# [***New Year's Time***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47K6-W470-01KN-202Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Somehow it's always a surprise when the old calendar comes to an end and it's time to hang up a new one. It hardly seems possible that all those days, so empty and abundant just a year ago, have now been used up. To an electronic calendar -- the kind you find on computers and P.D.A.'s and ***cellphones*** -- all years are equal, just one screen among many, businesslike, circumspect, immaculate. When the electronic year quietly rolls over, there's no sense of transition, nothing like the act of taking down a kitchen calendar stained with the year's events, the months dog-eared and paper-clipped, the days pasted over with stick-on reminders for dental appointments and the dogs' heartworm pills. A calendar like that is full of emendations and erasures and crossings-out, a record of changes of plan and purpose. If only the past were as easily emended.

But if there's any fixing to be done, it will have to be done in the future. That never seems quite as apparent as it does on New Year's Day. Of all the holidays on the calendar, this is, in some sense, the most secular one, a holiday open to whatever we choose to make of it. Today acknowledges no presidents or heroes or peoples or movements or births or deaths or even retail incentives. It nods merely to the fact of us and the turning of the year. Today may mean a cornucopia of college football or a chance to recover from New Year's Eve. But looking at a new calendar makes it clear, as nothing else can, that the year is a vessel full of only so many days and that one's life is a vessel full of only so many years. Seen that way, a new calendar naturally looks like a moral proposition.

It occurs to nearly everyone, sooner or later, to wonder why we measure out our lives in years. The good answers are astronomical and cultural, but they're really not good enough, as answers go. The fact is that in the strange business of being human, nearly the strangest thing of all is the consciousness of time. How can a year seem so short and so long all at once, like the one that ended last night?

Looking ahead, it's possible to say that the coming year, 2003, will contain 365 days. It's impossible to say, from here, just how long they'll take. It's impossible, really, even to say how it got to be 2003.

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