Notes on Heidegger and Time

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The question of what is time, is asked by Augustine: “I know what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I want to explain it to an enquirer, I do not know.”

Aristotle, however, explains: time is not the cause of generation and corruption, coming to presence and going out into absence, becoming as a whole. Rather, bodies decay, change happens, things move (more or less), physis becomes—and time counts the ways. Or, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning put it poetically: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”—that is time, not the loving, but the counting of how so.

So, how does time measure motion? Aristotle is quite clear: time measures motion in terms of duration-succession-simultaneity. For time orders change in relations of before-and-after—and so constitutes the now, that is, the now that continually changes, and the now that remains now, between the past that is past and future future which are both present, and the present present that is after the future and before the past.

But this does not mean that motion or change, or becoming as a whole, happens in time. For time is not a container; it is not a space in which objects exist, and nothing like an ocean full of fish. As Aristotle argues: if movement happens in time, then we would need to posit another time for temporal movement happens, and then a time for that time and the temporal, ad infinitum. And time does not begin—for then there would be a time before time, which is obviously impossible; rather, things can begin because of time. The use of the phrase “in time” is, therefore, at best, misleading; and at worst, simply wrong. Thus, motion is not in time; time counts motion.

But this does not mean that time is simply subjective; on the contrary, time is objective insofar as counting is counting of the counted. If there was nothing to be counted, there would be no counting; if there was nothing moving, no becoming, there would be no numbering of motion. In other words, time is always the time of the temporal—they are inseparable (unlike the divine, which is separable). For time is the measure of the duration-succession-simultaneity-velocity of that which moves, quicker or slower, changes its speed or not, continues or discontinues, the counting of what happens separately or together.

2 Aristotle, Phys, 221a26. And this is why time and motion are convertible—or relative (Einstein)—for if motion is measured by time, time may also be measured by motion.
3 Einstein adds “velocity” as a determination of time, that is, as a way of measuring motion or ordering change—but this does not fundamentally alter the original Aristotelian conception of time.
4 Physics, IV, 221a26.
5 Aristotle, Phys. 251b10-13; Meta. 1071b8.
And yet, time is always the time of the temporal. On the one hand, time itself is nothing temporal—time is eternal, uncreated, infinite; it does not move, but without movement, there would be nothing to measure, and so, no time. On the other hand, time is inseparable from the temporal, from motion and change and becoming. In other words, without time, there would be no measuring—for time is what we use to measure motion—but without measuring, there would be no time. Thus, time and the temporal are inseparable, but not identical; they belong to one another in a (differential) relation, but they are irreducible to each other.

The relation then, the difference, between time and the temporal—which we could call the “chronological difference”—is their unity. But the ground of this unity, for Aristotle, is the motion of things. Thus, time (and its determinations of duration-succession-simultaneity, before-and-after, its counting and measuring) and the temporal (what is counted and measured and determined) are different from one another, but inseparable—and this inseparability is due to the change of nature, the becoming of physis.

The ground of time then, for Aristotle, is motion, the becoming of beings (physis), the changing of things. But for Kant—with the “Copernican revolution in thought”—it is the reverse: things can change because time is already present, is always already there as the form of change. Or time is the a priori schema of becoming; it is that which allows things to be in motion or come to rest. For the ground of motion is time.

But this does not mean that time is simply subjective, like some form of inner and outer sense which I could adopt or relinquish. Nor is it merely optional, as if I could get out of time and somehow experience an object as supratemporal, like some infinite god. Nor could objects just become atemporal, move and change, and remain untimed or uncounted (if they are to be objects at all, one or many). Nor might I live without having my years numbered, nor love and not count the ways, as if living and loving could be non-temporal.

On the contrary: although why I schematize objects in accordance with time is a secret of the human soul, whose truth nature is unlikely ever to reveal; that I do so is necessary. Indeed, I do not love thee and then count the ways; rather, if I may love thee, it is because I can count. So, only a being that can count, like me, can love—a stone cannot love. Rather, if I can count (and so love), it is because of time, because time is the condition of the possibility of any experience whatsoever.

Or, even further: time is not only the form (duration-succession-simultaneity) of experience, of sensation, but also of imagination, and even of knowledge—for “Alles hat seine Zeit.” For example, we sense something now as one and then as many, or simultaneously this and that; we represent something in imagination as being or not-being now real or true, potentially or actually, or simultaneously both in different ways; we know causes now produce after-effects, or different attributes simultaneously

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6. For Heidegger, as we shall see, the ground of the chronological difference, the unity of time and the temporal, is neither things nor us, neither objects nor subjects—but time itself.


8. Ecclesiastes, III.
belong to the same substance. This is why the table of judgments and categories are *a priori* temporal: an object is present as one (quantity) substance (relation), and comes to presence (fills time) as being or not-being (quality), actually or potentially (modality).\(^9\)

And not just me, not merely the form of my sensible intuition, my imagination, my knowledge and judgment—for time is the form of anything whatsoever, subjects and objects alike. In other words, if time is as *subjective* (determinative for the subject), as it is *objective*, it is because time is universal—which is why this is not philosophical anthropology or psychology or biology, but pure reason’s critique of pure time. Thus, as Kant insists: time is the “third thing,” the universal *a priori* rule (schema) by which subject and object relate.\(^10\)

And it is the universality of time that drives Kant to the (metaphysical) deduction of its universal validity—for time is not grounded on language or consciousness; nor simply on the forms of human discursive thought, operations of the subjective mind, or “mental activities”; nor is it merely “irrational knowledge of the rational.”\(^11\) Rather, time is the ground of everything that is, of motion and rest, of being and becoming, subjective experience and objective knowledge. If Kant does not, therefore, provide an additional deduction of time; it is not because he could not, but because he need not—it had already been done for him (by the history of philosophy as metaphysics from Aristotle to Wolff); it is accurate and complete, so Kant can build upon it, stand on the shoulders of previous thinkers, and simply “expose” the existence of time’s universality and the universality of metaphysical categories/judgments that had already come to presence (and continue to be represented to this day).\(^12\)

If time, however, is the ground of motion and counting, of experience and knowledge—and their connection, the correspondence of object and concept, that is, truth—it is perhaps ironic that the history of philosophy continues to think of time as a space or container in which change happens. Hegel, for example, thinks time as the place in which spirit realizes or concretizes itself: “History, which is essentially the history of spirit, runs its course ‘in time’...[Thus] the development of history falls into time.”\(^13\) But, as Heidegger argues:

> “Spirit” does not first fall into time, but exists as the primordial temporalizing of temporality. Temporality temporalizes world-time, in whose horizon “history” can “appear” as an occurrence within time. “Spirit”

\(^9\) Kant, *CPR*, A215/B262.

\(^10\) Kant, *CPR*, B159.


\(^12\) *CPR*, A23/B38; §26; see also, *Prol*, §1, §39. The metaphysical deduction is not transcendental because metaphysics does not demonstrate the validity (*archê* as continuing rule) of applying concepts to objects, merely the validity (*archê* as origin) of the concepts themselves.

\(^13\) *GA2*, §82.

Or, when McTaggert denies the “reality of time,” he repeats (what he claims to be Hegel’s denial of) the reality of becoming: time retains its traditional definition (as the counting of change, the measuring of motion), but as nothing changes in reality, as being does not become, there is nothing to count.\footnote{Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.9.9: Time requires change, but the heavens do not change; they are eternal, outside of time. God creates ex nihilo; and he created time, when he created movement.} As McTaggert argues:

Hegel regarded the order of the time-series as a reflexion, though a distorted reflexion, of something in the real nature of the timeless reality, while Kant does not seem to have contemplated the possibility that anything in the nature of the noumenon should correspond to the time order which appears in the phenomenon.\footnote{J.E. McTaggert, “The Unreality of Time,” *Mind*, Vol. 17, 1908, pp. 456-473.}

In other words (even leaving aside the questionable analysis of Kant and Hegel), “distinctions [whether relations or qualities of events] are never true of reality.” And McTaggert’s claim that “time is unreal” simply means that change is unreal. This amounts to claiming that being is (unchanging) and becoming (as change) is not. But the problem is two-fold: (1) presupposing that time is a separable (inessential) quality or relation of events (while failing to understand that it is the inseparable and essential way in which events happen, become, that is, how movement and rest come to presence and go out into absence); and (2) reducing being to that which does not change, the permanent and continuous (while failing to understand that the impermanent and discontinuous, that which changes, also is or has being). In other words, McTaggert argues that, *in appearance*, events happen: A-series determinations are (permanently) related to the C-series (permanent and objective ordering of events), while B-series determinations are an (impermanent, and non-successive) interpretation thereof. But, *in reality*, nothing happens:

I am endeavoring to base the unreality of time, not on the fact that the A-series is more fundamental than the B-series, but on the fact that it is as essential as the B-series—that the distinctions of past, present and future are essential to time and that, if the distinctions are never true of reality, then no reality is in time.\footnote{Even McTaggert realizes that this claim (namely, that the successive A-series of past-present-future is essential or “ultimate” to time, but the B-series of earlier-later is not) is not essential to the argument for the unreality of time.}
while events seem temporal (change), time (as the counting of change) seems intemporal (a contradiction which Augustine solves by presupposing God’s unreal, albeit ideal, eternal time), and (2) events cannot be both present and past (or present and future)—which would be contradictory qualities or characteristics (predicates)—but past event are (present as) past and future events are present as future. Thus, for McTaggert, time is unreal because being is unchanging, unmoving, unbecoming, permanent presence.

And yet, what if being is not just unchanging? What if becoming also is? If reality is both in motion and rest? How is it then possible for both becoming and being to be temporal? Or for motion to be the ground of time and time to be the ground of motion? So that time is both subjective and objective? In other words, if time is neither merely real nor unreal, nor just a container, nor simply a form in which change occurs, nor by which it is measured—well then, what is it?

Heidegger answers: time is not a What, but a How—that is, the way in which anything whatsoever is. And so, time is determinative for beings because it is universal—there is nothing “outside” (or “inside”) of time; rather, “the atemporal’ and the ‘supratemporal’ are also ‘temporal’ with respect to their being.”\(^1\) In other words, everything is temporal: being and becoming, the real and the unreal, the moving and the unmoved, the changed and the unchanged. Even eternal beings (permanent substrata, immortal divinities, God or the gods) or infinitely becoming objects (geometric forms, mathematical formula, logical formulations) are not non-temporal, but semprieternas, always being or forever becoming, in all time. And time is determinative for both objects (the counting of the motion of things) and subjects (the schematization of receptivity and spontaneity, experience and knowledge) because its universality is “absolute.”\(^2\) Thus, permanent being and impermanent becoming (nothing, non-being, unreality) are merely ways in which the “ambiguity of being” itself comes to presence (remains continuously or not) and goes out into absence (non-presence); and the being present and being absent (non-present), now and then (not-now), are simply ways in which the “ambiguity of time” lets objects present themselves in motion or at rest, as temporal or eternal.

Time then, according to Heidegger, does not constitute beings, objects, things (as Husserl might have it). Rather, time “temporalizes” qua present/non-present, thereby revealing (opening up) the ontological difference (of being and beings) and the ontic difference (between beings, subjects and objects, how they are “given” temporally).\(^3\) Thus, it is the original unity of time, “original time” which is “originally one,” that—as the “self-giving of that which gives itself”—gives itself to things (beings), so that they can be given.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Heidegger, GA2, 18. Kant makes an analogous point with regards to ontology: “something” and “nothing” are already members of the concept of “an object in general” (Metaphysics of Morals, AA6, 218n).

\(^2\) CPR, A215/B262.

\(^3\) Heidegger, GA2, §65; GA3, §§24-26, 28.

\(^4\) GA3, §§28, 30, 32, 35; GA65, 234.
With regards to us then (a particular kind of being, with a particular kind of time), these modes of givenness (ways of being, moments or determinations, exstasies) point to the primordial wholeness of our (Dasein’s) temporality (in the “unity of the structure of care”)—which is why, for Heidegger, our way of being is three-fold: factually already having been (forgetting-and-retrieving-itself), being-there (falling prey, being-thrown), not-yet-being (existing, being-ahead-of-itself, anticipation, awaiting). So my way of being is having forgotten and remembering what I was (past); and being (present) now as falling prey to what They say and how They are, although I am thrown (like Hamlet, upon the stage, into the world); and not yet being what I am (whether I am I, or another), so waiting and anticipating what I will be (future). For as Heidegger insists: “temporality temporalizes itself completely in every ecstasy.” And each mode extends (intentionally “stretched out stretching itself along”) into others: the past attunement anticipates a future that comes to presence now; present falling prey is determinative for a future ruled by what has been; and future understanding exists now thanks to what has been. Thus, with respect to us: temporal differences (and our ways of being, the totality of which Heidegger names “care”) are grounded in the ecstatic unity of time.

And yet, if time is the how of being, that is, how objects and subjects, intuitions and concepts, are given—well then, what about time? In other words, what is the origin and ground, archê, of the being of time?

Heidegger answers: being is the how of time. Indeed, time temporalizes by becoming what it is, that is, by coming to presence, being present (in motion or rest, changing or remaining the same, eternally or not), and going out into absence. In other words, being and time, time and being, imply one another—insofar as they are both hows, they are the same, one; but they differ in how so (which is why the consideration of being and time is not just a matter for ontology and chronology, but also for henology). Thus, on the one hand, time is how being is (and so, the way that beings are and happen, which is the origin of ontological knowledge thereby; and we too, human beings, are “characterized by time”); and on the other hand, being is how time is, how time can temporalize beings and itself, its being in any time whatsoever.

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22 GA2, 325-6, 328, 350.
23 GA2, 350.
24 GA2, 375.
25 Kant too, insists upon the givenness of objects—in the Transcendental Aesthetic: “But intuition takes place only insofar as the object is given to us...Objects are given to us by means of sensibility...But all thought must, directly or indirectly, by way of certain characters, relate ultimately to intuitions, and therefore, with us, to sensibility, because in no other way can an object be given to us” (CPR, A19/B33; my emphasis). And then in the Transcendental Logic: “Through the first [intuition] an object is given to us, through the second [conceptual understanding] the object is thought...without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (CPR, A50-1/B74-5).
26 Heidegger, GA21, §15. Not only for objects, but also subjects: we are determined temporally in terms of past-present-future: psychologically in terms of memory-experience-anticipation; phenomenologically in terms of retention-primal impression-protention. Heidegger continues to use the how to describe time—for example, “everydayness” signifies the “How of existence that prevails in Dasein” (GA2, 370).
So, for Heidegger, Augustine asks the wrong question—he should not ask what it is, but how so—for being is temporal, and time is.

But is that it? Have we gone as far as we can go with regards to our investigation into time, or being and time, or time and being? Or have we maybe missed something—even something that has been missed for centuries, perhaps because it was, like Poe’s purloined letter, hiding in plain sight?

A clue from Benjamin, who writes (20 years before Heidegger): “Language speaks.” So how does language speak (or speak of) time? In fact, as the how, as the way of being, time speaks as tense. Then, if all verbs are tensed (past, present, future)—which is why German calls verbs Zeit-wörte—then we should probably not be surprised to find that being (sein) too always has a tense. Thus, being’s temporality, its temporal character or way of being, shows itself as tense—for time is determinative for being’s way of being, and time’s, and that of any being whatsoever (whether it comes to presence successively or simultaneously, or goes out into absence now or then; whether it changes or changed or will change, or remains or remained or will remain at rest; whether it becomes or became or will become, and whether its becoming is or was or will be real or unreal).

However, as the linguists remind us: all verbs have both time and aspect, which is the way things are (and events occur) at any time whatsoever. So while verbs are temporally characterized by the present or non-present (past and future), they are always also aspectually determined as complete or incomplete, continuous or discontinuous: I fell or I was falling, passé composé or imparfait. Aspect (in French, and many languages, such as English, or Russian) is irreducible to tense (or time). Then, in past tense, I can say both that I worked yesterday (Я поработал вчера, complete or discontinuous aspect) or I was working yesterday (Я работал вчера, incomplete or continuous aspect). Or in future time, I can say either tomorrow, I will read that novel (Завтра я прочитаю этот роман, complete aspect) or tomorrow, I will be reading that novel (Завтра я буду читать этот роман, incomplete aspect). Thus, anything that is, stone or unicorn, horse or human, word or deed, object or concept, has not only temporality, but also aspectuality—for not only is time the other of aspect, but aspect is also the other of time, and both are how being is.

Irreducible to one another then, time and aspect imply each another—and are implied by being, and by any thinking of being; they are the hows of being and beings, characteristic of how anything is (real or unreal, true or false, living or dead, including human beings like us), how each thing is now or then, once or always, and how anything occurs (comes to presence and goes out into absence, continuously or not).\footnote{And if the study of being is ontology, and the study of time is chronology, and we name the study of aspect (which is not a question of side or face, perspective or point-of-view) “phenomenology,” then what we have been doing is onto-chrono-phenomenology (or rather, first philosophy or metaphysics, for short).}

In other words, if being and time are universal, we should probably not be surprised at the universality of aspect as well. So if you ask me what time is, I will not just ask you
what being is—“but if I want to explain it to an enquirer,” I will also have to ask you what aspect is.