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The Time of Life and the Life of Time: An Articulation of the Problem of Time and Eternity in  
Hegel and Two Attempts to Resolve it

by

Nicholas Bergen

Under the Direction of Sebastian Rand, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

## ABSTRACT

This thesis identifies a problem in Hegel's thought regarding the relationship between time and eternity, and it interprets Heidegger's and Agamben's respective work on time as two attempts to resolve it. Time plays a distinct role in the logic of Hegel's dialectic; specifically, time is identified with the negation of the negation. However, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the dialectical progression culminates in the Absolute, and the dialectical and temporal manifestation of reality is grasped in its unchanging truth. Time is somehow related to eternity, but Hegel says that eternity is neither something that lies outside of time, nor something that comes after time. Hegel never gives a precise account of this relationship beyond these negative remarks. I interpret Heidegger's work on temporality and Agamben's concept of Messianic time as two attempts to clarify the problematic relationship between time and eternity, and I discuss the relative merits of each.

INDEX WORDS: Hegel, Heidegger, Agamben, Time, History, Dialectics

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2023

The Time of Life and the Life of Time: An Articulation of the Problem of Time and Eternity in  
Hegel and Two Attempts to Resolve it

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August 2023

**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Noah Williams, whose curiosity, earnestness, and love remain an undying source of inspiration.

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I owe my greatest thanks to my partner, Nina, and to my parents, Mike and Casey, for their love, patience, and unwavering support throughout the difficult and uncertain process of writing this thesis.

I must also thank my friend and colleague, Kevin, for the conversations we've had over the past two years. It would not be an exaggeration to say that every idea in this thesis was, in some form or another, incubated in our discussions together.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my advisor, Sebastian Rand, for his encouragement, generosity, and lucid conversation. His commitment to teaching is nothing short of inspiring.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Texts by Hegel

- EL*    *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991. Cited by section number.
- EN*    *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Translated by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Cited by section number.
- PS*    *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 1977. Cited by paragraph number.
- PR*    *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

### Texts by Heidegger

- BP*    *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- BT*    *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Cited by German edition page number.

### Texts by Agamben

- HS*    *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- IH*    *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*. Translated by Liz Heron. New York: Verso, 2007.
- TR*    *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford University Press, 2005.

*UB*    *The Use of Bodies*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford University Press, 2016

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The modern idea of the “end of history” begins with Hegel. It was taken up by Karl Marx, and more recently by Alexandre Kojève and Francis Fukuyama.<sup>1</sup> What is at stake in the end of history is not an end to the occurrence of important events, but rather, the end of the evolution of the normative structures of human life. Fukuyama summarizes this well:

Both Hegel and Marx believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an ‘end of history’: for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society. This did not mean that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end, that important events would no longer happen, or that newspapers reporting them would cease to be published. It meant, rather, that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled.<sup>2</sup>

However, one might object to the idea that “a form of society,” characterized by a set of “underlying principles and institutions,” is the kind of thing that could ever satisfy humanity’s “deepest and most fundamental longings” in the first place. Heidegger, for example, implicitly raises an objection of this sort with his philosophy of authenticity. According to Heidegger, a human being

is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity*... are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness. (*BT* 42-43)

For Heidegger, therefore, there is no set of pre-given or discoverable normative structures that are proper to human nature in the absolute sense. Rather, the human being is precisely the kind

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<sup>1</sup> See Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, and Fukuyama, *The End of History*.

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History*, xii.

of being that makes its own decisions, chooses its own principles, and creates its own institutions. It can either live authentically by taking responsibility for such life-defining choices and attain genuine selfhood, or it can fail to do so and “lose itself.” Authenticity is thus understood not as a normative principle, but as the condition for normative action in the first place.

Heidegger offers similar considerations on historicism. Just as human beings are not in the service of pre-given principles or institutions but can authentically choose their own, neither are human beings in the service of historical ends, whether these be conceived as ends to be realized in the future or ends already attained. Human beings are free to authentically appropriate their own historical past and determine for themselves how it will bear on their historical future. Such “authentic historizing” is thus understood, likewise, not as a normative principle, but as the condition for historically grounded normative action in the first place (*BT* 385).

On this basis, Heidegger criticizes Hegel for subordinating human action to the normative authority of an abstract historical progressivism, a historical progressivism characterized by the dialectic and the labor of the negative that drives the evolution of spirit (i.e., the evolution of the normative structures that shape social, political and cultural life). Heidegger sums up his interpretation of Hegel as follows:

The essence of spirit is the *concept*. By this Hegel understands not the universal which is intuited in a genus as the form of something thought, but rather the form of the very thinking which thinks itself: the conceiving of *oneself*—as the *grasping* of the not-I. Inasmuch as the grasping of the *not*-I presents a differentiation, there lies in the pure concept, as the grasping of *this* differentiation, a differentiation of the difference. Thus Hegel can define the essence of the spirit formally and apophantically as the negation of the negation. (*BT* 433)

To give a (simplified) illustration of the negation of the negation, we need only consider how human life is not self-sufficient. It depends on the natural environment—the not-human—for survival. This is the first “differentiation”. However, the human can also grasp the relationship between the human and nature itself. It can understand itself as realizing a particular form of life, a particular mode of subsistence, a particular way of relating to the environment. Therefore, not only can the human being work to transform the environment; it can also work to transform its own relationship with the environment, for example, by creating tools. By transforming its own conditions through the formal process of the negation of the negation, the human being gives rise to history. In both the Hegelian and Marxist varieties, historical evolution culminates in a form of society that satisfies the most fundamental human needs and desires. For Heidegger, however, any such understanding of history and human life is unacceptable, because human life is not subordinate to a logical, formal, biological, intellectual, social, cultural, or economic progression. Rather, human life is characterized by the possibility of authentic historicizing—the possibility that humans might collectively appropriate their own biological, intellectual, social, cultural, or economic heritage, and freely decide what to do with it.

In his book *Infancy and History*, Giorgio Agamben argues that Marx’s concept of history is actually similar to Heidegger’s, and that Marx avoids the “vulgar historicism” that subordinates human action to an abstract historical process (IH 103). In this sense, Agamben opposes those who interpret Marx and Engels as historical and economic determinists, and he also opposes Fukuyama’s characterization of communism as a form of society that is only achieved only at the end of a linear historical process. Marx does not understand history as an abstract process “into which man *falls*,” on Agamben’s reading (IH 99). Rather, for Marx, history

is man's original dimension as *Gattungswesen* (species-being)... History, therefore, is determined not, as it is in Hegel and in the historicism which derives from him, by an experience of linear time as negation of negation, but by *praxis*, concrete activity as essence and origin of man. *Praxis*, in which man posits himself as origin and nature of man, is at once 'the first historical act', the founding act of history. (*IH* 99)

Therefore, communism cannot be construed as an historical end, and humanity cannot be understood as tasked with realizing it. In this sense, Agamben thinks, Heidegger's authentic historicizing "is in no way opposed to the Marxist foundation of historicity in praxis." Both are "polar opposites to vulgar historicism" (*IH* 103).

The specific difference that sets Marx and Heidegger apart from other theories of history, Agamben thinks, is that each of them avoids the "experience of linear time as negation of negation." Heidegger explicitly develops a critique of the "ordinary concept of time," which understands time as a linear succession of instants, and which Heidegger thinks has been dominant from Aristotle to Hegel. Marx's critical orientation towards time, however, writes Agamben, was never explicitly developed:

Marx did not elaborate a theory of time adequate to his idea of history, but the latter clearly cannot be reconciled with the Aristotelian and Hegelian concept of time as a continuous and infinite succession of precise instants. So long as this nullified experience of time remains our horizon, it is not possible to attain authentic history, for truth will always vie with the process as a whole, and man will never be able concretely, practically, to appropriate his own history. (*IH* 99-100)

It is clear from these remarks that Agamben does not think Heidegger's own theory of time adequately fills in Marx's gap. In other words, communism is not a historical end that humanity is tasked with bringing about, as Fukuyama would understand it, but neither is the same as Heidegger's authentic historicity.

In this thesis, I will attempt to differentiate Heidegger and Agamben's respective positions, first by examining the point at which the Hegelian concept of time between problematic—namely, in the relationship between time and the Absolute (or between time and eternity). Second, I will attempt to show how Heidegger and Agamben offer different ways of dealing with this problem. Heidegger side-steps the problem entirely, by denying the possibility of the presence of the Absolute. Agamben, on the other hand, will retain the possibility of the Absolute in the guise of something resembling Marx's praxis. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks about the stakes of this difference, and some reasons suggesting that Agamben's solution is preferable.



## 2 HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF TIME

### 2.1 Time in the *Philosophy of Nature*

Hegel offers his most developed account of time in the second part of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, entitled *Philosophy of Nature*. It is not by coincidence that the discussion of time in the *Philosophy of Nature* occurs in conjunction with a discussion of space. For Hegel, as we will see, space and time are co-constitutive and mutually determining. It is impossible to determine one without reference to the other.

#### 2.1.1 Space

Hegel begins the *Philosophy of Nature* with the most basic determination of nature, namely, that nature is external to itself. If we begin with the simple determination of self-externality, abstracted from every other determination of nature, then, Hegel argues, we have arrived at a determination of space. “The first or immediate determination of Nature is *Space*: the abstract *universality of Nature's self-externality*, self-externality's mediationless indifference” (EN §254). Space, in this sense, is “absolutely *continuous*” because it is “*abstract*, and contains no specific difference within itself” (EN §254). However, the determination of space as continuous, abstract, and differenceless externality ends up being inadequate because defining something as external implies that there is something to which it is external. Thus, space is not differenceless. It admits a difference between the external and that to which it is external. This difference, Hegel thinks, is at the most basic level the difference between continuous space and a discrete point.<sup>3</sup> Continuous space is always external to some (ideal, arbitrarily fixed) discrete point.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Space, as in itself the concept as such, contains within itself the *differences* of the concept.” The differences are at first “merely diverse and possess no determination whatever” (EN §255). The “difference of space is,

However, Hegel says, although space is external to the discrete point, the point is still spatial. The point is the “*negation of space,*” but it is “a negation which is posited *in space*” (*EN* §254, remark; emphasis mine). Continuous space contains its opposite (the discrete point) within itself. “The unity of these two moments, discreteness and continuity, is the objectively determined Notion of space” (*EN* §254z). Space is both discrete and continuous. Insofar as we take space to be continuous extension, we must say that it is external to space taken as a discrete point; and insofar as we take space to be discrete points, we must say such points interrupt space taken as continuous extension.<sup>4</sup>

Hegel argues that the negative unity of space—that is, the unity in opposition of discreteness and continuity—determines itself first as a line, then as a plane, and finally as geometric space. First, a discrete point necessarily interrupts a continuous line, and a continuous line is necessarily interrupted everywhere by discrete points.<sup>5</sup> The continuous line, however, is also a discrete object that interrupts a continuous plane, while a plane is interrupted everywhere by discrete lines traversing it.<sup>6</sup> The continuous plane is, finally, is also a discrete object that interrupts a continuous, “*single whole space*” (*EN* §256).

---

however, essentially a determinate, qualitative difference. As such, it is ( $\alpha$ ), first, the negation of space itself, because this is immediate *differenceless* self-externality, the *point*” (*EN* §256). In other words, ‘externality’ is negatively determined with respect to its opposite—that to which it is external—and this opposition is determined as the difference between the continuity of space and the discrete point.

<sup>4</sup> Hence, Hegel’s assertion: “To fix a point is to interrupt space: but space is uninterrupted thereby” (*EN* §254z).

<sup>5</sup> “The point, as essentially this relation, i.e. as sublating itself, is the *line*, the first other-being, i.e. spatial being, of the point” (*EN* §256).

<sup>6</sup> “The line consequently passes over into the plane, which, on the one hand, is a determinateness opposed to the line and the point, and so surface, simply as such, but, on the other hand, is the sublated negation of space” (*EN* §256).

### 2.1.2 *Time: The Negation of the Negation*

Hegel goes on to argue that, if space is determined in this manner, then time is already implied. In other words, Hegel wants to demonstrate that space and time are mutually determined. Hegel writes:

Negativity, as point, relates itself to space, in which it develops its determinations as line and plane; but in the sphere of self-externality, negativity is equally for itself and so are its determinations; but, at the same time, these are posited in the sphere of self-externality, and negativity, in so doing, appears as indifferent to the inert side-by-sideness of space. Negativity, thus posited for itself, is Time. (*EN* §257)

There are three important points to make about this difficult passage. First, Hegel makes a distinction between two kinds of negativity. On the one hand, space is determined as the unity in opposition of discreteness and continuity (“[n]egativity, as point, relates itself to space.”) Most generally, this means that space is continuous but also divisible into discrete units. On the other hand, “negativity is equally for itself.” This means that discrete units are not merely a multiplicity of ways of breaking up the continuity of space, but they are each *specific* ways of breaking up the continuity of space. One discrete unit is distinguishable from all the others. A continuous line may be divided into inches, meters, miles, astronomical units, and so on. Discrete units are not only defined in opposition to continuous space (the negation of space) but they are also defined in opposition to other discrete units—the “negation of the negation,” or negativity “for itself” (*EN* §257z).

Second, Hegel thinks that discrete spatial units can only be distinguished from other discrete spatial units with reference to time. This claim becomes comprehensible, perhaps, when we consider our own practices of measuring space. We are accustomed to determining spatial distance by referring to motion over a period of time. We speak about our distance from stars and

galaxies in terms of light years. In SI units, a meter is defined in terms of the distance light travels in a certain amount of time. Colloquially, we talk about places that are, for example, a ten-minute walk, a two-hour drive, a three-hour flight, or a day's hike away.

Reciprocally, we determine specific periods of time with reference to space. We define a year as the time it takes for the Earth to make a complete revolution around the sun, and a day as the time it takes for the Earth to make a complete revolution about its axis. In SI units, a second is defined with reference to atomic frequency, which is a spatial determination. Even in cases where units of space and time are not explicitly defined in terms of one another, they still carry with them an implicit understanding in terms of the other. In large part, I am able to grasp the determinate quantity of space that constitutes one mile because I have an idea of how much time it takes me to walk, run, or drive one mile. In short, Hegel thinks space and time mutually determine one another.

Third, Hegel says, specific spatial units (e.g. meters) are still in space, but they distinguish themselves from the abstract unity in opposition of discreteness and continuity that characterized space earlier. No longer is continuous space generally divisible into indifferent discrete units. With time, we can divide space into specific, determinate quantities. Therefore, Hegel says, "time is precisely the existence" of the point; "in time... the point has actuality" (*EN* §257z). Time determines the position, and therefore the actuality, of the point. When we speak about the "actuality" or the "existence" of a point, we are not speaking about the divisibility of continuous space *in general*. We are speaking about a *specific* division that *stands out* from or distinguishes itself from the indifferent divisibility of space. With time, "[d]ifference has stepped out of space; this means that it has ceased to be this indifference" (*EN* §257z).

### 2.1.3 *The Temporality of Finite Things in General*

Hegel is primarily concerned with pure, abstract space and time (even our previous examples, in this sense, are too concrete in that they refer to motion). However, he does make some remarks about how we should understand the relationship between abstract spatio-temporality and concrete spatio-temporal things. “If abstraction is made from *everything*,” Hegel writes, “namely from what fills time, and also from what fills space, then what we have left over is empty time and empty space” (*EN* §258 remark). However, Hegel continues, “it is not *in* time that everything comes to be and passes away, rather time itself is the becoming, this coming-to-be and passing away” (*EN* §258 remark). Abstract, empty time and space should not be understood as a container in which objects are placed. Rather, empty space/time amounts to the abstract structure that is common to all finite things. To be finite is, in general, to be negatively determined, i.e., to be defined in opposition to something else. A point in space—defined in opposition to the continuous space that surrounds it—is the abstract structure that is common to all negative determination.<sup>7</sup>

Abstracted from each thing that becomes, time is empty, or as Hegel also says, it is an “abstract, ideal being. It is that being which, inasmuch as it *is*, is *not*, and inasmuch as it is *not*, *is*: it is Becoming directly *intuited*” (*EN* §258). In other words, time is the form that can be abstracted from all things that are subject to change (or that become, in Hegel’s terms), but the abstract form of time has no existence apart from the concrete things that embody it.

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<sup>7</sup> Here, we may speak of space in the ordinary sense, but we may also speak analogously of different kinds of logical spaces. For example, I am a finite human being because, with regard to ordinary space, I am at a single place and not at another place. But also, with regard to the ‘space’ of possible occupations, interests, genders, stages in life, or innumerable other categories, I occupy one ‘point’ to the exclusion of others.

Perhaps this is already evident from our consideration of specific measurements of space and time. If we determine a specific quantity of space with reference to time, e.g., a light year, we will see that it is not “*in time*” that light passes by one point at one moment and arrives at another point one light year away one year later. Rather, time is itself the coming to be and passing away. A specific amount of time is a specific determination of coming-to-be and passing-away. In this case, we are concerned with the coming-to-be and passing-away associated with spatial motion: a year is the amount of time it takes for light to “come to be” and “pass away” across the distance of one light year, and vice versa.

However, so defined, any finite thing is temporal. More precisely, finite things are co-determinative with time. “It is because things are finite that they are in time; it is not because they are in time that they perish; on the contrary, things themselves are the temporal, and to be so is their objective determination” (*EN* §258z). To say that a thing is finite is to say that it contains a negative moment, that it is determined by something outside it, or that it is defined by the limit that separates it from what it is not. With Hegel’s conception of space as self-externality, space is the abstract form of this negativity. No finite region of space is sufficient in its own right because it always relies on the surrounding space to define it. Just as the discrete limit that separates one region of space from another requires time for its precise determination, so the objective determination of any finite thing is determined by time and determines time. To give a cyclical example, we could say that the time it takes for the leaves of a tree to grow, to die, to fall off, and to grow back again is one year. But by the same token, the cycle of the leaves is one way of determining the length of a year. To give a linear example, we could say that the time it takes for an infant to mature and grow into an adult (and potentially have children of his or her own) is

one generation. But reciprocally, one generation is determined as the approximate length of time that it takes for the infant to become an adult.

## 2.2 Time in the *Phenomenology*

Hegel often describes human thought, cognition, or philosophy as finite and therefore temporal. For example, in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel famously writes that “each individual is in any case a *child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*” (PR 21). Even philosophy, it seems, which generally includes all systematic and scientific forms of thought, is ultimately conditioned by its own time and therefore limited by the futural horizon in which its truths will ultimately perish. However, throughout his work, and especially in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel also suggests that thought is capable of grasping eternal contents and therefore is capable of transcending time.

True to its name, the *Phenomenology* is a study of the forms of experience or what Hegel calls “shapes of consciousness” (PS ¶89). We might be inclined to think that a shape of consciousness is likewise conditioned by time and that the form experience takes is relative. However, Hegel attempts to show how consciousness can recognize the “Concept” (*der Begriff*) in the contingencies of everyday experience. In Hegel’s words, he attempts to show how philosophy can “bring chaotic consciousness back both to a well-thought-out order and to the simplicity of the concept” (PS ¶7). Therefore, Hegel describes the *Phenomenology* as “the science of the *experience of consciousness*” (PS ¶88).

### 2.2.1 *The Movement of (Self-)Consciousness*

The science of self-consciousness is a uniquely difficult enterprise because, by achieving an account of consciousness, we fundamentally and irrevocably alter consciousness itself, the

very object that we hoped to pin down. By knowing itself—by taking itself as its object of knowledge—consciousness changes. This means that it unfolds in time. For example, let's say we begin with an account of consciousness that takes the latter to be something that merely conscious of the external world.<sup>8</sup> By the simple fact of giving this account of itself, consciousness is transformed. It is no longer merely conscious of the world; but it is conscious of itself as conscious of the world. It is self-conscious. By looking inward and giving an account of its own principles, consciousness transforms itself.

The transformation of consciousness from one shape to another is always accompanied by a corresponding transformation in the form of the object that appears to consciousness. This is what Hegel means when he says that the “essence” of the shape of consciousness changes. In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes the mechanics of the transformation. First, ordinary consciousness believes that it can directly know its object. “Consciousness knows *something*,” writes Hegel, “and this object is the essence, or the *in-itself*” (*PS* ¶86). Second, ordinary consciousness realizes that it mediates the way reality appears. What first appeared as “the essence, or the *in-itself*... is also for consciousness the *in-itself*” (*PS* ¶86). Reality is not merely the pure immediacy of what appears—it is also the reality of consciousness actively knowing reality. Conscious experience is always also self-conscious. With this, Hegel says, “the double meaning of this truth comes on the scene. We see that consciousness now has two objects: One is the first *in-itself*, and the second is the *being-for-it* [consciousness] *of this in-itself*” (*PS* ¶86). In other words, we first located the truth of reality in the direct apprehension of the world. Second, this truth is called into question because we never know the world directly,

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<sup>8</sup> This assumption is the starting point of the *Phenomenology*. See Chapter 1, “Sense-Certainty: of the ‘This’ and ‘Meaning,’” §90-110.



but we only know it insofar as it appears in experience. Finally, this latter truth becomes the new object of our inquiry: “since the *in-itself* becomes a *being-for-consciousness of the in-itself*, this latter is the new object” (PS ¶87). In other words, the science of consciousness is no longer merely interested in the direct experience of the world, but it is also concerned with the experience of the relationship between mind and world: “As a result, a new shape of consciousness comes on the scene for which the essence is something different from what was the essence for the preceding shape” (PS ¶87).

The most notable aspect of this transformation is that consciousness shows itself to be temporal in knowing itself. The account of consciousness as merely knowing the immediate world appears as something that *was* true before consciousness looked inward and accounted for itself, but is *no longer* true now that it is done so. The account of consciousness as merely knowing the world accounts for consciousness as something that “*has been*” (PS ¶107). For example, consider the sensation of your immediate surroundings. Once you *consider* what you are sensing, you are already aware of the fact that you are sensing it. You cannot experience your pre-reflective awareness in the present, because experience always involves self-consciousness. This is the meaning of Hegel’s claim that the in-itself of the object is *always* also the being-for-consciousness of the in-itself. However, the pre-reflective awareness of your immediate surroundings is an element of experience, but it is only an element of experience insofar as it is recollected. It can only appear in experience as something past. Experience always involves some degree of self-consciousness, but the identity between consciousness and self-consciousness always appears as something that is achieved in time. If I become aware of what I am sensing, therefore, I necessarily become aware of time. I become aware of the fact that I *was*

not aware (of what implicitly affected me), but *now* I am explicitly aware (that I am being affected by what I sense).

### ***2.2.2 Comparing Hegel's Two Accounts of Time***

Though it may be initially unclear, the way that time shows itself phenomenologically corresponds precisely with the abstract structure of time that Hegel described in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Analogous to space, consciousness is external to itself. Hegel describes consciousness as the “movement of becoming an other to itself, which is to say, of becoming an object to its own self and of sublating this otherness” (PS ¶36). Consciousness is a subject of experience, but it can always take itself as its object as well. In so doing, consciousness steps outside of itself, so to speak, viewing itself from a higher vantage. For any particular shape of consciousness, consciousness can always step outside of itself, and take the previous shape of consciousness to be its object. In the process, it transforms itself into a new shape of consciousness. Only with reference to time, however, can one determine particular shapes of consciousness. This is already evident from the previous example, in which the direct apprehension of the world cannot be truly experienced in the present, but only appears in experience as something past, which is to say, as a temporal determination. Hegel explicitly draws this connection in a remark to the *Philosophy of Nature*: “Time is the same principle as the  $I = I$  of pure self-consciousness” Like space, which is external to itself and must be mutually determined with time, consciousness is always outside of itself, external to itself, or, we might even say, beyond itself. Precisely for this reason, if we are to determine consciousness as having any stable shape rather than in an infinite flight from itself, consciousness must be codetermined with time.

### 2.2.3 *Absolute Knowing*

All of this may suggest a somber dialectic according to which complete self-consciousness is never achieved. Continually transforming itself, consciousness would never be able to catch up with itself and know itself absolutely. Instead, consciousness would constitute what Hegel calls a “spurious or negative infinity” (*EL* §94). In other words, self-external consciousness would be something that “becomes an other, but the other is itself a something, so it likewise becomes an other, and so on *ad infinitum*” (*EL* §93). However, both in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* (‘Absolute Knowing’) and in a brief remark to the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel argues that consciousness does know itself absolutely. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel writes:

The finite is perishable and *temporal* because, unlike the Concept, it is not in its own self total negativity... Time, therefore, has no power over the Concept, nor is the Concept in time or temporal; on the contrary, *it* is the power over time, which is this negative only *qua* externality (*EN* §258 remark).

Every finite thing is perishable because to be finite is to be negatively determined, and as we have seen, negative determination is temporal determination. A specific point in space can only be determined with respect to time (i.e., as the time it takes for one point to pass to the next, as exemplified by motion). Likewise, any finite thing is negatively determined with respect to time, as the time it takes to pass into its other. In this sense, Hegel says that the finite is “perishable.” However, to recognize the Concept in all things is to grasp that which is eternal in them, including the structures of space and time themselves. Space and time are in their own selves “total negativity.” Space is self-external, but taken as a whole, it is not external to anything. Therefore, it is not determined by time (insofar as time is a determination of externality) but is eternal.

Similarly, in the *Phenomenology*, Absolute knowing does not merely stand outside itself to grasp itself as an object, thereby inaugurating a new shape of consciousness. Rather, it takes its object to be itself in the guise of the entire progression of shapes of consciousness that it has generated. “The experience through which consciousness learns about itself can, according to its concept, comprehend within itself nothing less than the whole system of consciousness (PS ¶89). And the whole system of consciousness consists in the “moments of truth,” of the various shapes of consciousness, which are now grasped systematically “in their proper determinateness” (PS ¶89). By “proper determinateness,” Hegel means that they are not simply “abstract, pure moments,” as if they were an indifferent collection of possible candidates for the true science of consciousness. Rather, they each appear in the necessary and systematic order.

The “appearance” of the successive shapes of consciousness, Hegel writes, “is both an emergence and a passing away which does not itself emerge and pass away but which instead is in itself [i.e. subsists intrinsically] and which constitutes the actuality and the living movement of truth” (PS ¶47). Consciousness unfolds in time, so its finite moments arise and pass away, but the temporal movement of consciousness itself never arises nor passes away, it is “in its own self total negativity.” Hegel explicitly identifies time and the concept at the end of the *Phenomenology*: “Time is the concept itself that is there and is represented to consciousness as empty intuition. Consequently, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not grasp its pure concept, which is to say, as long as it does not erase time” (PS ¶801). Because consciousness transforms itself by grasping itself, it produces time and can only grasp itself as what it was. However, when consciousness grasps itself as temporal, “it sublates its temporal form” through the comprehension of time itself (PS ¶801). It grasps the eternal content in itself, the Concept, and in this sense, time is “erased”.

### 2.3 The Unresolved Problem of Time in Hegel

The eternal content of the science of the experience of consciousness, therefore, is that consciousness unfolds in time. “But the notion of eternity,” Hegel writes, “must not be grasped negatively as an abstraction from time, as existing, as it were, outside of time; nor in a sense which makes eternity come after time, for this would turn eternity into futurity, one of the moments of time” (EN §258 remark). How should we conceive of the relationship between time and eternity?

Hegel is somewhat ambiguous on this point. However, he provides a clue in the Preface to the Phenomenology when he famously describes the truth of the absolute—which contains within itself the flux of all its finite moments—as a “bacchanalian revel where not a member is sober.” However, he continues,

because, in isolating himself from the revel, each member is just as immediately dissolved into it – the ecstasy is likewise transparently and simply motionless. Judged in the court of that movement, the individual shapes of spirit do not stably exist any more than do determinate thoughts, but they are also equally positive, necessary moments just as much as they are negative, disappearing moments. – In the whole of the movement, taken as being at rest, what distinguishes itself in it and what gives itself existence is preserved as the kind that remembers, as that whose existence is its knowing of itself, just as this self-knowing is no less immediate existence. (PS ¶47)

Eternity appears when we grasp the “whole of the movement,” and see it as “being at rest.”

However, to see the movement as a whole requires that the movement be finished. We cannot view the movement of consciousness as a whole if we are still caught within it. Therefore, the whole is “preserved as something that remembers itself.” This is a challenging claim to understand, however, since Hegel explicitly disallows the two most intuitive interpretations in the above quote from the Philosophy of Nature. Remembrance cannot occur after the thing remembered. Eternity is not something that occurs at the end of a global temporal process and

that recollects the preceding process as a whole. (This is the tacit assumption of those who would like to interpret Hegel as advocating a progressive theory of history.) However, neither can recollection take place, in some sense, outside of time (as we might imagine the mind of God, which eternally and timelessly knows all of time).

Rather, the moment in which we grasp “the whole of the movement,” in which we erase time, must paradoxically occur within time. Eternity is integrally related to time, in some sense. The comprehension of time brings time to an end. But since this comprehension is neither outside of time nor after time, we must have some account of how time brings itself to an end, whatever that means.

At this point, we can clearly formulate the problem of time in Hegel. There must be some time in which the comprehension of time occurs. In what follows, we will look at two attempts to theorize this time: Heidegger’s concept of primordial time, and Agamben’s concept of messianic time.

### 3 HEIDEGGER'S PRIMORDIAL TIME

In this section, we will consider how Heidegger's work on the concept of time can help us understand the relationship between time and eternity in Hegel. We have seen how, for Hegel, eternity means something like the eternal contents, or the unchanging structure, of temporal human life and experience. Hegel calls this unchanging structure the Concept. We have also seen how Hegel disallows, first, the construal of eternity as something that arrives after time or at the end of time, and second, the construal of eternity as something that lies outside of time. Therefore, we are left with the difficult idea that eternity is, in some sense, integrated with time or integrally related to time. Heidegger's criticism of the "ordinary concept of time,"<sup>9</sup> in particular, provides us with one way of understanding this difficult idea. According to the Heideggerian approach, the idea that eternity is integrally related to time only appears perplexing from the perspective of the deficient "ordinary concept of time," which Heidegger claims has persisted from Aristotle to Hegel and which Heidegger proposes to move beyond.

According to Heidegger, the ordinary concept of time was first articulated by Aristotle in the *Physics*. Heidegger gives his most thorough account of the ordinary concept of time in his 1927 lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. While Heidegger acknowledges that several other thinkers have made contributions to the understanding of time—Augustine, Aquinas, Suarez, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Bergson—he claims that all have fundamentally remained within the Aristotelian framework (*BP* 231-2).

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<sup>9</sup> Heidegger also refers to "common time," "natural time," and "vulgar time." For consistency, I will use the phrase "ordinary concept of time," or "ordinary time."

Heidegger calls our attention to the initial question that opens Aristotle's discussion of time, namely, whether time as a whole exists or not. Initially, Aristotle thinks that it does not exist. Explaining Aristotle's conclusion, Heidegger writes:

How should time exist as a whole, an *ousia*, if the parts that go to make it up are non-existent are so in different ways? Things past and things future belong to time. The former are *no longer*, the latter are *not yet*... Past and future, by their very concepts, are exactly non-existent; at bottom it is only the present, the now, that *is*. (BP 233)

This initial supposition about the ontological status of time becomes the basis for the ordinary concept.<sup>10</sup> "Aristotle characterizes time primarily as a *sequence of nows*" (BP 256). Time is the perpetual coming into presence and passing away of individual moments. Since being is implicitly identified with presence, Aristotle supposes that time, as a whole, does not exist because time includes the past and the future which, by definition, are not present. This supposition, which Heidegger alleges Hegel to share,<sup>11</sup> obviously makes it extremely difficult to understand eternity as integrated into time.

Heidegger does not simply reject the ordinary concept of time, as we will see, but instead makes it out to be a partial and one-side understanding derivative of a deeper structure of time which he calls "primordial time" or "ecstatico-horizonal time." According to Heidegger, philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel have supposed that the now is equivalent to presence, that presence is equivalent to being, and that this fact is more or less self-evident. By contrast, Heidegger argues that the 'now' and presence are not simply given, but that we must inquire into their origin. This origin, for Heidegger, will be primordial time. And on the paradigm of

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida argues that the concept of time (and by extension, the metaphysical tradition as a whole) that Western philosophy inherits from Aristotle results from Aristotle's *evasion* of this question. See Derrida, "*Ousia and Gramme*", especially the subsection entitled "What the Question Evades", 46-53.

<sup>11</sup> See Heidegger's explicit engagement with Hegel in Section 82 of *Being and Time*.



primordial time, Heidegger will understand the relationship between time and eternity as an authentic comportment towards the horizon of the past and the future. In this way, eternity is integrally related to time, but not as something present, as it is with Hegel. We will now analyze Heidegger's ideas in greater detail, beginning with his discussion of the genesis of the ordinary concept of time.

### 3.1 Aristotle, Hegel, and the Ordinary Concept of Time

Aristotle defines time as *arithmos kineseos kata to proteron kai husteron*<sup>12</sup> or as “something counted in connection with motion that is encountered in the horizon of the earlier and later” (*BP* 237-8). In any case, we should emphasize that “time is not movement,” but it is something that is essentially connected to movement. Time is movement only “insofar as it admits of enumeration.”<sup>13</sup> This definition seems strange at first, but it becomes intuitive once we clarify a few things. First, we must distinguish motion from moving things. For example, we do not find time in the sun as it moves across the sky or in the movement of the heavens, as some of Aristotle's predecessors claimed. Rather, time resides in the motion itself. Heidegger describes (physical) motion as “change of place, the transition from one place to another” (*BP* 238). Time is related to change or transition in general. Specifically, “time exists so far as motion has a number.” Time lies in the enumeration, or in the counting, or in the numbering of a transition from one place to another (*BP* 239).

Let us illustrate this idea. If I look at my watch and tell the time, I am counting the motion of the pointer. When I enumerate the motion of the pointer, I do so in terms of seconds, minutes, and hours. If I look at the sun and tell the time, I am counting its motion as it moves

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 219b.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 219b.

across the sky. When I enumerate the motion of the sun, I do so in hours, or I count its movement informally—for example, I say, ‘now it is dawn’, ‘now it is morning’, ‘now it is noon’, ‘now it is afternoon’, or ‘now it is dusk’, which breaks the movement of the sun into five stations and implicitly counts them. However, we do not simply glimpse time by looking at a watch or the sun. Time is visible through the watch or the sun, but time does not reside in them. I could also look at a watch to appreciate its design or look at the sun to appreciate its radiance. In either case, I do not perceive time. Rather, Aristotle says, I glimpse time through the “horizon of the earlier [*proteron*] and later [*husteron*].”<sup>14</sup> (Heidegger’s use of the term ‘horizon’ is helpful here, because it emphasizes the way we look not towards the extant thing, but towards that which came before it and will come after it.)

What does it mean to count time within the horizon of the earlier and later? First of all, Heidegger says, we must remember that generally, motion is *metabolé*, a transition from something to something. Etymologically, *metabolé* comes from *metá* (beyond) and *boléō* (to throw). When something moves it is ‘thrown beyond’ its current state. According to Aristotle, this leads naturally to the before and the after: “every change is from something to something—as the word itself [*metabolé*] indicates, implying something ‘after’ something else.”<sup>15</sup> Though Aristotle frequently relies on examples from physical motion, *metabolé* does not only mean physical transition from one place to another but any kind of transition from something to

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger calls our attention to a potential problem here: “‘Earlier’ and ‘later’ are time-determinations... But this simply means that time is something met within the horizon of time. Time is counted time... the definition of time seems to be a trivial tautology: time is the earlier and later, thus *time* is *time*.” However, Heidegger says, perhaps “the second term ‘time means something different and more original than what Aristotle means in the definition itself’ (*BP* 241). As we will see, Heidegger will argue that the definition means that time, in the sense of successive moments, is determined originally by time as the irreducible phenomenon of the horizon of the future and the past.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 225a.

something else. All motion has dimension, but this dimension need not be spatial. Therefore, I can speak of physical motion, but I can also speak of qualitative motion which is equally a kind of motion but with a different dimensionality.

At this point, Hegel's proximity to Aristotle's concept of time becomes apparent. Hegel defines time as the negation of a negation in the *Philosophy of Nature*, but this definition is not limited to the physical realm of nature. All finite things are in motion—*metabolé*—generally understood as the transition from something to something, because at the highest level of abstraction, all finite things are negatively determined by what they are not, and so are always in a process of transition. Furthermore, Hegel's claim that time, as the negation of the negation, is co-determinative with space, is proximate to Aristotle's definition of time as number of motion counted in the horizon of a before and after which also clearly understands time and space as mutually co-determinative. The only difference (although perhaps it is merely a difference of emphasis) is that Hegel believes that the logical structure of space and time—that is, of the negation and the negation of the negation—makes determinate motion possible and not the other way around. “Thus,” Heidegger writes, “the most appropriate expression which the Hegelian treatment of time receives, lies in his defining it as ‘the negation of a negation’... Here the sequence of ‘nows’ has been formalized in the most extreme sense” (BT 432).

### 3.2 Primordial Time

In his reflections on motion and dimension, Heidegger introduces a concept of ‘stretch’. As we will see, this concept will be key to Heidegger's concept of primordial time. Heidegger writes: “Dimension expresses a general notion of stretch,” and stretch implies continuity (*BP*

242). “There is no break implied in the concept and essential nature of ‘from something to something’” (*BP* 242). This experience of motion is necessarily an experience of continuity (*BP* 243). Continuity is an ontological condition of motion: if there were only discrete determinations, motion (and time) would not be possible, as Zeno demonstrated. Nevertheless, when we observe something in motion, we always observe it at a discrete place or state. But we experience the manifold of possible places or states not as the pure juxtaposition of discrete elements, but as ‘away from there’ and ‘towards here’. In other words, when we look at the sun in the sky and we tell time, we say ‘now the sun is directly overhead, so it is noon’. But ‘directly overhead’, as a discrete determination, signifies a stretch—a continuity—away from the east and towards the west. We retain the earlier location—the sun in the east, and we expect the later location—the sun in the west. However, in order to retain and expect, we must see the thing as ‘now’. The sun is ‘now’ directly overhead, which means it is ‘now-longer’ in the east and ‘now-yet’ in the west. What we count in the horizon of the before and the after are the nows.

However, “the now as such is already in transit... It is intrinsically transition” (*BP* 248-9). The concepts of stretch and transition do not express an extrinsic relation between self-contained moments, but rather, a moment is constitutively stretched and intrinsically in transit. Because the now

has this peculiar stretching out within itself, we can conceive of the stretch as being greater or less. The scope of the dimension of a now varies; now in this hour, now in this second. This diversity of scope of dimension is possible only because the now is intrinsically dimensional. (*BP* 249)

For example, I can say ‘now it is 2:00 p.m.’, ‘now it is afternoon,’ ‘now it is Sunday,’ ‘now it is 2023,’ ‘now I am hungry because I have not eaten lunch,’ ‘now I am working after running an errand earlier, and meeting with a friend later,’ ‘now I am tired because I have been writing,’

‘now I am working on a degree in philosophy,’ ‘now I am in early adulthood,’ ‘now I am ending one stage in my life and entering another,’ and so on. ‘Nows’ admit of so many dimensions and can be counted on so many scales precisely because the ‘now’ is not something extant or self-contained but is that which appears as stretched between the horizons of the earlier and the later, however narrow or broad things horizons appear, and in whatever dimension they appear. Therefore, Heidegger says, “Time is not thrust together and summed up out of nows, but the reverse: with reference to the now we can articulate the stretching out of time always only in specific ways” (*BP* 249). And each specific way constitutes a specific way of “making motion accessible *as motion*, in its unbroken character of transition” (*BP* 251).

We can now begin to understand how this analysis of stretch points back to a more fundamental structure which constitutes the origin of the now. Primordial time is not a flow of moments that come into presence and then pass away. Rather, we can only experience a flow of moments because we can perceive the horizon of the earlier and the later. Primordial time is not composed of a present now, past ‘now-no-longers’, and future ‘now-not-yets’ as if all these moments were self-contained entities that arise and then perish. Primordial time is the temporal dimension opened up by the horizon of the earlier and the later which makes the experience of a now accessible in the first place. This is why Heidegger says that

Aristotle’s definition... characterizes time by defining how what we call time becomes *accessible*. It is an *access definition* or *access characterization*. The type of definiendum is determined by the manner of the sole possible access to it: the counting perception of motion as motion is at the same time the perception of what is counted as time. (*BP* 256-7)

In other words, we access time by retaining the past and expecting the future. Or, in other words, we access time through counting nows, each of which is in itself retention, expectation, stretch, and dimension. However, Heidegger says, Aristotle explains how we access time (through the

retention of the earlier and the expectation of the later), but he does not explain time itself. He does not, for example, explain why we could have access to anything like a ‘now’ in the first place. Nor does he explain how we are able to encounter anything in the horizon of a ‘before’ and ‘after’ if this is not made possible through time, the very thing which we are trying to explain. In this sense, Heidegger thinks, one could accuse Aristotle of begging the question:

‘Earlier’ and ‘later’ are time-determinations... But this simply means that time is something met within the horizon of time. Time is counted time... the definition of time seems to be a trivial tautology: time is the earlier and later, thus *time* is *time*. (BP 240-1)

However, Heidegger thinks that Aristotle can be absolved of this suspicion if

the second term ‘time’ means something different and more original than what Aristotle means in the definition itself. Perhaps Aristotle’s definition of time is not a tautology but merely betrays the inner coherence of the Aristotelian time phenomenon, that is, of time as commonly understood, with the original time which we are calling temporality [or primordial time]. (BP 241)

Let us now consider how this primordial time shows up in experience. It must be the experience of the past (as retaining) and of the future (as expecting), and these must be construed as features of *present experience* rather than as self-contained experiential moments that are past or yet to come. Heidegger gives a number of examples.

First, Heidegger invites us to think about the experience of unreflectively looking at a clock. “When without reflecting we look at a clock in everyday behavior, we always say ‘now,’ explicitly or not. But this now is not a naked, pure now but has the character of the ‘*now it is time to...*,’ ‘now there is still time until...,’ ‘now I still have enough time until...’” (BP 259). The now always has some sort of significance by virtue of being stretched between the horizon of the past (as retaining) and the horizon of the future (as expecting).

In this sense, time appears even when I am not measuring time with a clock. When I feel hungry, for example, there is an implied ‘now I am hungry’ which measures the metabolic rhythm of eating and digestion, the rhythm of meals and of the day generally, my biological being, and so on. For this reason, Heidegger emphasizes that “when we mean and express ‘now’ we are not talking about some extant thing or other. Saying ‘now’ has a different character from saying ‘this window’” (*BP* 259). The ‘now’ is essentially related, it seems, to my activity. “If in saying ‘now’ we are not addressing ourselves to anything extant,” says Heidegger, “then are we addressing ourselves to the being that we ourselves are? But surely I am not the now? Perhaps I am, though, in a certain way” (*BP* 259). The phenomenon of time appears primarily in the multifarious rhythms of our own lives, each having a dimension and a stretch that opens up the horizon of the before and after. “Time is constantly there in such a way that in all our planning and precaution, in all our comportments and all the measures we take, we move in a silent discourse: now, not until, in former times, finally, at the time, before that, and so forth” (*BP* 259). These irreducible temporal features of our experience and life, Heidegger continues, “can be made intelligible in their possibility and necessity by way of a more original phenomenon whose unity we shall come to know as temporality [i.e., primordial time]. And temporality in its turn provides the horizon for the understanding of being in general” (*BP* 260). Let us consider what this claim amounts to.

Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* (literally: there-being) to describe the mode of being realized by humans, or to describe the entity that human beings are.<sup>16</sup> *Dasein* is the distinctive

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<sup>16</sup> Scholars disagree about how the term *Dasein* should be interpreted. For my purposes, it will not be necessary to enter the debate or take a position. I merely mention two possibilities to give the reader a general sense of what Heidegger might be talking about.

being for whom its own being is an issue.<sup>17</sup> The human being, understood as *Dasein*, is unique because its being, its essence, or what it is—is not a predetermined or settled matter. *Dasein* must determine *what it is* and what it means for it to be. According to Heidegger, this means that the “*essence of Dasein lies in its existence*” (BT 42). Heidegger clarifies this definition by saying that existence, here, should not be understood as an attribute of something present at hand or of a mere existent thing, in the way that the coffee mug on my desk exists.<sup>18</sup> Rather, Heidegger is using the term existence in the etymological sense of standing-out. *Dasein* is not confined to a fixed essence; but, in a word, *Dasein* “stands out” from fixed essences and is free to determine what it will be. *Dasein* is essentially free with respect to fixed essences. In this sense, *Dasein*’s essence lies in its existence. It is the being for whom being is an issue.

Conceived as the being for whom its own being is an issue, Heidegger shows primordial time to be the structure of *Dasein*. Since *Dasein* is the being for whom its own being is an issue, what we ultimately retain and expect are possible ways to be. “Even if what we are expecting may be some event, some occurrence, still our own *Dasein* is always conjointly expected in the expecting of the occurrence itself” (BP 265). If we are expecting our own *Dasein* in expecting, then this can only mean that we are expecting a possible way of being. “The *Dasein* understands itself by way of its own most peculiar capacity to be, of which it is expectant” (BP 265). For example, when I say, now I am hungry, I am already conceiving the now in terms of a transition

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<sup>17</sup> See BT 41-2: “These entities [*Daseins*], in their Being, comport themselves towards their Being... *Being* is that which is an issue for every such entity.”

<sup>18</sup> “But here our ontological task is to show that when we choose to designate the Being of this entity as ‘existence’ [*Existenz*], this term does not and cannot have the ontological signification of the traditional term ‘*existentia*’; ontologically, *existentia* is tantamount to *Being-present-at-hand*, a kind of Being which is essentially inappropriate to entities of *Dasein*’s character” (BT 42).



and a future horizon of my own activity. I am always coming towards myself, in Heidegger's terminology. I come towards a distinctive possibility of my being.

In this coming-toward-itself, expectant of a possibility, the Dasein is *futural* in an original sense. This coming-toward-oneself from one's most peculiar possibility, a coming-toward which is implicit in the Dasein's existence and of which all expecting is a specific mode, is the *primary concept of the future*. This existential concept of the future is the presupposition for the common concept of the future in the sense of the not-yet-now. (*BP* 265)

In other words, this primary concept of the future—the future in the existential sense—is the origin of the not-yet-now. Because *Dasein* is ahead-of-itself—because *Dasein* can project itself onto possible ways that it can be—the experience of the horizon of the 'after' is opened up.

Heidegger makes similar remarks about the past. "The Dasein, in being, necessarily always has been," Heidegger writes.

From the viewpoint of the moment of the future, as previously characterized, this means that since the Dasein always comports itself more or less explicitly toward a specific capacity-to-be of its own self, since the Dasein always comes-toward-itself from out of a possibility of itself, it therewith also always *comes-back-to* what it has been. (*BP* 265)

Not only does *Dasein* project a possible way of being onto the future, but more specifically, it projects onto the future of possible way of being what it has already been. To exist is to be thrown into a set of circumstances that we did not choose. We project into the future possible ways of being someone who has been thrown into a set of circumstances in the past. The primary concept of the past—the past in the existential sense—is the origin of the now-no-longer. It is because *Dasein* always has been—because *Dasein* understands its futural possibilities as possibilities of what it has been—that the horizon of the 'before' is opened up. Insofar as *Dasein* is the being for whom being is an issue, its essence lies in its existence. In other words, its essence lies in its standing out from circumstances, factual conditions, fixed essences, etc., such

that its being can be an issue for it, i.e., such that it is free to choose possible ways to be. The structure of *Dasein*, in this respect, is the structure of primordial time. Temporality is manifest as “the ἐκστατικόν [ekstatikón] pure and simple. *Temporality is the primordial ‘out-side-of-itself’ in and for itself*” (BT 329). Temporality is the horizon of the future as expecting possible ways of being and the horizon of the past as retained the ways it has been. This temporality, then, cannot be understood as the successive flow of moments, but as the necessary dimensions of a being for whom its own being is an issue.

### 3.3 Heidegger Contra Hegel

In a way, Heidegger resolves the problem of time and eternity that arises in Hegel. For Heidegger, the relation between time and eternity ceases to be problematic once we understand time in a more fundamental and original sense. Time does not originally consist in a succession of present moments. Rather, the experience of present moments is only made possible because *Dasein* is an entity for whom being is an issue. Insofar as *Dasein* is always determining what will be, *Dasein* “exists” in the sense of standing outside of the present in the horizon of the future as expecting and in the horizon of the past as retaining—what Heidegger calls “the ‘ecstases’ of temporality” (BT 329). These horizons cannot be construed as moments to come and moments past, i.e., moments that will be present and that no longer are present. Rather, these horizons are the fundamental structure of the experience of the present itself. So long as *Dasein* exists, it exists as the being for whom being is an issue, which means that it stands out from the present and stands in relationship with the future as expecting (possible ways of being) and the past as retaining (ways that it has been).

For Heidegger, then, the notion that eternity could be integrally related to time does not appear so paradoxical. It only appears paradoxical if we understand time as a succession of

present moments and if we understand eternity as the totality of those moments (past, present, and future). The ordinary concept of time leaves it unclear how eternity could be integrally related to time, or in other words, how one might grasp eternity in a single moment of time. We could imagine an instant in which time stops, and in that instant, we could recollect all of time as past. But Hegel explicitly disallows this. We could also imagine an eternal understanding that transcends time, that exists outside of time, that could therefore comprehend all of time eternally—past, present, and future, and that, perhaps, the human mind could participate in it. But Hegel explicitly disallows this as well.

By moving beyond the ordinary concept, however, Heidegger solves the problem by construing eternity (if we could even call it that) not as presence nor as the totality of present moments but as the experience (in the present) of the horizon of the non-present future and the horizon of the non-present past. In other words, the integral relation between eternity and time cannot be a relationship of presence; eternity is not something that becomes fully present in time. Heidegger solves Hegel's problem by denying the *parousia*, the presence, of the Absolute. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger thematizes the impossibility of the *parousia* of the Absolute through the related ideas of finitude, guilt, and being-towards-death. In the final instance, *Dasein* projects its possible ways of being onto its own death, upon the impossibility of being, which is something that never comes to presence, but is only experienced as something expected and impending.<sup>19</sup> An adequate examination of Heidegger's ideas about guilt, death, and finitude is beyond the scope of this paper. In what follows, however, we will consider Agamben's solution

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *BT* 235-260.

to Hegel's problem of time and eternity. As will see, Agamben will refer to the interrelated ideas of guilt, death, and finitude to suggest that we should be dissatisfied with Heidegger's solution.

## 4 AGAMBEN'S MESSIANIC TIME

### 4.1 The Time that Remains

Agamben's relevant discussion on time and eternity is located in *The Time that Remains*, a lecture course on Paul's Letter to the Romans. Agamben develops a concept of messianic time which, as we will see, can also be interpreted as a solution to the problem of time and eternity in Hegel. Agamben's account of messianic time centers around Paul's technical term for the messianic event of Christ's resurrection: *ho nyn kairos*, "the time of the now". The 'now' in question, however, is not the now of *chronos*, the chronological succession of instants. Rather, it is the kairological now in which "time contracts itself and begins to end," and which, Agamben says, "lasts until the full presence of the Messiah," a presence that "coincides with the Day of Wrath and the end of time (but remains indeterminate, even if it is imminent)" (TR 63). These are difficult claims that we will consider more closely in this section.

However, we can begin by making a few remarks about how Agamben's approach differs from Heidegger's. We have seen how primordial time, for Heidegger, lies not in the succession of instants but in the experiential dimension of the non-presence of the future as expecting and the non-presence of the past as retaining. At the limits of this structure, Heidegger says, "Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end" (BT 252). *Dasein* exists as having been thrown into circumstances and as projecting ahead towards the possibilities afforded by those circumstances, all the way up to the ultimate possibility of death and the end of being. *Dasein* can authentically grasp itself as this structure, and in so doing, it can grasp itself as the totality of time or as eternity (if we can call it that), but this eternity is never something present. Rather, it is the ultimate horizon of nothingness that is constitutive of finite being.

By emphasizing kairological or messianic rather than chronological time, Agamben follows Heidegger in refraining from conceptualizing time as a succession of instants. Agamben, too, thinks time in terms of horizons. However, for Agamben, the horizon is not constituted by death, the end of being, or the nothingness of finitude. Rather, on Agamben's interpretation, Paul's messianic *ho nyn kairos*, "the time of the now," looks toward the horizon of the *parousia* of the Absolute. Kairological time, on Agamben's interpretation of Paul, is not constituted in the expectation of oblivion, but in the expectation of the full *parousia* of the Absolute that was announced in the messianic event. The precise meaning of this idea will become clearer as we look to the text.

#### ***4.1.1 The Future vs. the Kairological Now***

Agamben begins his discussion of time with the following observation: Paul typically opens his epistles with a preamble in which he presents himself as an apostle.<sup>20</sup> Agamben asks why Paul identifies as an apostle and not, for example, a prophet. The question appears all the more pertinent because Paul alters the scripture to the effect of opposing these two figures, the apostle and the prophet:

When Jeremiah says 'I made you a prophet at your mother's breast,' Paul, having just defined himself as an 'emissary [apostolos] not from human beings nor through a human being, but through Jesus Messiah and God the father,' cancels out 'prophet' and simply writes, 'who from my mother's womb had set me apart.' (TR 60).

The principal reason for their opposition, according to Agamben, is their opposing temporalities. On the one hand, "the prophet is essentially defined through his relation to the

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<sup>20</sup> *The Time that Remains* is, in fact, presented as a lengthy commentary on the preamble of the Letter to the Romans: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an *apostle*, separated to the gospel of God" (TR 6, emphasis mine).

future...the message is always about a time to come, a time not yet present” (TR 61). On the other hand, the time of the apostle “is no longer the future, but the present,” and this is why “Paul’s technical term of the messianic event is *ho nyn kairos*, ‘the time of the now’” (TR 61).

However, Agamben cautions against misinterpreting this distinction as a distinction between the prophet and the apocalyptic—i.e., between the figure who foretells of events that will come to pass in chronological time, and the figure “who sees the end fulfilled and describes what it sees” (TR 62). The apostle is not situated in ordinary time, like the prophet, but neither is the apostle situated in the *eschaton*, at the instant when time ends with the *parousia* of the Absolute.

By calling himself an apostle, therefore, Paul situates himself beyond the traditional rabbinic distinction “between two times or two worlds (*‘olamim*): the *‘olam hazzeh*, which designates the duration of the world from creation to its end, and the *‘olam habba*, the world to come, the atemporal eternity that comes after the end of the world” (TR 62). The apostle is neither interested in events that unfold in chronological time, nor in the moment in which time ends. Instead, the apostle is interested in “the time that contracts itself and begins to end (*ho kairos synestalmenos estin*; 1 Cor. 7:29), or if you prefer, the time that remains between time and its end” (TR 62). Comparing Paul with Hegel, we will see that the former is in full agreement with the Hegelian claim that the Absolute is *not* something to be expected in a future time or historical moment. Rather, the Absolute has arrived. Paul is also in agreement with the Hegelian claim that the eternity of the Absolute is not something that arrives after time. Rather, the eternity of the Absolute must be integrally related to time. We must now try to understand in greater detail what messianic time consists in.

### 4.1.2 Messianic Time

Agamben suggests that we might represent messianic time according to the model of Apelles' cut.<sup>21</sup> We could imagine a linear timeline, divided in two. One side represents chronological time, the '*olam hazzeh*, and the other side represents eternity, the end of time, the '*olam habba*. Messianic time divides the dividing line that separates these two times and "introduces a remainder [*resto*] into it that exceeds the division" (TR 64). Elaborating, Agamben writes, "messianic time is presented as a part of the secular eon that constitutively exceeds *chronos* and as a part of the eternity that exceeds the future eon" (TR 64). However, Agamben argues, a "general problem arises here regarding our representations of time, which are of a spatial order" (TR 65). By nature, space is simultaneity, while experience is dynamic and unfolds in time, as Hegel and Heidegger both rightly suggest. Therefore, Agamben proposes the following distinction, between a representation or an image of time, and the experience of time:

If you represent time as a straight line and its end as a punctual instant, you end up with something perfectly *representable*, but absolutely *unthinkable*. Vice-versa, if you reflect on a real experience of time, you end up with something *thinkable*, but absolutely *unrepresentable*. In the same manner, even though the image of messianic time as a segment situated between two eons is clear, it tells us nothing of the experience of the time that remains. (TR 64)

This distinction also has important implications for Hegel. The connection between time and its spatial determination is fundamental to Hegel's discussion in the *Philosophy of Nature*. As we saw, for Hegel, space and time mutually determine one another. Likewise, near the end of the *Phenomenology*, when Hegel writes that time "is represented to consciousness as empty

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<sup>21</sup> Agamben refers to a story, recounted by Pliny the Elder in *Natural History*, about a contest between two painters, Apelles and Protogenes, about who can draw a finer line. "Some of you will recall the story Pliny mentions concerning a contest between Apelles and Protogenes... Protogenes draws such a fine line that it seems not to have been drawn by the paintbrush of any human being. But Apelles, using his brush, divides his rival's line in two with an even finer line, cutting it lengthwise in half" (TR 50).



intuition,” and that consequently, “spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not *grasp* its pure concept, which is to say, as long as it does not erase time,” he is contrasting the real experience of time with its comprehended determination (*PS* ¶801). The succession of shapes of consciousness is merely intuited in time until Spirit comprehends itself as unfolding in time. In his early Jena drafts, Hegel explicitly equates the comprehension of time with spatial representation: “From the determination of the infinite, whose representation is time, the past has passed over into its opposite, the determination of self-identity to itself; and in this way, in the self-identity to itself whose moments now stand in front of each other, it is space.” He also refers to a “gallery of pictures” in which the various moments of consciousness are gathered together and represented simultaneously (*PS* ¶808). Just like time in the *Philosophy of Nature*, the time of experience mutually determined by representations of a spatial order. The difficulty lies in thinking the relation of between eternal contents of the Absolute—the “gallery of pictures”—and time, given that the picture gallery is not completed at the end of a temporal process of construction, nor does it exist outside of time.

To deal with this difficulty, Agamben borrows the concept of operational time from the French linguist Gustave Guillaume (Agamben will later assimilate operational time to Paul’s messianic time). According to Guillaume, “the human mind experiences time, but it does not possess the representation of it, and must, in representing it, take recourse to constructions of a spatial order” (*TR* 65). In the simplest form, then, time is represented as a line that extends back toward the past and extends forward toward the future, divided in the middle by the present. However, for the mind to represent time to itself in this manner, it must construct the representation in thought which is a temporal process. The time-image “presents time as though it were always already constructed, but does not show time in the act of being constructed in

thought” (TR 65). Therefore, “Guillaume defines ‘operational time’ as *the time the mind takes to realize a time-image*” (TR 66).

On the one hand, operational time entails a discrepancy in every attempt of thought to become conscious of itself:

It is as though man, insofar as he is a thinking and speaking being, produced an additional time with regard to chronological time, a time that prevented him from perfectly coinciding with the time out of which he could make images and representations. This ulterior time, nevertheless, is not another time, it is not a supplementary time added on from the outside to chronological time. Rather, it is something like a time within time—not ulterior but interior—which only measures my disconnection with regard to it, my being out of synch and in noncoincidence with regard to my representation of time. (TR 67)

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the representation of thought’s temporal process in which thought comes to comprehend itself. Taking the entire process at its object, thought becomes self-conscious. However, strictly speaking, thought is not the representation of the process, but the process itself which constructs the representation. The latter construction always happens in time, and for this reason, there is always some other time belonging to the structure of thought that its representation cannot fully capture. This additional time is part of the structure of thought, but it is not included in the picture gallery of Absolute Knowing, which means that the object of the latter knowledge does not fully coincide with thought itself. It is not the fulfillment of perfectly transparent self-consciousness. On the other hand, Agamben writes, “precisely because of this,” operational time

allows for the possibility of my achieving and taking hold of it. We may now propose our first definition of messianic time: messianic time is *the time that time takes to come to an end*, or, more precisely, the time we take to bring to an end, to achieve our representation of time. (TR 67)

In other words, I cannot attain self-consciousness in the representation that results from operational time. But I am self-conscious in the experience of bringing time to an end, that is, in the process of achieving my representation of it.

Whereas our representation of time, as the time *in which* we are, separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves—spectators who look at the time that flies without any time left, continually missing themselves—messianic time, an operational time in which we take hold of and achieve our representations of time, is the time *that* we ourselves are, and for this very reason, is the only real time, the only time that we have. (TR 68)

We can interpret Agamben's idea that we could be “impotent spectators of our lives” in terms of Hegel's problematic of time and eternity. If we are to comprehend eternity, then this comprehension must occur in time or be integrally related to time, in some sense, because experience and life themselves unfold in time. For this reason, if eternity (in the sense of the eternal contents of experience of the Hegelian Concept) were not integrally related to time, then we would merely be spectators of ourselves.<sup>22</sup> Our lives would be subordinate to principles that exist outside of time, or subordinate to principles that arise as ends to a temporal process, but we would not be able to grasp the truth of life or experience in time as it is lived.

## 4.2 Ontological Apparatus

In a chapter from the *Use of Bodies* entitled “Ontological Apparatus,” Agamben systematizes the reflection on time from *The Time that Remains*, touching on all the authors we have considered so far—mainly Aristotle, but also Hegel and Heidegger.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 7: “In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.” For an account of Agamben's relationship to Debord, see Mesing, “Guy Debord,” in *Agamben's Philosophical Lineage*.

### 4.2.1 *The Ontological Apparatus in Aristotle*

According to Agamben, the term ontological apparatus designates an operation that “divides and at the same time articulates being.” To explain what he means, Agamben takes as an example Aristotle’s division between primary and secondary essences. The primary essence is defined as “that which is not said of a subject nor in a subject” but is the subject of speech itself.<sup>23</sup> We designate primary essences by proper names and demonstrative adjectives: e.g., ‘Socrates,’ ‘this book.’ Secondary essences are the predicates that are applied to primary essences. For example, ‘Socrates’ belongs to the species ‘human’ and also to the genera of this species, ‘animal,’ ‘living being,’ etc. Primary and secondary essences constitute an ontological apparatus that divides and articulates being because it divides reality into a non-linguistic part about which we speak (primary essences) and a linguistic part that articulates the nature of the non-linguistic (secondary essences).

Agamben argues that this division has its origin in language and is essential to the structure of language: “the articulation worked by language always pre-sup-poses a relation of predication (general/particular) or of inherence (substance/accident) with respect to a subject, an existent that lies-under-and-at-the-base” (*UB* 117). Language subjectivates being—it “places” non-linguistic being “under” language, making it into the subject about which language speaks (Agamben hyphenates “pre-sup-pose”, to stress the etymological meaning, “to place under before”). The primary essence

is what is said neither on the presupposition of a subject nor in a subject, because it is itself the subject that is pre-sup-posed—as purely existent—as what lies under every predication... As soon as there is language, the thing named is presupposed as the non-linguistic or non-relational with which language has

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Categories*, 2a. Quoted in Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 115.

established its relation... That is to say, the onto-logical relation runs between the beings presupposed by language and their being in language. (*UB* 119)

An ontological apparatus tries to account for the division and articulation enacted by language: the division between being and saying, being and being-said, *ontos* and *logos*. “But in this way,” Agamben continues, “the distinction between *saying* and *being* remains uninterrogated, and it is the opacity of their relation that will be transmitted by Aristotle to Western philosophy” (*UB* 117). In other words, Aristotle uses the concepts of primary and secondary essence to account for the distinction, but he does not interrogate the distinction itself.

Hegel, Agamben writes, is perhaps the first to clearly understand and explicitly thematize this distinction.<sup>24</sup> Hegel focuses on consciousness rather than language, but the structure is the same. Being is divided between the subject of experience and its other—the object that it knows. Hegel, by means of the dialectic, makes this relation itself into an object of knowledge and thereby constitutes a shape of consciousness that knows it. As we have seen, this ultimately leads Hegel to grapple with the question of time. And, as we will see, Agamben shows that Aristotle was also led, in the same manner, to the question of time.

#### ***4.2.2 Time and the Ontological Apparatus***

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle expresses dissatisfaction with the division and articulation of being by way of primary and secondary essences, and he tries to grasp their unity. From a certain perspective, Hegel will simply repeat this gesture. Not content with the absolute division between being the reality of experience and the reality of the world that appears in that experience—not content to play one side against the other—Hegel tries to think both sides

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<sup>24</sup> “It is this presuppositional structure of language that Hegel—hence his success and his limits—will seek at the same time to capture and to liquidate by means of the dialectic.” Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 118.

together. According to Agamben, Aristotle does the same thing with his concept *to ti en einai*, which often translated into English as “essence” but literally means “what it was to be.”

That is to say, *to ti en einai* means (in the case of a human being); ‘what it was for X (for Socrates, for Emma) to be (Socrates, Emma).’ The formula expresses the *ousia* of a certain entity by transforming the question ‘what it was for this certain being to be?’ into the response ‘what it was for that certain being to be.’ (UB 123)

Agamben sees a profound significance in this construction; the past tense ‘was’ in *ti en einai* directs our attention to time: “the *identity* of the being that language has divided, if one attempts to think it, necessarily entails *time*. In the very gesture with which it divides being, language [or consciousness] produces time” (UB 125). Language and consciousness presuppose the non-linguistic or non-conscious object that they articulate, but they always presuppose them as past. The presuppositional structure entails time. Therefore, thinking the unity of language and the object it presupposes, between consciousness and its other, between being and being-said, or between *ontos* and *logos*, is always a question of thinking the unity of time and language or the unity of time and thought. This is why at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel claims: “just as the essence used to be expressed as the unity of thinking and extension, it could here be interpreted as the unity of thinking and time” (PS ¶803).

This unity is the eternal content of thought. Eternity is integrally related to time because at every instant, the presuppositional, ecstatic structure of language and thought presupposes a chronological past—i.e., it presupposes a time chronologically prior to the division between *ontos* and *logos*, and in the same gesture, it unifies them, comprehending time, “[seizing] hold of time, achieving our representation of time, making it end” (TR 100). This is not something that happens within a global temporal process that finds eternity at the end, nor is description of how temporal beings can relate themselves to an atemporal eternity. Rather time is integrally related

to eternity because, at every instant, the living, thinking, and speaking being ventures forth into the other, giving rise to time, and then returns to itself, bringing time to an end, all in a single gesture. The living, thinking, and speaking being, therefore, does not dwell at the end of time, in the parousia of the absolute, but dwells within the messianic time which is always *bringing* this *parousia* into being. The human being inhabits the time that remains between time and its end—the *ho nyn kairos*, the time of the now, the time that contracts itself and begins to end.

### 4.3 Agamben Contra Heidegger

At the end of his discussion on the ontological apparatus, Agamben explicitly distances himself from Heidegger.

Heidegger's attempt to grasp—in perfect coherence with precisely his Aristotelian model—being as time could not but fail... Heidegger affirms that time, as form of internal sense and pure autoaffection, is identified with the I. But precisely for this reason, the I cannot grasp itself in time. The time that, with space, was to render experience possible is itself inexperiencable; it only measures the impossibility of self-experience. Every attempt to grasp the I and time therefore entails a discrepancy. This discrepancy is bare life, which can never coincide with itself, is always in a certain sense missed and never truly lived. (*UB* 133)

Referring to his earlier work, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben identifies this “discrepancy” with bare life. We cannot give a complete analysis of the role that ‘bare life’ plays in Agamben’s thought, but a brief summary will help us understand Agamben’s meaning.

Agamben inherits the term ‘bare life’ from Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence,” which is concerned with the relationship between violence and law. Benjamin distinguishes between law-making violence and law-preserving violence. The former functions to “found and modify legal conditions,” and is exemplified by revolutionary strikes and military force.<sup>25</sup> The latter functions to preserve the law in place by suppressing competing powers. However, this renders the law

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 240.

ambiguous: law must be posited, but then to preserve itself it must turn against its own principle and suppress the power to posit the law. On its own terms, then, law undermines its foundation and “falls into decay.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, all law is subject to the superior law of historical change—the “dialectic” and the “law of oscillation” (*Schwankungsgesetz*) between lawmaking and law-preserving violence.<sup>27</sup> The oscillation between lawmaking and law-preserving violence constitutes a single paradigm that Benjamin calls “mythic violence,” and whose principle is “guilt and retribution.”<sup>28</sup> The constant throughout the historical oscillations between lawmaking and law-preserving violence is the presumption that “bare life” or “mere life” (*bloßes Leben*) is the “marked bearer of guilt.” Human life, as bare life, is always presumed to need law as a violent corrective.<sup>29</sup> By laying bare the structure of mythic law, however, Benjamin opens the possibility for a “pure immediate violence that might be able to call a halt to mythic violence” which he calls “divine violence.”<sup>30</sup> “Mythic violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake,” and therefore presumes mere life guilty; “divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living,” and therefore “‘expiates’ the guilt of mere life.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay. In our time, parliaments provide an example of this. They offer the familiar, woeful spectacle because they have not remained conscious of the revolutionary forces to which they owe their existence.” Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 244.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 251. “The law governing their oscillation (*Schwankungsgesetz*) rests on the circumstance that all law-preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the lawmaking violence it represents, by suppressing hostile counterviolence... This last until either new force or those earlier suppressed triumph over the hitherto lawmaking violence and thus found a new law, destined in its turn to decay.”

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 249.

<sup>29</sup> According to Benjamin, this is true even when law is established peacefully: “We are above all obligated to note that a totally nonviolent resolution of conflicts can never lead to a legal contract. For the latter, however peacefully it may have been entered into by the parties, leads finally to possible violence. It confers on each party the right to resort to violence in some form against the other, should he break the agreement” (243). Therefore, Benjamin writes, “the question poses itself whether there are no other than violent means for regulating conflicting human interests” (243).

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 249.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, 250.



Given the central role that guilt plays in Heidegger's "attempt to grasp... being as time," Agamben's comparison with bare life is helpful. Heidegger does not mean guilt in the ordinary sense, as something that we incur by breaching a moral or legal requirement (*BT* 283).<sup>32</sup> Rather, Heidegger is speaking of existential guilt—a guilt that *Dasein* bears simply by existing. "Dasein is essentially guilty—not just guilty *on some occasions*, and *on other occasions not*" (*BT* 353). As Hubert Dreyfus writes, existential guilt "reveals an essentially unsatisfactory structure definitive of even authentic Dasein. Even if Dasein has done nothing wrong there is something wrong with Dasein—its Being is not under its own power."<sup>33</sup> *Dasein* is guilty in the sense that it is essentially unsatisfactory, and it must assume responsibility for this fact. It is unsatisfactory because it "*is a nullity of itself*" (*BT* 284), or it is rooted in a "notness" (*BT* 285-6). Dasein's past is based on "notness" owing to its thrownness—it is always arbitrarily "thrown *into a world*," into circumstances that it did not choose (*BT* 192). And its future is based on "notness" owing to its projection—it always has to choose possibilities for its future under the horizon of inevitable death and without any ultimate grounds for choosing.<sup>34</sup> *Dasein* can never free itself from guilt, but can only accept its guilt "resolutely" and "authentically." It can take responsibility for its thrownness by projecting itself towards the distinctive possibilities for being that its circumstances afford—all the way up to the horizon of death—and thereby freely choosing its own life.<sup>35</sup> As Heidegger argues in Section 65 of *Being and Time*, the meaning of resoluteness is

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<sup>32</sup> "The idea of guilt must... be detached from relationship to any law or 'ought' such that by failing to comply with it one loads himself with guilt" (*BT* 283).

<sup>33</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 306.

<sup>34</sup> "The 'nothing' with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very *basis*, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death" (*BT* 308).

<sup>35</sup> "And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself" (*BT* 42-3).

temporality. Coming-towards or expecting one's distinctive possibilities for being is the "primordial phenomenon of the *future*" (BT 325). Likewise, "having-been" or retaining the circumstances into which one was thrown is the primordial phenomenon of the past (BT 327). "Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself'" (BT 329). Temporality, for Heidegger, becomes the meaning of Dasein's guilt, of its unsatisfactory character, and of the fact that *Dasein* is never fully at home within itself, but is always a "nullity of itself," and outside of itself. We can see, then, why Agamben identifies Heidegger's temporality with bare life. In either case, we have an entity that "cannot coincide with itself," that is essentially unsatisfactory, and that is, in this sense, guilty (UB 133). Heidegger's time, Agamben says, "only measures the impossibility of self-experience," foreclosing the possibility that the I could "grasp itself in time" (UB 133). For Heidegger, primordial time is constituted in the horizon of the absolute non-presence of guilt, death, and finitude. For Agamben, on the other hand, messianic time constitutes the single instantaneous gesture in which language, experience, and life venture forth into the other, producing time and then returning to presence with itself, bringing time to an end. In this manner, Agamben clarifies the relationship between time and eternity in Hegel while retaining the possibility of the fullness of the Absolute. Eternity is integrally related to time, as the eternal-instantaneous gesture in which Spirit ventures out into the realm of the other, falling into time, and returns to itself, erasing time.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Both Heidegger and Agamben share an anti-modernist skepticism about historical progressivism and the notion that the historical evolution of human normative structures could come to completion. For Heidegger, we would struggle in vain to articulate a set of normative principles that would be universally adequate to the needs and desires of human life, precisely because humans are the types of beings who must authentically choose their own guiding principles. For the same reason, humans are not subordinate to a process of historical development, but are free to authentically appropriate their own historical past, and to take responsibility for how it should bear on the future. For Heidegger, this claim goes hand in hand with a critique of the ordinary concept of time and the substitution of primordial temporality. Precisely because the human being is temporally outside of itself—retaining the past and expecting the future—it can historicize authentically. It can appropriate its historical heritage in the present and take responsibility for deciding how this heritage will bear on the future. Thus, the experience of eternity for Heidegger grasps the present together with the (absent) retained past and expected future. But for this reason, it forecloses the possibility of the full presence of the absolute. Instead, the present situation is, in Agamben’s words, “transformed into a task (*Aufgabe*)” (HS 151). The human being is constituted by an ontological guilt in the sense that it is constitutively out of place, its factual conditions are not under its own power, but it is instead tasked with assuming responsibility for them in the horizon of the authentic past and the authentic future.

Agamben thinks this view has dire historical and political consequences. In fact, he argues, it can “shed light on the scandal of twentieth-century philosophy: the relation between Martin Heidegger and Nazism.” (HS 151). “Hitler’s philosophy,” writes Agamben, is “founded

on an absolutely unconditional assumption of the historical, physical, and material situation, which is considered as an indissoluble cohesion of spirit and body and nature and culture” (HS 151).

Therefore, Agamben shares Heidegger’s anti-modern skepticism in the sense that (1) he rejects the idea that there are atemporal normative structures proper to human life that exist eternally, outside of time, and (2) he rejects the idea that such normative structures could arise at the end of a temporal process. But he also rejects the idea that humanity is defined by existential guilt, that it must accept its guilt authentically, anxiously assuming responsibility for its destiny at every moment. Rather, for Agamben, humanity is without a historical task. Messianic time is not grounded in the nothingness of the past and the future, nor in the infinite task of taking responsibility for our lives in the face of that nothingness. Rather, messianic time is the time in which human praxis becomes transparent to itself, recognizing itself as temporal while creatively appropriating that temporality, grasping it in its fullness, and therefore, “making it end” (*TR* 100).

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