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## Adversus Mathematicos

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# Adversus Mathematicos

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It stands to reason once you've got the gist  
And figured why, as life goes on, its rate  
Of passage speeds up and it seems you missed  
Some annual fixture just because the date

Came round so quickly that the old check-list  
Of jobs to do or days to celebrate  
Was finally unable to assist  
Your effort to prevent things running late.

The answer's one our number-theorist  
Has got off pat: the ratios dictate  
That an inverse proportion must exist  
Between the sum of years you've had to wait

From birth till now and the contractile tryst  
Of time with life that sets life's quickening gait  
From now on. Hence the chronotropic twist  
That thwarts all vain attempts to correlate

Your own time-consciousness with what they say,  
Those back-to-Newton clock-watch types who think  
Its flow's so smooth and equable that they  
Can accurately gauge from link to link

Its chronometric rate. A simpler way  
Of putting it's the fact that time-scales shrink  
(It seems) in keeping with the day-to-day  
Expanding ratios now required to sync

Time further-back with time not so passé  
Or time right now. This feels too like the brink  
Of some catastrophe you'd kept at bay,  
If not by ministry of drugs or drink,

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Then by some trick of thought that might defray  
The cost by making out that there's a chink  
In that proportion-scheme so things obey  
Sir Isaac's second law and, in a blink,

Accelerate so fast you'll never know  
What happened at the close. So they compute  
Quite logically, those speed-ups in the flow  
Of human time whose rate turns out to suit

The number-crunchers who purport to show  
How everything's numerical at root,  
Or how those mid-to-late-life crises go  
Directly into mathemes that commute

Life-sentences to short-term. These bestow  
The Pythagorean leisure to impute  
All such small upsets to the quid pro quo  
Of time and number that the more astute

Or numerate among us reckon no  
Great cause for mental anguish so acute  
Since merely products of a ratio  
Whose shortening odds no life-hope could refute.

Yet it's by just their method to explain  
That hope's eclipse (they say) that we may find  
More adequate resources to maintain  
Some equipoise once sensibly resigned

To overtaking in an outside lane  
Marked 'Pile-Up Just Ahead', while way behind  
There fades from view our last hope to regain  
That old co-temporality of mind

And world inhabiting the one domain  
Of a life-time that let them both unwind  
At their accustomed pace. If we refrain  
From all vain efforts later on to bind

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The time-scales so they synchronize again,  
Or do the sums until we're disinclined  
To find a cause of existential pain  
In functions mathematically defined,

Then (they propose) we'll emulate the best  
Of Pascal's thinking. These are not the bits  
About how small he felt or how depressed  
By sheer immensities or infinites,

But more the thought-experiments that test  
Just how those intuitions fare when it's  
A matter for math-specialists possessed  
Of some technique that more exactly fits

Our need to steer well clear of such distressed  
Mind-zones and so make sure the thing submits  
To problem-solving powers beyond what messed  
With Pascal's *autre soi*. This then permits

(They'd have us think) the well-schooled mind to wrest  
Some glimpse of truth and order from the pits  
Of inchoate emotion that expressed  
No more than our desire to call it quits

With time's fast-forward. Granted, they've a fair  
Entitlement, those thinkers, to proclaim  
By dint of proof demonstrative that their  
Procedure's what most best justifies the name

Of truth and best equips us to prepare  
For moves in the timescale-adjustment game  
Whose mounting odds would otherwise so scare  
Our mortal selves that we'd be prone to blame

The very powers of thought that did their share  
To quiet our fears for putting us to shame  
By showing how we lacked the strength to bear  
Such undeluding truths. Yet, if we came

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Up against some *mémoire involontaire*,  
Perhaps some near-death flashback that could frame  
And shrink our lifetime to an instant where  
The ratios went sky-high, then all the same,

Despite our having taken full on board  
All that the *mathematikoi* had taught  
Our time-sick souls, their cure might not afford  
Us mental strength enough to face the sort

Of panic-state that used to have us floored  
And does right now. Then we perceive how short  
Such mind-games fall of finding some accord  
Between that old, inconsolable thought

Of *temps* too soon *perdu* and tricks that scored  
Top points for puzzle-solving though they brought  
No sense of *kairos* gratefully restored  
Or gift to heal the damage *kronos* wrought

When clock-time calibrated. This ignored  
Its finely gauged potential to distort  
Whatever our life-histories have shored  
Against time's shrewd contrivances to thwart

The time-shaped craving that time should reward  
Us tempus-fugitives with times less fraught  
Since amply sutured by the triple cord  
Of body, mind and world that time holds taut.