

BOOK REVIEW

Marilyn Stendera and Emily Hughes's  
*Heidegger's Alternative History of Time*

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Marilyn Stendera and Emily Hughes. *Heidegger's Alternative History of Time*. New York: Routledge, 2024. 231 pages.

This book aims to reassess Heidegger's philosophy of time in light of leading views in the scholarship that Heidegger's treatment of time is fragmentary and incomplete, if not generally incoherent. Stendera and Hughes (hereafter referred to as "the authors") propose that, although the fragmentary nature of Heidegger's philosophy of temporality cannot be overcome, it is nonetheless possible to stitch together a coherent picture of this philosophy that avoids the incompleteness charge (1, 4). The authors' primary approach in tackling this challenging subject is to identify and dissect the encounters between Heidegger and the historically decisive philosophers that figure into his work. Analyzing these various encounters (with Aristotle, Kant, Bergson, and numerous others) provides a behind-the-scenes look at what motivates Heidegger's philosophy of time, what his work adds to the Western canon on this topic, and unexplored routes Heidegger either fails to address or else does not adequately develop. The book covers seven core figures in their own dedicated chapters, in addition to several minor figures that are taken up in three "Preamble" chapters.

The book opens with a survey of current scholarly positions on Heidegger's accounts of time and temporality, followed by an overview of Heidegger's core framework. A key distinction that the authors

draw on repeatedly in the subsequent body chapters of the book is the “four-dimensionality” of Heidegger’s overall account of time. By this term, the authors mean, on one hand, the threefold ecstatic structure of temporality that Heidegger describes in Division II of *Being and Time*. On the other hand, by the “fourth dimension” the authors mean the later Heidegger’s conception of the “Time of Being,” or “horizontal Temporality,” whereby temporality is read in terms of *Es gibt*, “It gives” or “There is” time, in the guise of appropriation or *aletheia*.

The first Preamble, devoted to Heidegger’s engagement with the Presocratics and related ancients, marks out a vision of time read as a primordial givenness from without, not reducible to subjectivity or objectivity (25). The treatment here is brief, but the themes are echoed in subsequent chapters. The book’s first major chapter studies Aristotle’s account of time in the *Physics*. A number of themes at work in this chapter foreground the remainder of the book. The authors observe that while Aristotle represents for Heidegger the basic starting- and end-point for all philosophical grappling with time in the history of Western thought (52–53), Heidegger also finds Aristotle’s philosophy of time to be narrow in a manner that ignores the time of lived experience. The authors highlight a number of instances in which Heidegger observes in Aristotle the seeds of a more originary temporality, but which Aristotle himself does not develop as he focuses on treating time from the side of nature. The main Heidegger text cited here is *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (GA 24). As is well-known, Aristotle defines time in *Physics* IV.11 as “a number belonging to change with respect to the before and after” (49). The basic element of time for Aristotle is the “now,” the instant that divides before from after and which is constantly changing, like a point moving on a never-ending line. While Heidegger gives credence to Aristotle’s account of time as definitive for describing the everyday experience of it, particularly, the derivation of time from the present (54), Heidegger also finds that this account neglects the lived, ecstatic temporality in which the now contains within itself both past and future. Because Aristotle’s account of time limits its

basic unit to the now (reading time solely in terms of present things), the subjectivity of temporal experience is not thematized (49).

Aristotle's emphasis on time as countable likewise expresses for Heidegger an orientation geared toward beings conceived as abstracted, quantifiable presence (56). However, Heidegger also observes that viewing time as inherently countable again requires the presence of a subject. This is not to say that time is a subjective phenomenon, but it suggests a notion of time as an ecstasis of the soul (57). Finally, a last decisive element the authors cite in Heidegger's encounter with Aristotle is Heidegger's recasting of the "before" and "after" in Aristotle's definition of time with "earlier" and "later," considering these in terms of horizontal structures informing the number of changes with respect to before and after. This move has the phenomenological benefit of recontextualizing the basic element of the "now" within a larger ecstatic "stretch." In other words, the "now" is no longer simply the basic unit of time, but referred out to the expansive, lived context in which it occurs (58). This move also affords Heidegger the benefit of transcending the view in which the temporal is grounded solely in change and magnitude (58), rendering its origins non-temporal. The authors round out this discussion with a look at how scholars have criticized Heidegger's recasting of Aristotle on time. Most notably, according to John Protevi, Heidegger's replacement of before and after with earlier and later risks removing the phenomenon of space from time. According to this view, Heidegger's move to redefine Aristotelian time in terms of ecstatic temporality ignores that time is essentially referred to space, as opposed simply to an interior ecstatic state of *Dasein* (59). The authors conclude from this and other sources of tension in Heidegger's account of Aristotle that Heidegger understands the contradictions overall, and that there is a dynamism of revealing and concealing at work in the phenomena in question. In other words, the contradictions are not resolvable, but fundamental to the phenomenon of time and to the difficulty in describing it in univocal terms (59–60).

The next chapter takes up the philosophy of time in Plotinus, a figure who, the authors admit, has only a scant presence in Heidegger's

work. Although the selection of Plotinus for this application is hermeneutically fraught, the approach is best understood as outlining the philosophical kinship between Plotinus and Heidegger on the issue of time. The authors do not make a case that Plotinus is significantly influential upon Heidegger in any meaningful way. The majority of this chapter dissects Plotinus's account of time particularly as this concept is derivative from Soul, and distinct from eternity. As the authors describe, time for Plotinus is the movement of Soul (68). Time is not the measure of motion, but rather inherent to Soul insofar as Soul represents the motion of the cosmos. While eternity refers to the a-temporal aspects of the One and the Intellect, time comprises a derivative, lesser emanation of being. The relevance the authors find in these themes vis-à-vis Heidegger's philosophy include the following. Plotinus clearly recognizes that prior philosophical accounts overlook the question of what time itself is when they refer time to phenomena such as motion. Yet, when Plotinus assigns eternity to an a-temporal dimension of being, he overlooks the neglected question of why being connects to time at all (74–75). On a more positive note, the authors point out, in characterizing time as derivative from yet concomitant with Soul, Plotinus effectively previews Heidegger's later account of temporality conceived as an ecstasis of Dasein. Indeed, the authors note that Plotinus is the first philosopher to say that time “temporalizes” itself – he is the first to render the word *chronos* into a verb (75). Finally, the authors persuasively suggest that the vision of finitude emerging out of Plotinus's vision of time aligns with Heidegger's characterization of fallenness. Because Plotinus describes time as essentially belonging to all things, set over against the concept of eternity, this drives the fact that all things, including Soul, exist in a state of decay and decomposition (73–77). A (minor) point of criticism I note here is that this chapter's inclusion seems questionable, given that Heidegger's own philosophy of time is not strongly indebted to Plotinus. From a principle of charity, it seems as if the authors are most motivated to sketch a moment in the history of the philosophy of time that aligns with themes Heidegger takes up in his own work.

The next chapters cover Augustine through Kant, highlighting moments in which Heidegger thematizes the contrast of time read as a subjective experience versus an objective phenomenon. Augustine's philosophy of time in *Confessions* XI is well-known for its characterization of time as a subjective experience, originating in the soul's ecstatic, three-fold present. The authors note that in the main, Heidegger (in *Being and Time*; *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*; and *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*) criticizes Augustine on the grounds that he both privileges the "now" as the fundamental temporal mode and nonetheless reads time in terms of subjective experience (84). Augustine ends up repeating the Aristotelian model without adding anything new (86). Whereas, as Heidegger writes in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, to describe time phenomenologically requires transcending the subjective/objective paradigm (86). However, the authors also note that other, less-read texts not yet translated into English suggest that Heidegger finds some favorable elements in Augustine as well. These are the 1930–31 Freiburg seminar entitled "Augustine, *Confessions* XI (*De tempore*)" (GA 83) and the 1930 lecture given at Beuron monastery, entitled "Saint Augustine's Meditation on Time" (GA 80). As the authors summarize, in these texts Heidegger reads Augustine's account of the ecstatic nature of time as an "out-stretchedness" of the human being, a holding of oneself. On this ground, Augustine's account of time becomes a precursor to Heidegger's description of the temporality of Dasein (86–87). Heidegger reads Augustine here to acknowledge that time is the essence of human existence (87). Another significant element the authors observe in these same writings is that Heidegger finds his own concept of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) to have an analogue in Augustine's notion of affect (*affectio*), by virtue of Augustine's observation that affect can impact one's disclosure of time (87). Insofar as (for Heidegger) certain fundamental attunements can reveal the entirety of temporality, Heidegger likewise suggests that Augustine's appreciation of this role of affect reveals an appreciation on Augustine's part that time is both constitutive of human existence and an event or

happening that unconceals itself, thus previewing Heidegger's notion of the Time of Being (87–88).

Following the chapter on Augustine, the second Preamble treats Heidegger's encounters with Descartes, Newton, and Leibniz. The coverage of each figure is quite brief, more or less presenting sound bites that are not essential for the book's argumentative course. Most noteworthy here is the authors' analysis of the relevance of Descartes for Heidegger. The authors focus on Descartes's way of characterizing time as, at once, the duration of interior experience that can be applied to things external to oneself, whereby time straddles mind-body dualism. This overview nicely reinforces the general position at work in the book, that, from a Heideggerian perspective, the history of the philosophy of time coheres around attempts at reconciling time's subjectivity with time conceived as an objective property of things (and, that the pervasiveness of this paradigm has decisive philosophical implications) (100–101). In Descartes's case, the casting of time within mind-body dualism ends up removing the temporality of being-in-the-world from human existence (101–102). This brief analysis of Descartes leads nicely into the much longer engagement with Heidegger's encounter with Kant.

Taking up Heidegger's encounter with Kant, the authors highlight that Kant encapsulates all of the key tensions regarding the philosophy of time covered in the preceding chapters (110). In addition, the authors remark that given Kant's claim in the first *Critique* that time is both empirically real and transcendently ideal, this claim offers an historical inflection point (for Heidegger) by virtue of identifying time as both structuring experience and shaping cognition (110). The authors do an impressive job of summarizing both Kant, and Heidegger on Kant, in a short space. Although, given that his writings on Kant are where Heidegger most thoroughly engages another philosopher in advancing own his account of temporality, more space devoted to this very challenging and provocative material would be welcome. The account the authors provide here is confined primarily to the essential points. The authors highlight Heidegger's focus on imagination in Kant, which Heidegger interprets as

an unspoken dimension of temporality Kant either fails to comprehend or else shrinks away from pursuing. Heidegger for his part holds that implicit in Kant is temporality read as originating from Dasein's future-directed faculty of imagination, and affecting Dasein from without, by virtue of providing the horizon within which Dasein's experience of world moves (115–16). Vis-à-vis the historically influential arguments regarding time as subjective or objective, Heidegger's insight on Kant is that time is both of these: "Heidegger claims that Kant invites us to reconceptualize what each of these terms might mean: in order to adequately understand what it is for time to be 'objective,' we need to stop equating this with the status of present-at-hand or extant objects" (116). And similarly, "the subjectivity that is actually at issue here, the self that is wrapped up in time, must instead be characterized in terms of finitude and time's *self-affection*" (116). Somewhat distracting in this chapter is the authors' devotion of a good bit of space to positions in the scholarship regarding how faithful Heidegger's reading of Kant is, viz., whether Heidegger gets Kant right, and if not, what the impact is. The authors initially say they are not going to go down this road (115), before raising the topic again later, as if it is obligatory (120). While I grant that Heidegger's reading of Kant is inventive and provocative, all one really needs to say for this book's purview is that Heidegger purports to discover in Kant something that Kant himself missed, and that Heidegger runs with this discovery in his own account of temporality. Precisely what takeaway the authors want the reader to draw remains unclear. It is quite informative already to restrict the focus to how this text motivates Heidegger's conception of the Time of Being.

Chapter 5, on Hegel, does not leverage a major position regarding Hegel's influence upon Heidegger. But the authors do formulate a key point about the former's importance for the latter. The authors summarize Heidegger's criticism of how Hegel understands time, with some remarks at the chapter's end regarding the alignment between the two figures on the notion of negation. Heidegger's principal criticism hinges on Hegel's claim that when Spirit becomes objective, time becomes sublated into the Absolute concept. Whereas prior to subjective

Spirit becoming objective, time expresses the moments of negation by which the subject unifies itself with the world. Once subjective Spirit has become objective Spirit, this negation no longer takes place. This means that, with history now at an end, time becomes absorbed into the Absolute, the world now becomes an eternal present (133–34). The authors highlight that, while for Hegel negation has a productive function in subordinating time to being, Heidegger importantly reads the role of negation in reverse: being is subordinate to time. Citing GA 68, the authors write that for Heidegger, “at the crossroads of finitude and infinity, the strife of the abyssal nothing must be endured, precisely because it constitutes the negativity – the nothing, absence, non-presence, withdrawal, difference, deferral, or *trace* – *through which* the question of the Time of Being might be disclosively unconcealed” (135). In sum, the authors suggest that Heidegger’s extensive studies of Hegel inform a dimension of negativity Heidegger employs in his own work to adduce the hidden origin of the Time of Being.

The chapter devoted to Hegel is followed by the third Preamble. Here the authors devote some informative though brief space to the concept of time as treated by Albert Einstein, William James, Franz Brentano, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche, highlighting the relevance of these figures to Heidegger. Of Heidegger’s sparse engagements with Einstein, the authors observe that his main position emphasizes that Einstein’s standpoint never transcends physics. Einstein’s purported recasting of the concept of time through relativity only speaks to the measurement of time, rather than time itself considered from a metaphysical standpoint (148–49). With the analysis of James and Brentano, a richer picture of the seeds for Heidegger’s own account of temporality comes into focus. The authors highlight that although Heidegger never directly engages with these two figures on the issue of time, both nonetheless lay critical groundwork for thinking about time in ecstatic terms and transcending the empty abstraction of the Aristotelian notion of time as a series of instants. Both James and Brentano advance accounts of time suggesting that the human experience of the present is always backward-stretching

and forward-looking, such that the present is never merely the present (149–52). This analysis is helpful given that James and Brentano are not often cited alongside Heidegger on the topic of time. Of most note in the sections that remain on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is Heidegger’s critique of the former; the authors question whether Heidegger’s critique of Kierkegaard passes muster. Leveraging some positions in the scholarship, the authors highlight that, while Kierkegaard’s conception of the “moment” and its role in achieving authentic temporality align strongly with Heidegger’s own account of these in *Being and Time*, Heidegger (perhaps unduly) dismisses Kierkegaard on the ground that the latter’s account never transcends the existentiell-ontic aspect of subjectivity, and thus, that it remains at the level of the ordinary view of time (154). Heidegger is unwilling to grant that Kierkegaard uncovers horizontal temporality as such. While I do not find it controversial here to claim that Heidegger’s critique of Kierkegaard is dismissive, as with the treatment of Heidegger’s encounter with Kant, the authors do not give a persuasive reason here for why the correctness or incorrectness of Heidegger’s position matters in the scope of the book.

The last two main chapters are devoted to Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl, respectively. The authors note that with these figures, the true precursors to Heidegger’s account of temporality become visible, particularly as both Bergson and Husserl advance the views according to which time is fundamentally constitutive of experience (174, 181). These two chapters cover much more ground than I can summarize here. Perhaps most informative across both analyses is the authors’ treatment of where Bergson and Husserl come up short relative to Heidegger’s position. As the authors note in the case of Bergson, it is not perfectly clear why Heidegger seeks to distance himself from Bergson, when Bergson’s notion of duration (*durée*) comes so close to the position Heidegger develops in *Being and Time*. And similarly, given the overlaps of Heidegger’s ecstatic conception of temporality and Husserl’s groundbreaking work on inner time-consciousness, one can raise the question of whether Heidegger’s work accomplishes anything new. The authors address these questions by noting that Bergson and Husserl both seem to err, perhaps unwittingly,

on emphasizing the present in their accounts of time. This means that they fail to comprehend the critical dimension of temporality's temporalizing from the futural mode (176, 185–86). Both Bergson and Husserl remain trapped in reading time from the perspective of subjectivity (174, 186), such that they overlook the Time of Being and the latter's role in transcendence (176, 187–88).

In the final chapter, the authors address Heidegger's threefold, ecstatic account of temporality alongside his post-*Being and Time* positions regarding the Time of Being. As noted above, together these four pieces constitute what the authors term Heidegger's "four-dimensional" account of time. Rather than devoting significant space here to the origin and motivations of Heidegger's own philosophy of time, the authors primarily address the issue of unity across Heidegger's early-career and later accounts, in order to justify viewing Heidegger's philosophy of time overall as both complete and fragmented ("we argue that Heidegger's conception of time can and should be read as a fractured whole" (193); and similarly, "we argue that a coherent and compelling existential-ontological interpretation of originary time can be found in Heidegger's work" (195)). While the authors do not aim to overturn the reading of Blattner and others, according to which the *Being and Time* project fails to demonstrate how ordinary time derives from originary temporality (194), the authors' interest is to make a stronger case for how originary temporality and the Time of Being are complementary, in such a way that together they make a complete picture. The authors argue that this completeness is borne out in Heidegger's various attempts in the later works to describe the Time of Being on the basis of unconcealment and an "abyssal confrontation with nothingness" (195). Citing Heidegger's referring of the reader to *An Introduction to Metaphysics* in the preface to the seventh edition of *Being and Time*, the authors advocate reading the *Introduction's* emphasis on the ontological difference; its theme of a confrontation with nothing, where being is described as the groundless ground; and its equation of *logos* as both gathering and gatheredness, all as expressive of the interplay of originary temporality and the Time of Being. In other words, the authors maintain that the *Introduction to*

*Metaphysics* provides a connecting link unifying Heidegger's earlier and later views. Several brief sections follow in which the authors adduce this position by citing various texts in the later Heidegger. The authors suggest that in these later treatments, where the Time of Being comes into focus, Heidegger's approach is formally indicative rather than seated in arguments: "We suggest that each repetition of Heidegger's interpretation of time can be interpreted as a disintegrated yet enduring attempt to unconceal rather than explain originary time" (195). Finally, the last sections of this chapter return to the accounts of the historical chapters, with the goal of highlighting how the key historical moments exemplified in Aristotle, Augustine, *et al.* each bear traces of Heidegger's vision of the alignment of originary temporality with the Time of Being. In other words, the authors hold that (as analyzed in the historical chapters) Heidegger's encounters with seminal philosophers of time are of a piece with Heidegger's own complete, yet fragmented philosophy of time. It is here that the appropriateness of the book's title, *Heidegger's Alternative History of Time*, becomes visible. Heidegger's alternative history of time is ontological rather than chronological.

This book, while rather short at just over 200 pages, is both very sprawling and very focused. A text twice as long would certainly be justifiable; however, the authors do an excellent job of covering much historical territory while keeping it manageable. The thematic argument regarding time's manifestation in the history of philosophy (and in Heidegger's version of this history) in alternate guises of objectivity and subjectivity is persuasive. The core argument regarding the completeness of Heidegger's philosophy of time is also persuasive, if a bit formal and tidy. Overall, the scope of the work is inventive and provocative, and the authors' findings will be important for Heidegger scholars to study.

The main points of criticism I offer regard the execution of the book's total project rather than specific arguments the book advances. First, given that the historical narrative conveyed across the book's main chapters does not correspond to the genesis of Heidegger's own philosophy of time, the presentation risks entailing a false chronology. Only with the concluding chapter does it become clear that the authors intend for

the historical moments analyzed in the main chapters to represent simply genetic components of Heidegger's philosophy of time rather than a chronology. It might have been more effective for the main chapters to proceed thematically rather than upon a chronology of historical moments. The approach adopted by the authors potentially obscures the book's broader claims that Heidegger's philosophy of time is both fragmentary and complete, as the historically-inflected dimension of the authors' account suggests a linear development on Heidegger's part. In effect, once one completes the final chapter, the direction of the book has shifted rather starkly. Secondly and on a related note, because the authors want to adduce a progressive view of how each historical figure anticipates or contains seeds of Heidegger's own philosophy of time, the authors put themselves in an awkward position from the start by assuming the reader has a full understanding of Heidegger's philosophy of time and the ambiguities contained in it. The book's introductory chapter, while setting some of the stage regarding Heidegger's philosophy of time, probably should give a much fuller treatment of this material before transitioning to the historical chapters, where a rather complete understanding of Heidegger's philosophy of time is presupposed. I found this aspect particularly challenging in context of what the authors refer to throughout as the "four-dimensionality of time," as well as "the Time of Being." Because these concepts and their genesis are not sufficiently worked out at the beginning of the text, it is not always clear why they are relevant when the historical chapters refer to them. To my mind, the larger issue here (probably unrealistic to expect the authors to tackle), is that it is difficult to treat either Heidegger's philosophy of time, or the historical seeds of its development, in isolation from one another.