

Heidegger and ‘the concept of time’

LILIAN ALWEISS

ABSTRACT

This article explores the extent to which Heidegger promises a novel understanding of the concept of time. Heidegger believes that the tradition of philosophy was mistaken in interpreting time as a moveable image of eternity. We are told that this definition of time is intelligible only if we have eternity as a point of departure to understand the meaning of time. Yet, Heidegger believes that we are barred from such a viewpoint. We can only understand the phenomenon of time from our mortal or finite vantage point. Contrary to the tradition of philosophy, Heidegger argues that time does not find its meaning in eternity, time finds its meaning in death. The article takes Heidegger’s position to task. It argues that it is not evident why Heidegger’s account of time should in any way be superior to the traditional conception of time. Drawing on the criticism raised by Lévinas and Blanchot, that death – like eternity – is never at our disposal to understand the phenomenon of time, it shows that although Heidegger is aware that death is never an event in our life, he nonetheless claims that it is the awareness of our finitude that informs our understanding of time. Yet if Heidegger does not see it as a problem that death is never at our disposal, then it becomes questionable whether Heidegger’s initial critique launched against the tradition of philosophy still holds, because it is no longer evident why it matters that eternity, as a point of departure, is never at our disposal to understand the phenomenon of time.

Key words Blanchot, death, Heidegger, Kant, time

In memory of Marek Schmidt 1963–1997

If time finds its meaning in eternity, then it must be understood starting from eternity. The point of departure and path of this inquiry are thereby indicated in advance: from eternity to time. This way of posing the question is fine, provided that we have the aforementioned point of departure at our disposal, that is, that we are acquainted with eternity and adequately understand it.¹

With these words Martin Heidegger began his lecture on *The Concept of Time* which he delivered to the Marburg Theological Society in 1924. Here Heidegger questions the possibility of us mortals ever having the starting point of eternity at our disposal. He asks whether time can find its meaning in eternity. Yet should we be barred from eternity as a point of departure, then the question arises from which other place than the position of eternity can we understand the meaning of time? In this article I should like to explore the significance of this question and show the extent to which it promises another Copernican Revolution that is not only human but also essentially mortal.

The aim of this article is to make sense of these opening lines. The first part expounds the extent to which Heidegger suggests a radical departure from the traditional conception of time. The novelty of Heidegger's position is that he shows that time does not find its meaning in eternity but that time finds its meaning in death. Time 'is' only for a being that lives with an awareness of its own mortality. The second part shows the extent to which Heidegger's account of time has been under severe attack. The main concern articulated by thinkers varying from Sartre to Derrida is that Heidegger tries to 'domesticate' or 'humanize' death. He thereby fails to see that death is never in our grasp. Rather 'death comes from outside and transforms us into the outside' (Sartre, 1969: 545). Should this critique be valid, then Heidegger seems to fall prey to the very same critique he has launched against the tradition of philosophy. For it suggests that death, like eternity, is never at our disposal to understand the meaning of time. Part three shows that this criticism raised against Heidegger misses the significance of Heidegger's position. Heidegger never refers to the 'actuality' or the 'event' of death but to death as a mode of being. Yet, if it poses no problem to Heidegger that death is not at our disposal, then it becomes even more questionable whether Heidegger's initial objections raised against the traditional conception of time are still valid. Hence, it seems no longer evident why we should be in any way troubled by the fact that eternity as a point of departure is never at our disposal to understand the meaning of time. It thus seems questionable whether Heidegger's account of time is necessarily superior to the traditional conception of time.

THE CONCEPT OF TIME

It is only possible to appreciate Heidegger's remark if we come to understand the traditional conception of time which has not only informed the tradition of philosophy but also our everyday understanding of time. By expressing doubt as to whether we can ever take eternity as our point of departure to understand the meaning of time, Heidegger questions the whole tradition of Western thought which, ever since Plato, has viewed time as 'a movable image of Eternity' (Plato, 1929: 37d). The tradition regards time as a linear series of 'now' points that can be measured. Time is thereby interpreted as a modification of presence. We call 'past' what is no longer present and 'future' what is not yet present.

The present is the nodal moment which makes past and future intelligible. The tradition has taught us that this nodal point – the present – can never be a moment of time because it makes the flow of time possible in the first place. This 'stable indeed non-flowing or timeless moment' from which time moves away the tradition has called eternity.² To follow Saint Augustine: 'eternity, in which there is neither past nor future, determines both past and future time' (Saint Augustine, 1961: Book XI, §11, 262). Time is thus nothing but a moving image (*εἰκῶν*) of eternity.

Such a conception of time adheres to a vision of philosophy that seeks to transcend the sensible world. It sets out upon the pure path of light in order to disclose the eternal realm of truths which is non-changing and immutable. Unlike the world of appearances, the tradition argues truths do not change; they are timeless. Philosophers thus understand eternity and time as features of the ideal and phenomenal world respectively. For example, in the *Timeaeus*, Plato refers to the sensible world as a world of becoming which is visible, temporal and tangible, and to the intelligible world as a world of Being that is unchanging (though living), self-existent and fully present,³ and Parmenides argues for a timeless nature of being that lies behind the flow of time (B8.1–22). If time is an image of eternity, in an analogous way in which the sensible world is an image of the intelligible world, then the best way to understand the image is first to understand the original. Philosophy thus teaches us that it can find its adequate beginning only if it transcends the world of change in order to determine the intelligible world that has made the appearance of the sensible world possible in the first place. For example, Plato seeks to transport our imagination to a point 'before the beginning of years when time was not' in order to understand the 'original' that has made the moving image of time possible, namely timelessness. The tradition of Western metaphysics can thus be characterized by its desire to overcome time and, indeed, mortality. The aim is to say farewell to mortality and open up a vista to eternity and to an eternal life (*αἰῶν*) (Plato, 1929: 31c, 1–2) where everything is wholly present to itself and, therefore, without duration and extension.⁴

HEIDEGGER'S DEPARTURE

When Heidegger questions whether it is possible to derive the meaning of time from eternity, he thus questions whether it is ever possible to say farewell to mortality. We humans never experience eternity as such. What defines us humans says Heidegger is our finitude, indeed the very fact that we are temporal. We can never divorce ourselves from our temporal existence: 'eternity as a point of departure is never at our disposal'. The only viewpoint that is at our disposal is the temporal one. Hence, time, indeed even eternity, can only be understood from time. It is from our temporal vantage point alone that we can understand the meaning of time.

In a sense Heidegger appears to adhere to Kant's so-called Copernican Turn, since it is Kant who has illustrated already the impossibility of moving from the human perspective (sensible intuition) to the viewpoint of the eternal (intellectual intuition).⁵ Indeed, in the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' Kant explicitly states that time (and space) defines the human world and does not pertain to the thing-in-itself.⁶ 'Time is not something which exists of itself' (Kant, 1933: B49/A33). 'Time is therefore a purely subjective condition of our (human) intuition . . . and in itself, apart from the subject, is nothing' (Kant, 1933: B51/A35). Apart from the human subject, time is nothing. Thus, it would appear that Heidegger's first few lines of *The Concept of Time* reflect the Kantian project.

However, we can also provide another reading which is diametrically opposed. We can interpret Heidegger's question as to whether it is possible to 'move from eternity to time' as being deeply suspicious of Kant's project. Despite Kant's claim that 'apart from the [human] subject, [time] is nothing', he still takes eternity as his point of departure in order to understand the phenomenon of time. Kant thus appears – even though he turns philosophy into a human enterprise – to adhere still to Plato who calls time 'the image of eternity' (cf. Plato, 1929: 37d); the eternal here being quite specifically an eternal image, that of the unity of number.

This is exemplified in Kant's treatment of the transcendental unity of apperception. According to Kant, we need to differentiate between consciousness in time (empirical), and transcendental consciousness which is a *numerically identical* 'I think'.⁷ Any synthesizing presupposes a consciousness of our synthesizing activity, a consciousness that is distinct from my empirical self that changes through time. There must be an 'I think' that can accompany all my representations, even the representation of myself in time.⁸ The 'I think' is never something represented but the formal structure that makes it possible for anything to be represented. It is 'outside' space and time in so far as the 'I think' cannot be an intuition in me.⁹ This *logical* subject, which can only be posited, remains constant.

Kant in this respect adheres to the tradition. Change is understood in

relation to non-change. It is from the viewpoint of the eternal, the *nunc stans* (the standing now), that we understand time.¹⁰ It is the numerically identical now of the 'I think' in accordance to which our representations are organized. The flux of time and change is measured against the 'highest point (*höchste Punkt*)' (Kant, 1933: B134), an analytic (cf. Kant, 1933: B134) transcendental unity of apperception. This highest point lies outside of time and allows us to measure time; and undoubtedly what lies outside of time is timeless.¹¹

While the significance of Kant's position lies in the fact that he realizes that time is essentially human, it falls short of answering our question: namely, from what place other than eternity can we understand the meaning of time? As the highest principle of organization it is still the eternal now-point of the 'I think' which guarantees both the difference and the unity of our experience. What has come to light is that if Heidegger's claim is justified that we cannot understand time from the viewpoint of eternity, then we need to think the place that is revealed through the disappearance of such an assumed beginning.

Contrary to the tradition passed down from Parmenides to Husserl,¹² Heidegger wishes to show that time cannot find its meaning in eternity or number; rather, time finds its meaning in time – to be more precise, in *Dasein's* originary temporality. Indeed, Heidegger goes so far as to assert that '*Time itself is meaningless; time is temporal*' (Heidegger, 1992: 21E). Heidegger here not only argues that the meaning of time does not derive from eternity, but that the concept of eternity and, indeed, presence itself is a derivative of temporality.¹³ Indeed, we learn from Augustine already *why* from the viewpoint of the eternal, time is nothing. Only for us humans does time pass. For God, years neither go nor come – they are 'completely present . . . all at once, because they are at a permanent standstill' (Saint Augustine, 1961: Book XI, §13, 263). From the viewpoint of the eternal, everything is eternally present: there is no room for possibility. For God there is no time in so far as there is no (desirable) possibility that is not always already actual if 'he' or 'she' wills it. Yet if this is so, then Heidegger believes that Augustine's postulate that time is an image of eternity no longer holds. For Augustine has shown convincingly that for God there is no time. This insight should have led him to realize that the issue is not merely *that* we do not have eternity as a point of departure at our disposal but more importantly that time can *never* find its meaning in eternity.¹⁴

The primary question is thus not 'what is time? . . . [but] Who is time?' (Heidegger, 1992: 22E). Namely, we first need to ask what kind of being, other than the eternal, can understand the concept of time? We soon come to realize that time is intelligible only for a being that lives with an understanding of a limit. For when we think of time, we think of it in terms of restriction. As Shakespeare said in *Twelfth Night*, 'Youth's a stuff will not endure'

(Shakespeare, 1947: Act II, Scene iii, line 52), or as we say in everyday speech, 'we cannot turn the clock back'. These expressions intimate that we conceive time in terms of a limit. As time passes, so do our possibilities. The passing of time and indeed such restrictions are thus meaningful only for a being that lives with an understanding of a limit.

Heidegger now argues that only we human living beings – whom Heidegger calls 'Dasein' – live with such an understanding. For what distinguishes us from other living beings is that our entire existence is informed by the fact that we are mortal.¹⁵ What defines our very existence, indeed, what gives the sum of Descartes' '*cogito sum*' meaning is that it is '*sum moribundus*' (Heidegger, 1985: 437). We humans are destined for death and Heidegger believes that this ultimate limit or end makes all possibilities *eo ipso* time intelligible. Death here should not be understood as 'something' outstanding; rather, we humans understand our relation to death as something that we live. 'As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die' (Heidegger, 1962: §48, 245). We live our not-yet – that is to say, our end – and it is because our life is defined by death that we have an understanding of a limit and thus time. It is the certainty of death, the certainty of finitude, that opens up possibilities and thus time. Possibilities and time are constitutively determined through finitude. Time 'is' only because we are mortal.

In this sense Heidegger has managed to explain *why* time is essentially human and why, in itself, apart from us humans, it is nothing. '*Time itself* is meaningless; time is temporal' (Heidegger, 1992: 21E). Only because we are finite is there something called time. Heidegger even goes so far as to argue that we should not regard time as a linear series of now-points. Time does not originate in the present; rather, our understanding of presence and thus eternity itself is derivative. To follow Heidegger: "The "now" is not pregnant with the "not-yet-now", but the Present arises from the future' (Heidegger, 1962: §81, 427). Time is not an image of eternity, but time finds its image in our finitude. The meaning of time does not lie in eternity which is beyond our grasp. *Rather it lies in an end, and that end lies within our grasp.*

HEIDEGGER'S RIVAL METAPHYSICS

Blanchot believes that this inevitably leads Heidegger to express a rival metaphysics. By doing away with the infinite instance which is the condition of possibility for all being and time, Heidegger radicalizes our notion of freedom and responsibility. The very fact that 'time apart from Dasein's ordinary temporality is nothing' indicates that it is we who are responsible for giving meaning to time. This responsibility is reflected through Dasein's finitude.

Indeed, according to Heidegger, in our everyday we only have an inauthentic understanding of possibilities and thus time. We live in the belief

that what we cannot do now we can do tomorrow; we thus live as if time were infinite. However, this expresses nothing other than a recoil from an authentic understanding of time. The open-endedness of our everyday possibilities is made possible only by the radically closed and certain 'possibility' of death as the horizon of finite existence. Heidegger thus calls upon us to confront death as our ownmost possibility. Death forces us to acknowledge that what matters to us about our existence is not just specific possibilities but the totality of all these possibilities, our very existence (i.e. our not-yet). It is only by taking our mortality and thus finitude seriously that we are able to gain an authentic understanding of time.

Blanchot thus believes that *Being and Time* can be read as the desire to turn the fear of death into a passion. It calls upon us to become truly mortal. We should no longer regard death as a given state of affairs, rather as our task. To follow Blanchot: 'Death, in the human perspective, is not a given, it must be achieved'. It is our task to face death, 'a task, one which we take up actively, one which becomes the source of our activity and mastery. . . . [The human being] makes his death; he makes himself mortal and in this way gives himself the power of a maker and gives to what he makes its meaning and its truth' (Blanchot, 1989: 96). So long as we treat death as a given state of affairs we fail to realize that we are responsible for our own time and being. To truly philosophize and think is to have courage 'for anxiety in the face of death' (Heidegger, 1962: §51, 254). This concern for death, this awakening that keeps vigil over death, is another name for freedom.

The reign of responsibility and freedom consists in the triumph over death, in other words, the triumph over life. Indeed, Blanchot compares this heroic triumph over life and death with the character of Kirilov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Devil*. Kirilov convinces himself that we can only be true atheists and prove the non-existence of God by taking our own life. Kirilov believes that we are only truly human if we realize that it is we who are responsible not only for our life but also for our death. To follow Blanchot:

Kirilov's suicide thus becomes the death of God. Hence his strange conviction that this suicide will inaugurate a new era, that it will mark the turning point in the history of humanity, and that, precisely, after him men will no longer need to kill themselves. His death, by making death possible, will have liberated life and rendered it wholly human. (Blanchot, 1989: 97)

To all appearances his plan is that of a calm and collected rationalist. If men do not kill themselves, he thinks, it is because they are afraid of death; fear of death is the origin of God. (Blanchot, 1989: 98)

For Blanchot, Heidegger's and Kirilov's conception of time overlap here. We only grasp our life and are truly responsible for our life once we have grasped

our death. In this way Heidegger and Kirilov have provided us with an answer to the question which initiated our investigation. Time does not find its meaning in eternity but in death. If we truly wish to be human and affirm an atheist (Kirilov) or finite (Heidegger) conception of time, then we need to realize that we ourselves are responsible for our own life and, indeed, for our own death. Yet according to Blanchot, in a curious way this solution is not as radical as it may appear. For rather than proclaiming the death of God, the desire to take over the task of God still remains. Heidegger merely suggests a rival metaphysics by disclosing our creatureliness or finitude without the infinite instance that gives meaning to us humans. The aim is to overcome nihilism within nihilism by positively affirming our finitude.

Not only this but, according to Blanchot, Heidegger, paradoxically, still adheres to the tradition in so far as being-toward-death is nothing but being-toward-presence. Time remains the image of eternity. To quote Blanchot: 'He who kills himself is the great affirmer of the *present*. I want to kill myself in an "absolute" instant, the only one which will not pass and will not be surpassed. Death, if it arrived at the time we choose, would be an apotheosis of the *instant*; the instant in it would be that very flash of brilliance which mystics speak of. And surely because of this, suicide retains the power of an exceptional affirmation' (Blanchot, 1989: 103). Suicide is an ecstatic assertion of absolute freedom; an almost mystical death which allows the suicide to gather time into the living presence of a 'now-point'. At the moment of death, the suicide brings the flow of time to a halt and no longer needs to fear an unknown future and death, or indeed God.

In this way, Heidegger's position has Platonic overtones. In the end, death is just another name for timelessness and, indeed, eternity. Authentic existence is described as having the courage 'for anxiety in the face of death' (Heidegger, 1962: §51, 254). This consists in the triumph over death, in other words the triumph over life. The philosopher triumphs over death in the sense that she does not run away from it, but looks it straight in the face. This reflects Plato's contention that philosophy is nothing other than the practising of 'being in a state of death: or is it not this the practice of death?' (Plato, 1914: 80–1). It 'cannot be born from anything else than death' (Plato, 1914: 77c). Heidegger's philosophy thus turns out to be once again nothing but a *philo-thanatos*. As Plato argues in the *Phaedo*: the task of philosophy is to charm away the fear of death (cf. Plato, 1914: 77e). This is reflected in Heidegger's position: the triumph over life lies in cultivating what Heidegger himself called an 'impassioned [*leidenschaftlich*] freedom toward death' (Heidegger, 1962: §53, 266). By mortalizing philosophy, Heidegger has thereby curiously turned it immortal again.

Blanchot, moreover, believes that this 'militant atheism was a mad dream' (Blanchot, 1989: 101). In the same way as time cannot find its meaning in eternity, time cannot find its meaning in death. According to Blanchot, we

neither have death nor eternity at our disposal. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein already observed that: 'One's death is not an event in one's life – not even the last one' (Wittgenstein, 1963: 6.4311ff). We cannot face and master death. Death is never *my* possibility because death is the moment when the 'I' and its possibilities disappear. I can never consciously will myself to be no longer conscious. Death, like sleep, overcomes us; it is a moment over which we have no control. This is reflected in Emmanuel Lévinas' remark that: 'Death is . . . never assumed, it comes. Suicide is a contradictory concept' (Lévinas, 1994: 73). It is contradictory since we are trying to show mastery at a moment when the subject loses its very mastery as a subject; when 'we are no longer *able to be able*' (Lévinas, 1994: 74). Rather than being the possibility of the impossibility of existence, death is nothing other than the '*impossibility of possibility*' (cf. Blanchot, 1989: 100).

It is impossible for us humans to ever grasp our own death. Death is always something that happens to us, it cannot be willed. Death will always be other to our projects. Death is a stranger to the world and remains foreign to all achievement. Death is never my time or my project – it is without relation to me. Death must remain other to us humans. If this is the case, then we humans never have death at our disposal to understand the meaning of time. Just as we could not move from eternity to time, so we cannot move from death to time – for in neither case do we have a point of departure at our disposal. Death 'marks the end of the subject's virility and heroism' (Lévinas, 1994: 72).

HEIDEGGER'S APORIA

What then are we to make of Heidegger's account of finitude? Are we to accept it as a flawed account in so far as it misses what is essential, i.e. the fact that death is always other to us humans? To dispose of Heidegger's position is not that simple. Curiously, in line with Blanchot, Heidegger emphasizes that death is never something that can be *mastered*.¹⁶ 'Death is not something not yet present-at-hand, nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding . . . Death is something that stands before us – something impending' (Heidegger, 1962: §50, 250). Death is not a work that can be performed or mastered. Death is not at our disposal. Indeed, Heidegger agrees with Blanchot that suicide deprives Dasein 'of the very ground for an existing Being-toward-death' (Heidegger, 1962: §53, 261).

Heidegger thereby presents an ambiguous position. It is certainly the case that 'temporality arises out of the future'.¹⁷ However, the very fact that we humans are futural should not be understood as an anticipation of actuality. Like Blanchot and Lévinas, Heidegger argues that we can never experience our own death, for in the moment of actual death, we are no longer. The future orientation should never be understood as an anticipation of actuality.

Death can *never be turned actual*. Indeed, being-towards-death should not be understood as being-towards-perfection; the future is not a moment of fulfilment towards which we aspire. We do not lack anything for which we seek fulfilment, death is not the final work. Rather it is the unmasterable 'work' that can never be performed nor avoided. It grounds the possibility of all our possible works (ontic actualities). It is the end that allows us to grasp the unity (*Einheit*) of possibilities.

In this manner Heidegger wishes to grasp possibilities not in terms of a *telos* or final work but *qua* possibilities. By affirming our finitude, the aim is not to hasten our demise, to brood or to sink into a kind of self-pity. Rather being-toward-death should be understood as a forerunning and as an anticipation of the ultimate possibility of the impossibility of existence. It grounds the possibility of all possibilities. For what Dasein grasps is the limit situation which lets beings, entities, indeed any actuality be. It provides the horizon within which beings in the world can be encountered. Death thereby is not something that will happen some time in the future, but it is 'now', it is the future orientation as horizon of possibility. It grounds the possibility of all possibilities without ever becoming actual.

Yet unlike Blanchot, this does not lead Heidegger to call death a stranger to this world. Rather Heidegger still holds on to the belief that death, in its impossibility of ever becoming actual, allows us to grasp our finitude. It is exactly *because* death can never be turned actual that it is possible to become sovereignly mortal. We thus do not move from a final work, death, to time but from death as the ultimate *possibility of all possibilities* to time. The beginning is not death but the *potentiality* of death. What Heidegger describes is our attitude, the manner in which we relate to death as an ultimate possibility but not the actual demise as such. It thus appears, as Jacques Derrida observes, when Blanchot argues for the impossibility of dying, 'he says at once the same thing and something completely different from Heidegger' (Derrida, 1993: 77).

However, the paradox posed by Blanchot is thereby not evaded, rather it is intensified. Heidegger finds himself between a rock and a hard place. If Heidegger believes that death can be mastered he falls prey to Blanchot's critique; if, however, he believes that it cannot be mastered, then it becomes questionable whether we can ever take death as a *point of departure* to understand the meaning of time.¹⁸ After all, our whole investigation endeavours to find nothing more than an adequate and, indeed, a human point of departure that allows us to understand time.

The fundamental problem is – strange as this may sound – that there 'is' no death in *Being and Time*. We can experience another person's demise but not his or her death – in the same way as we can only experience ourselves as dying, as comporting ourselves toward death, but cannot experience ourselves as undergoing death.¹⁹ The paradoxical position is thus that we can

grasp the certainty of death even though we never die. What Heidegger is trying to articulate is the *impossibility of ever experiencing our own death*; we only die for others – but this death is not the ultimate impossibility of our existence but the experience of someone going out of existence while we continue to be. The death of the other does not allow us to understand our life – it is not the ultimate limit that makes time intelligible (cf. Heidegger, 1962: §51). Heidegger can therefore never call death something actual but only our 'way of being (manner to be)' – it has to be understood adverbially and transitively as our movement toward our nullity which makes all being intelligible. However, if this is the case then, as Derrida observes, 'there is no scandal whatsoever in saying that Dasein remains immortal in its originary being-to-death' (Derrida, 1993: 39–40). We never die; we never live our end.

The paradoxical position is that we can only grasp its possibilities *qua* possibilities in view of an end, namely the certainty of our own death. Yet as Derrida and Lévinas have shown, I can never be certain of my end; the death of the other is my only experience of death.²⁰ To follow Derrida: 'The death of the other, this death of the other in "me", is fundamentally the only death that is named in the syntagm "my death"' (Derrida, 1993: 76). Heidegger, however, believes that it is possible to be authentically certain of death even though we never die. It is the certainty that death is possible at any moment. This despite the fact that we comport ourselves toward an end that has never been and can never be. It remains an end informing any instance of our life without ever being actual. An end that is without precedent.²¹

Heidegger accepts the impossibility for us to ever achieve death – we never die – yet he regards this impossibility as the possibility of all possibilities. Should this be so, then Heidegger's initial endeavour to seek a beginning that lies at our disposal to understand the meaning of time is questionable. For time can no longer be understood in view of an end but only in view of something *infinitely* impending of which we know nothing. However, how can we take death as our point of departure to understand the meaning of time if death remains *infinitely* impending (of which we know nothing)? How can this 'end' which never happens be the point of our departure? We seem to have gone full circle. Heidegger appears to leave us with the same aporia which initiated our investigation. Initially Heidegger implores us to reconsider the meaning of time by questioning whether eternity, as a point of departure, is ever at our disposal. We have now come to see that this approach itself renders suspect the aspiration to understand the meaning of time through death. For death, like eternity, is never at our disposal. In questioning the traditional conception of time, Heidegger unwittingly exposes a fragility in his account of temporality as finite. For as long as Heidegger searches for a point of departure that lies at our disposal, he deprives us of the significance of the fact that death remains elusive. Maybe we should abandon the desire to find 'a point of departure that is at our disposal' to

understand the meaning of time. Yet once we do this, the reasons for doubting whether time is an image of eternity have been rendered suspect.

It seems we are not much wiser than Saint Augustine was 600 years ago:

I confess to you, Lord, that I still do not know what time is. Yet I confess too that I do know that I am saying this in time, that I have been talking about time for a long time, and that this long time would not be a long time if it were not for the fact that time has been passing all the while. How can I know this, when I do not know what time is? Is it that I do know what time is, but do not know how to put what I know into words? I am in a sorry state, for I do not even know what I do not know! (Saint Augustine, 1961: Book XI, §25, 273)

NOTES

I should like to thank Steven Kupfer and Felix Ó Murchadha for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

- 1 Heidegger, 1992: 1E [Wenn die Zeit ihren Sinn findet in der Ewigkeit, dann muss sie von daher verstanden werden. Damit sind Ausgang und Weg dieser Nachforschung vorgezeichnet: von der Ewigkeit zur Zeit. Diese Fragestellung ist in Ordnung unter der Voraussetzung, daß wir über den vorgenannten Ausgang verfügen, also die Ewigkeit kennen und hinreichend verstehen].
- 2 According to Richard Sorabji the first clear articulation of the classical doctrine of eternity as an eternal 'now' ($\nu\upsilon\nu$) and always ($\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota$) was first voiced by Plotinus. Cf. Sorabji, 1983: Chs 8 and 9.
- 3 Plato, 1929: 30c–31b. The interesting aspect of the Platonic doctrine of eternity is that presence is not regarded as inert but as living ($\acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$), even though it is without time. It involves no tenses other than the present (cf. Plato, 1929: 38ab). Eternity for Plato thus should stand in relation to the intelligible cosmos just as time stands in relation to the sensible one (cf. Plato, 1929: 38c1–2).
- 4 There are no distinct moments that can be measured 'in' time.
- 5 '... we can never transcend the limits of our possible experience' (Kant, 1933: B xix).
- 6 This leads thinkers such as Trendelenburg to argue: 'Even if we concede the argument that space and time are demonstrated to be subjective conditions which, in us, precede perceptions and experience, there is still no word of proof to show that they cannot at the same time be objective forms' (Adolf Trendelenburg: *Logische Untersuchungen* [Leipzig, 1862] cited by Allison, 1976: 313–14). Indeed, it is one thing to say that we can only understand time from our human perspective, i.e. as a form of sensible intuition, and another to argue that time does not exist apart from the subject. To know that things in themselves are not in time is after all to know something about them. However, Kant's position can be salvaged from this critique since as a form of *human* sensibility time cannot pertain to things themselves, for by definition things themselves describe things considered

as apart from all relation to the conditions of human sensibility, i.e. space and time. 'We deny to time all claim to absolute reality; that is to say, we deny that it belongs to things absolutely, [as their condition or property] independently of any reference to the form of our sensible intuition' (Kant, 1933: B52/A35). Cf. Allison, 1976: 313–21.

- 7 It is important to note that inner sense itself, the awareness of myself in time is not due to a presupposition of an absolute time. Rather the very fact that we have a sense of the duration of inner time is dependent on outer sense. The awareness of myself as existing in time *presupposes* something permanent. Whatever is permanent cannot have originated *in me*, for it makes *me* possible: 'This permanent cannot, however, be something in me, since it is only through this permanent that my existence in time can itself be determined' (Kant, 1933: B275; cf. BXXXIX), since time itself (inner sense) has no manifold. This has been shown well by Krüger, 1950: 884 ff. Cf. also Allison (1983: 258–9). It is Jonathan Vogel who does not accept this line of interpretation by arguing that inner sense has its own pure manifold (cf. Vogel, 1993). The argument Vogel provides, however, indicates a conflation of what Kant calls inner sense and Time and subjectivity as such. For Vogel it is deeply problematic 'to see why the self, unlike outer things, has to be represented (if we can talk that way) as a bare substratum rather than as a fully-fledged object' (Vogel, 1993: 881). Yet this statement alone conflates the substratum of the self with the empirical self which can be represented; the differentiation between the substratum of the self and the self which can be known in time. We need to distinguish between time which determines my empirical being (*ich bin in der Zeit* [I am in time]), and the temporal relation to myself (*die Zeit in mir* [the time in me]) which has its own sense of permanence. The latter refers to a permanence 'as substratum (as permanent form of inner intuition)' (Kant, 1933: B224). This is well illustrated by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, 1964: esp. IV, 74–8. The representation of my self in time is guaranteed only by outer sense, which precedes – and thus does not originate from – inner sense: 'Thus perception of this permanent is possible only through a *thing* outside me and not through the mere *representation* of a thing outside me' (Kant, 1933: B275). Hereby Cartesian dualism is refuted, because before I know that I exist in time, I need to know that there is a world. Knowledge of the world makes possible the representation of my self.
- 8 To follow Kant, this 'consciousness in itself is not a representation distinguishing a particular object, but a form of representation' (Kant, 1933: B404).
- 9 'But this permanent cannot be an intuition in me. For all grounds of determination of my existence which are to be met with in me are representations; and as representations themselves require a permanent distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and so my existence in the time wherein they change, may be determined' (Kant, 1933: Bxli n.1 and B275 n.1).
- 10 Indeed, Heidegger maintains that 'ever since Aristotle all discussions of the concept of time have clung *in principle* to the Aristotelian definitions: . . . Time is what is "counted". . . . The world-time is sighted in this manner in the use of clocks . . .' (Heidegger, 1962: §81, p. 421. SuZ).
- 11 The 'I think' still adopts an absolute and constitutive beginning. This leads thinkers like Gilles Deleuze to observe: 'God survives as long as the I enjoys a

- subsistence, a simplicity and an identity which express the entirety of its resemblance to the divine' (Deleuze, 1994: 86).
- 12 Cf. Alweiss, 1999a and 1999b.
 - 13 It is important to note that Heidegger thereby does not wish to jettison theological concerns; rather the aim is to make the question of the eternal more difficult: 'The philosopher does not believe. If the philosopher asks about time, then he has resolved to *understand time in terms of time* or in terms of the *ἀεί*, which looks like eternity but proves to be a mere derivative of being temporal' (Heidegger, 1992: 1–2). It is not the infinite instance or presence which is the condition of possibility for all being and time; rather Dasein itself makes possible time and *eo ipso* presence and eternity.
 - 14 I am grateful to Felix Ó Murchadha who has pointed out to me that the translation 'point of departure' is deceptive. Heidegger uses the term *Ausgang* which refers much more to the beginning of a path or way. It is only from this perspective, namely, the manner we are under way, that the question of time can arise.
 - 15 Only we human living beings – whom Heidegger calls 'Dasein' – live with such an understanding. Other living beings go in or out of existence. Although they perish (*verenden*), yet this end does not determine them intrinsically. A human being (Dasein), in turn, never perishes but demises (*ableben*). That it can demise is, however, only as long as it is dying (*solange es stirbt*) (Heidegger, 1962: §49, 247). It is important to note that, for Heidegger, to be mortal implies to be fundamentally human. Without an understanding of our finitude there 'is' no time.
 - 16 'Manifestly Being-towards-death, which is now in question, cannot have the character of concernfully Being out to get itself actualised. For one thing, death as possible is not something possible which is ready to hand or present at hand, but a possibility of Dasein's being. So to concern oneself with actualising what is thus possible would have to signify, "bringing about one's demise". But if this were done, Dasein would deprive itself of the very ground for an existing Being-toward-death' (Heidegger, 1962: §53, 261).
 - 17 'The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future' (Heidegger, 1962: §65, 329).
 - 18 Dasein never perishes but can demise, however, only so long as it is dying, i.e. so long as it is being toward death. Cf. Heidegger, 1962: §52, 259.
 - 19 The demise of the other merely signifies an exit out of life – but life still continues. Thus it does not allow us to grasp Being-in-the-world in its unity.
 - 20 'The death of the other is the first death' (Lévinas, 1993: 54).
 - 21 It should not surprise us that Heidegger therefore contends that 'All the more explicitly must the existential definition of concepts be unaccompanied by any existential commitments, especially with relation to death' (Heidegger, 1962: §49, 248–9).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

LILIAN ALWEISS is lecturer in philosophy at Trinity College Dublin. Her book *The Word Unclaimed: A Challenge to Heidegger's Critique of Husserl* will be published by Ohio University Press in the autumn.

Address: Department of Philosophy, University of Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland. Tel: 677 2941; 608 1206 (Direct). Fax: 671 5760. [email: alweissl@tcd.ie]

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