
Reviewed by Frank Schalow, University of New Orleans, author of *The Incarnality of Being: The Earth, Animals, and the Body in Heidegger’s Thought*.

Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger stand out as two of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, each of whom also advanced a unique understanding of what it means to be human. Yet, the different focus of each—one psychoanalytic in delving into the unconscious and liberating its “repressed” contents, the other philosophic in re-asking the question of being—creates a gulf which seems to preclude any possible intermediation between them. In *A Question of Time*, Joel Pearl confronts that challenge. But rather than artificially attempting to bridge that gulf by constructing parallels between Heidegger and Freud, Pearl undertakes a “crossing” by showing how Heidegger’s insight into the elliptical dynamic of temporality provides a new grounding for the therapeutic practice that Freud modeled upon the structure of linear time. As Pearl succinctly summarizes his thesis in the “Introduction”:

> This book constitutes a philosophical attempt to rethink, from an existential-phenomenological perspective, the theoretical foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis. The following discussion will focus on the notion of time—both its significance in psychoanalytic theory and its function in the clinical encounter. The significance of time in Freudian theory will be grounded in Martin Heidegger’s notion of “Temporality” (Zeitlichkeit) [p. 5].

In Part One of his study, Pearl undertakes a critique of the linear conception of time and its basis in the Cartesian view of the self as both an isolated, disembodied “subject” (i.e., the *cogito*) and an enduring structure or “substance.” Descartes’ epistemology falls prey to various dualisms of mind-body and ego-external world, which prescind from or neglect the concrete situation of our “lived-experience.” These dualisms harbor a “theoretical” bias, which not only discounts the “practical” concerns of everyday experience, but also forms the unquestioned backdrop of a scientific world-view on which modern psychoanalytic *theory* is based. As an alternative point of departure, Pearl adopts Heidegger’s phenomenological description of our being-in-the-world, and its development of the “pre-thematic” understanding of everyday, lived-experience. Phenomenology “reveals the world as having a layered structure, in contrast with the manner in which the world of phenomena is epistemologically perceived, that is, as an objective entity located outside the world of the subject” (p. 35).
Given this phenomenological orientation, Heidegger explores the manner in which each of us, as “being-there” or Dasein, exhibits the encompassing purview of concern or “care,” and thereby the ways in which its elements of existence, facticity, and falling, are temporally unified. As the being who is in each case mine, Dasein ex-ists by projecting futural possibilities, in such a way as to reaffirm its power to choose from the past, and thereby disclose the meaning of the present. By unfolding this temporal arc of transcendence, Dasein can then pursue possibilities that are distinctly its own, and take ownership for its choices, that is, exist “authentically.” To develop Heidegger’s crucial distinction between authentic time or its elliptical enactment as temporality, and inauthentic time and its linear character, Pearl reconstructs Heidegger’s argument from his lecture course from the Summer Semester 1927, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. “The Heideggerian effort to avoid the metaphysics of presence as it is expressed in the phenomenon of temporality and its modifiable horizons opens up the possibility for us to understand Dasein’s being as a constant expression of the phenomenon of time” (p. 72).

In Part II, “A Temporal Lacuna,” Pearl identifies a major flaw in the psychoanalytic method: “a blind spot which overlooks temporality” (p. 74). Freud addresses the ebb and flow of libidinous forces, and their therapeutic management insofar as they affect the individual’s behavior, attitudes, and comportments. Implicitly, Freud conceives the interplay of psychic forces as a self-regulating mechanism that follows scientific principles of change and development. This view of time as succession, however, is not original, but as Heidegger shows, derives from a model of entities rather than from the enactment of human, finite temporality. This Freudian model implicitly privileges the ‘present,’ as the fulcrum for associating psychic phenomena and does not explain the overriding basis for their interconnection and unification as grounded in the elliptical dynamic of primordial time. Moreover, Freud’s therapeutic technique, for example, as epitomized through his interpretation of dreams, is largely based on a chronology or sequence of events (p. 123).

At this juncture, the larger implications of Pearl’s argument begin to become apparent. If Freud’s conception of time is itself derivative, then the attempt to ground the human psyche and his understanding of the unconscious on that basis is equally suspect. Put more simply, the configuration of psychic forces that create conflicts, and their resolution through therapy based on analysis, still presupposes a self whose ontological basis remains unquestioned. For example, diagnosing a neurotic condition involves extrapolating from the patient’s present fixation the chronology of determinative events from the past, e.g., the narrative of a trauma. But such a narrative not only privileges the present, but also relegates the past to a subordinate role as exclusively housing “repressed” experiences and memories,