

David Couzens Hoy

The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality.

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The first in a landmark two-volume study of the history of consciousness, this volume represents a history of *time*-consciousness, with the second volume to focus on the history of *self*-consciousness. Hoy's decision to place 'time' before 'self' (consciousness) by no means an arbitrary one, but itself a statement of the forthcoming philosophical challenge that, in part, seeks to reverse the traditional (Kantian) assumption that mind is the *source* of time. Specifically, this 'reversal' reflects and charts the influence of the phenomenological tradition—with attention as well to some of its precursors and successors—as it has variously sought to make temporality a condition for the possibility of subjectivity rather than *vice versa*. Though crucially, any notion of a *simple* 'reversal' is itself problematized in the forthcoming chapters, and for two main reasons. First, the very notion of 'reversal' relies on old, 'radioactive', transcendental categories of 'before' and 'after'—even 'time' and 'mind', 'subjective' and 'objective'—which need to be rethought, if not necessarily abandoned, after phenomenology. Second, although Hoy is quick to point out this book is not about the nature of time *in general*, i.e., 'universal time', 'clock time', or 'objective time', but is instead about the *phenomenology* of time as it manifests itself in human existence—what he terms 'temporality'—the real project here is to *rejoin* and *reconcile* (as far as possible) time and temporality, the 'sting of time' and the enjoyment of time, so that (as temporal beings) we can temporalize in 'the way that *best* brings about both joy and justice' (221). Hoy's 'critical history' (or genealogy) of temporality thereby promising 'tectonic transformations in the overall philosophical landscape' (viii).

Chapter 1 'sets up the issue about the source of time through an account of Kant's interpretation of time and Heidegger's deliberate misreading of Kant' (xviii-xix). Kant asks whether time is mind-dependent or independent, and while he seems to want it both ways, as a form of intuition, it seems fair to say that for him the source of time was the mind. Heidegger on the other hand reads in Kant's own speculations on the (transcendental) imagination his own belief—fleshed out here through his analysis of the temporal phenomena of joy, anxiety and boredom—that the mind is in fact dependent on a prior temporalization of the world. Put crudely, time produces the mind. Hoy finds in Heidegger one account of the birth of normativity, as he uses temporality to explain the distinction between authentic and inauthentic comportments. As Hoy counsels, despite providing a framework for later investigations on the different dimensions of time—past, present and future—the general reader might find this chapter more illuminating after reading one or more of the following chapters, as the full implications of some of the issues raised here for us as temporal beings become clear.

Chapter 2 examines various theories on the temporality of the present, including Hegel's critique of sense-certainty, Husserl's protention and retention, Heidegger's

ecstases, James' specious present, Merleau-Ponty's identity of time and self and Nietzsche's *amor fati*. The common thread in these (by no means identical) phenomenological, hermeneutical (phenomenological) and deconstructive strategies is that they all 'want to build the past into the experienced Now, and some...the future as well' (90). This has important ethical and political implications for Hoy because, as he reads *through* Heidegger exemplarily, if temporality is hermeneutical (or subject to interpretation) and hermeneutics (or interpretations) are always temporal, through changing the present we all at least potentially have the power to 'change either or both the past and the future...for the *better*' (93).

Chapter 3 is concerned with the past, memory and memorialization (or as Hoy calls it Remembrance), and deals with issues about where time goes and whether the past can be changed. Hoy examines lessons from both the German phenomenological tradition and the twentieth century French tradition. The former tradition includes (despite their differences) Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, and it emphasizes the power of the past over any interpretation of what is essential in the present. The latter tradition, which includes Derrida, Bourdieu and Foucault, regards memory (and tradition) as shot through with gaps and discontinuities which the illusion of a coherent temporality (found in the likes of Husserl in particular) seeks to cover over. After an examination of Bergson's account of duration and of how Bergson is interpreted differently by Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, the chapter's final lesson is that just as the past influences the present, so the present influences our *perception* of the past. Through a discussion of Hoy's methodology, the advice is to recognize the gift of the past (as Derrida might say) while avoiding nostalgia in the bad sense which blocks new questions coming into being; we thereby remain open to new possibilities.

Chapter 4 'raises questions about the phenomenology of the futural, but also about political implications' (xx), and asks whether avoiding nostalgia means giving up hope for a better future. After a discussion of the historical sense of hope found in Kant and Hegel, Hoy identifies Heidegger as the first to provide a 'genuine phenomenological account of the future' (147). For Heidegger, the '*authentic*' mode of the future is a sense of 'coming toward', whereby one 'runs ahead' and seizes the possibilities that are important; the 'futural' understood here as central to the directionality of time, and correlated to authentic and inauthentic understandings of past and present. Walter Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* demonstrates for Hoy that the future may not be a function of what lies ahead of us, but more of what lies behind us, a 'possibility once to be realized, but that also exceeds what was once present' (182). Benjamin's dystopian vision allows for a backward looking hope not for redemption from time but of past injustices to other's through memorialization. Deleuze's conception of the future, as the third synthesis of temporality, is read through his notion of the self as a multiplicity of competing elements and prepares for the subsequent disappearance of teleology in the history of the 'future' found in Derrida and Žižek. Although without teleology, Derrida's account of the messianic character of temporality (as the basis for history) is not without eschatology and is linked to his idea of a democracy-to-come. As Hoy paraphrases Derrida, 'the future is an *ecstases* of the present, and this in itself transports us to the future perfect, when it will have been the case that what is now present to us is the past of

a future present' (172). We are thus enjoined by Derrida to act *now*, in the present, in the name of a democracy-to-come that will never (can never, should never, *structurally*) arrive. Hoy concludes with a discussion of Žižek's 'refusal' of democracy as a weapon of critical resistance. What Hoy concludes from these discussions, as with the past, is that the future exists as a feature of the 'time of our lives' and just as the past can be re-interpreted, so the future can be reinterpreted through action; a source of hope.

Chapter 5 looks at strategies for reconciling lived temporality with objective time, rejoining time and temporality and thereby fusing the two senses of the time of our lives, the sting of time and the enjoyment of life. Crucially for Hoy, through these very discussions, we are witnessing the reconciliation of the difference between phenomenology and normative hermeneutics, turning phenomenology into genealogy as it becomes clear how phenomenological analyses of the times of our lives can be applied to existential normative issues. As Chapter Six makes clear, genealogy is a self-reflective, 'philosophical method of analysis of how certain cognitive structures, moral categories, or social practices have come into being historically in ways that are contrary to the ordinary understanding of them' (223). In terms of the strategies for reconciling time and temporality themselves, Hoy groups them (tentatively) into four groups, drawing on the previous chapters. The first seek recovery of lost time through *memory*, and includes Proust and his notion of Reminiscence and Walter Benjamin's Remembrance. The second seek recovery through interpretation, and includes the early Heidegger of Resoluteness and Regulation, the later Heidegger's 'Resignation', and Husserl and Merleau Ponty's Retention. The third—including Marx's Revolution, Foucault's Reflection, Derrida's Rogues and Žižek's Refusal—seek recovery through critique. The final group seek recovery through temporalization, including Nietzsche's Recurrence, Bergson's Revelation and Deleuze's Repetition. Although, as Hoy will point out, none get it 'right'—reconciliation to the impossibility of entirely eliminating the sting of time being itself a 'positive step toward living more completely' (186)—Hoy's sympathies lie with the more 'considered and reflective attitude of the fourth set of strategies' (221). He concludes: 'The synthesis of the previous three attitudes can potentially be achieved by a temporalization that combines a forward-looking attitude that is fully informed both by sympathy for those who suffered past injustices as well as a practical sense of present possibilities...if temporality temporalizes, then it is open to us to temporalize in the way which best brings about both joy and justice' (221).

The breadth and depth of Hoy's study is quite breathtaking, and although it is by no means an easy read—indeed, I would recommend reading it more than once—Hoy's critical history of temporality and in particular its ethical and political implications certainly achieves its aim of helping to change both the reader's perspective on the issues, and, one suspects in time, that of the wider philosophical landscape as well. I eagerly await the second volume.

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