academic point of view or a more informal one, we come across the specific grammatical terminology of “tense” and “time.” Hence, there is a very obvious need to clearly differentiate between the two notions of “time” and “tense” we use in English grammar. “Time” is a general and universal concept that, on a horizontal axis, helps people refer to the “past,” the “present” and the “future.” There has been much insightful study into this area recently, more precisely starting with the beginning of the 20th century. “Time is a measure in which events can be ordered from the past through the present into the future, and also the measure of durations of events and the intervals between them” [10], whereas “tense refers to the absolute location of an event or action in time, either the present or the past. It is marked by an inflection of the verb” [10].

In grammar we have the linguistic concept, called “tense” which thus represents a grammatical

category since it refers to two verbal forms (past and present) and two verbal groups (perfect and future), their main function being that of expressing the time at which an action takes place.

Roughly speaking, in English grammar there is the following array of tenses: Present Tense and Present Perfect for present, Past Tense and Past Perfect for past and Future Tenses for future, but at a closer look we shall see that things are not exactly as simple as they might look since there is an intermingling of their uses and functions. What differentiates English from other languages is the category of “aspect” for each grammatical tense: simple and progressive/continuous. This is one of the reasons why “the use of the simple Present Tense in English is more restricted than in other languages. For one thing, actual duration, which may be implicit in the simple-tense form in other languages, is expressed by the progressive in English” [11]

The most common use of the simple Present Tense in English is to refer to general truths or statements, laws of nature, habits, live commentaries, reviews, summaries, proverbs, instructions, directions or facts that do not change and do not involve a particular time. Another common case refers to repeated actions, at certain intervals, most of the time clearly specified by frequency adjuncts or adverbs. The next important, but less known or frequent situation refers to the “historic”, “narrative” or “dramatic” present, “a present tense used in contexts where a past tense would normally be used, to create a more vivid effect to show informality, or to show a sense of ‘friendliness’ between speaker and hearer” (Richards & Schmidt, 240). An interesting case occurs when the Present Tense denotes an action that takes place at the moment of speaking or writing. The simple present is only possible and limited to those uses that do not require the progressive/continuous aspect, in other words the groups of verbs that cannot be used in the progressive/continuous aspect. For all the other verbs that do not fall into this category, English grammar uses the progressive/continuous aspect that refers to an action happening at the moment of speaking or writing or covering even a larger span of time, especially when the actions go together with a double comparative to show the change or the development of a situation. In this particular case there is also a clear connection to the future, involving not only the very moment of speaking, but also a period from the future covered by that specific action.

Otherwise the progressive/continuous aspect of the Present Tense can refer to an action happening in a given, limited period of time or as an exception to a rule. This aspect can also emphasise in English a repeated action that becomes annoying, or even amusing, for the speaker, when used with frequency adverbs specific to the simple Present Tense.

English, as opposed to other common languages, and especially to Romanian, has a very interesting and useful grammatical “tool” that connects the past to the present, namely denoting “an action or a state beginning at some time in the past and continuing up to the moment of speaking” [11] called the simple Present Perfect. The main focus in the use of this tense is on the relationship between the situations or states that started in the past and the fact that they are still true in the present; it can also emphasise a completed action at a time in the past which is not known, relevant or important or whose result in the present is more important than the time when they occurred; and for recently completed actions as well, most likely associated with specific time adverbs, and, of course, one of the key uses refers to the speaker’s or writer’s experiences that leave open the possibility of repetition in the present or in the future given that the subject can still perform them and the time span is not completed. The continuous aspect of the same tense underlines the progressive aspect of the actions or situations continuing up to the present and even the future.

Both aspects of the Present Tense can be used to refer to a future time, although this type of use is less common in English as compared to other languages. The simple Present Tense used with future reference is limited to the cases in which the future action is considered as part of an official, already established programme, mostly common with verbs denoting coming or leaving, but the time adverb or adjunct expresses future, not present, most of the time. The Present Tense is also used in subordinate clauses, mainly time or conditional ones, which depend on a main clause, implying or expressing future time. There are some exceptions in point, but the use of the simple Future Tense in such cases refers to a modal function of the future auxiliary “will,” most of the time for polite requests in formal English. In contrast, the progressive/continuous aspect of the Present Tense can be used with a future reference when connected to a personal arrangement or intention, usually for the near future time span.

Future Tense proper in English is expressed with “will,” and, more and more less frequently, “shall” (for first person singular and plural), followed by a short infinitive verbal form to refer to an action or state related to the future time span, predictions, future facts, offers, promises, requests, refusals, and so forth. The current use of English language has slowly replaced the use of “shall” for the first person, singular and plural, with “will.” Nevertheless, the reversed use of both “shall” (for second and third person) and “will” (for the first person) expresses volition, strong intention, assumption or determination, depending on a particular case. The use of the future is also marked by the use of specific adverbs. The use of the

progressive/continuous aspect of the Future Tense focuses on emphasising the development of an action at a specified time in the future, commonly associated with a specific time adverbial, and, of course, a verb that is not restricted to the use of the simple aspect only, for situations which will happen in the future as a normal course of events, and even for habits or repeated actions at a point in the future.

English language uses a rather extended range of other grammatical “tools” to refer to the future time-sphere, such as: “Be going to” to express the speaker’s intention both on short and long term and for predictions based on present evidence, “Be to” mostly for obligations and formal announcements, “Be due to” for formal arrangements, “Be on the point/verge of” for the (very) near future, “Be (just) about to” also for the (very) near future in informal English. Modal verbs can also be used to express future actions.

The association of “will,” followed by the auxiliary verb “have” and a past participle form what is known as the Future Perfect Simple whose main role in English language is to express a retrospective look on a completed situation, before a certain, given time in the future, or a continuing situation up to a certain time in the future, and even an assumption. The continuous aspect of the same tense emphasises the duration of the action or situation continuing up to a certain time in the future.

The Future in the past is used in English to express a situation in which we look back at what was the future once, by making the future verb form past, thus, for example, “will” becomes “would” or “is going to” becomes “was going to,” etc. – overall, all tenses go back one tense in what is also known as “sequence of tenses.” “There is a good deal of differences between the distribution of the past and perfect tenses in English and other languages, the perfect tense being often used in other languages where the past tense (or preterite) is required in English” [11] In this case the focus is on the time at which the action happened in the past. Thus, in English, the Past Tense can be used to refer to repeated actions in the past, to report a present tense in indirect speech, in subordinated clauses – what is also known as subjunctive – to express something desirable, an opposition to reality, conditions not likely to be fulfilled, etc. – situations in which only the verbal form is related to the past, the meaning expresses the present. Generally speaking, the simple Past Tense expresses single completed actions at a specific time in the past or repeated habitual actions, general truths about the past or the main events in a story and it can also be used to emphasise contrast in the past. The progressive/continuous aspect of the Past Tense highlights the progress of a specific action at a particular moment in the past, most of the time

mirroring the situations in the Present Tense, but shifted in the past. Other ways of commonly expressing past habits in English is by using “would” – particularly for the distant past – and “used to” both for past habits and states, also particularly for the distant past.

English, as many other languages in this case, uses another tense for the more distant past, the Past Perfect Tense (formed with the auxiliary *had* and a perfect participle) to refer to situations and states happened and completed before the past or before a moment in the past or a series of actions continuing up to a moment in the past. It is also used in the sequence of tenses (as a Past Tense shifted back), in conditional clauses (for hypothetical situations, for example), in indirect speech, and also after certain verbs to express hope or intention that did not become true. The progressive/continuous aspect of this tense emphasises actions or situations continuing up to a moment in the past (or just before a moment in the past) [12,13].

Finally, *Carpe diem* as an expression of an isolation in the present, does not dominate the time of speech according to the specially chosen theoretical examples in one of the most frequently invoked and sensitive languages, but also in one of the most known and accessed modern languages. Neither the philology nor the communication or the behaviour derived from all these places in a median position the time specific to *Carpe diem*, but densifies and accentuates excessively the past, rarefying the future...

3. CONCLUSIONS

A multidisciplinary investigation of the capitalization of *Carpe diem* as a temporal, behavioural, historical and statistical solution identifies some similar attitudes, reflecting common asymmetries. *Carpe diem* has been falsely identified as a substitute for the common, typically central or essential approach of the human individual, the median value attributed in a population-related manner, not being justified even by the original aphorism. In the end, Horace deplores the almost probabilistic minimization of the variations of the future together with the informational expansion, as a true and wise modern or expert in foresight, connoisseur of the wide range of possible evolutionary variants. From this point of view, accepting a middle position of a *Carpe diem* is equivalent to considering that two millennia of history remain imbued with ignorance and contempt for knowledge and implicitly for the future... In reality, *Carpe diem* is a call to

multidisciplinary investigation and knowledge and implicitly scientific (historical, physical, statistical, but especially probabilistic, philological and prominently grammatical, etc.). “*Even as we speak, time speeds swiftly away,*” tells us another one of Horace’s dictums, to relativize the excessive synthesis of the same: “*Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*” or *Carpe diem*, trusting as little as possible in tomorrow can mean minimizing the future evaluation but not its impact also...

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