
TOTIS (J. JOSEPH KAZDEN)

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A slim, unassuming book, J Joseph Kazden's *TotIs* is an unusual blend of Eastern mysticism, quantum mechanics, Socratic dialogues, and a healthy dose of perceptual denial. With a background in mathematics, chemistry, and psychology, Kazden has devoted his life to a pursuit of the nature of perception and reality. His current work as an artist lends itself to the creation of his book, which he describes as the culmination of his journey. Claimed on his website to be the product of a personal epiphany, *TotIs* is a nosedive into topics most would not even broach, all to see if individuals can make sense of the immense structure the concept of time has placed on their understanding of reality. Kazden, through the perspective of a modern Socrates dialoguing with modern day scientists and philosophers, is attempting to convince his audience that reality as they know it is an illusion.

But he is not taking the red pill or unplugging from some sort of simulation. One's reality is very real, in the understanding that it is all he can know. Limited by faulty senses—Kazden uses the illustrations of cataracts—and the delayed biomechanical process of sensory organs relaying to the brain, the actual reality an individual perceives through the senses is not the reality of the *now* moment. Rather, it is an understanding of what has just occurred. This is complicated by the fact that mankind is a sensory dependent being. One comes to know the world around him by way of his senses. It is almost impossible to think of an experience that does not impact the senses in some fashion. Kazden, however, says people create an experience of the world they live in, rather than an accurate portrayal of how things really are.

Taking things a step further, Kazden demonstrates how even one's experience of time is impacted by this "false" reality. The key to understanding time is remembering the faulty reality as delayed by one's biomechanical sensory organs. By the time someone recognizes a now moment, it has already past. Mankind is constantly moving through time which assumes that future points in time already exist. Given one's role as an observer of time, he is limited again by his sensory experience. Every understanding of human experience is dependent upon man being the observer. As such, reality is dependent upon man observing it. For Kazden, reality is created by human experience. Actual reality, or *TotIs* exists, but it is not the one that individuals experience. He likens it to Schrodinger's cat—reality both is and is not. Time is a chemical creation of the mind, a way to understand what humanity is observing, but in the *TotIs* reality, time is null.

If one takes Kazden's point so far, there are troubling implications for the Christian. If Scripture is the authority for truth—not the sensory observances of man—then believers can stand on the creation of time in this universe as solid and purposeful in God's design. Day and night, seasons and moon cycles, all these are placed by God in this world purposefully. Even such things as wrinkles, growth spurts, and death are chronicles of time in the universe. Kazden, however, places the universe outside of time. For the atemporalist, this is a near equating of the universe to God. Existing outside of time, unchanging, omnipotent, omnipresent. What is particularly startling about Kazden's view of this 'null time' is that this new found understanding is to have no impact on how people live their lives. As one character says, "But then aren't we just living a lie, if knowing more exists, yet we simply live with these illusions?" Kazden's Socrates claims it changes nothing in regards to how one lives or who he is. Like a perpetual carrot dangling before him, he is to be content in not being able to obtain it. Kazden revels in the knowledge that this unobtainable universe is right there and he cannot reach it. He calls it paradise.

For the believer, this is a horrific view of paradise. If one takes Kazden's parallels to their logical ends, this implies a Creator who has placed a timeless, endless expanse of a true and perfect reality, invites one to see it, and then keeps it just out of reach. Kazden's paradise sounds much more like Lazarus' description of hell—begging Abraham for just one drop. Yet the most disturbing implication creeps in at the last moment. If the *TotIs* universe

exists in null time, there are no future or past events, no causality, no purpose, no meaning. Without causality, there is no purpose to life and creation, no meaning to the events that occur in our lives, and ultimately no consequences for these experiences.

Kazden is looking for a solution to the ravages of time, something to pacify his anxieties of existence. For him, crafting an argument for reality as illusion assuages his fears. Fate, as he understands it, requires time to flow, which in the *TotIs* universe is null. There is no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow, and thus there is no fate to come. “We are each beyond timeless or eternal.” Kazden may call it fate, but no fate means no purposeful will; no will, no predetermined plan. Without a purposeful will, there is no meaning, no end goal for existence. Thus, there is no need for a personal God.