

Chronopathologies: Time and Politics in Deleuze, Derrida, Analytic Philosophy, and Phenomenology

By Jack Reynolds

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In *Chronopathologies*, the Australian philosopher Jack Reynolds gives an exciting analysis of the intimate connection between time and politics in three trajectories of contemporary philosophy: analytic philosophy, poststructuralism, and phenomenology. These trajectories are incompatible in the sense that internalizing the norms of any one of them ‘makes taking the other(s) seriously very difficult’ (p. 225). Given this incompatibility, Reynolds convincingly argues that the only way forward is to draw out the differences between these trajectories, in order to address the problems and limitations of each from the perspective of the others. Reynolds’s fruitful approach uncovers that each trajectory is threatened by a disease of time or ‘chronopathology’ (a key term that is never fully defined). Such a ‘chronopathology’ can be characterized as a pathological condition that is the result of two factors: the reduction of the plurality of time to only one of its dimensions; a biased and one-sided view on ethics and politics. Reynolds convincingly identifies the root of the threat. He develops his diagnosis in three steps. (1) Analytic philosophy over-emphasizes the synchronic dimension of time, without making any room for its diachronic dimension. (2) Poststructuralism acknowledges the necessity of a reciprocal relation between the synchronic and the diachronic dimension of time, but ultimately privileges the latter (i.e., the relation remains asymmetrical). (3) An embodied phenomenology opens up a way to bring the synchronic and diachronic dimension of time in a reciprocal and symmetrical relation that does not privilege the one over the other.

As a first step, Reynolds puts analytic philosophy to the test by confronting it with poststructuralism (chapters two, three and four). This confrontation shows that analytic philosophy relies on temporal and normative presuppositions that are one-sided and biased. In Reynolds’s diagnosis, this means that analytical philosophy is afflicted by a chronopathology. In analytical philosophy the debate about the nature of temporal reality is mainly dominated by two opposed views, presentism and eternalism. In presentism only the self-contained present is considered to be ontologically real; in eternalism all parts of time are considered to be equally real. In both cases the plurality of time is reduced to its synchronic dimension, which results in a chronopathology. Moreover, Reynolds argues that these two views, despite their fundamental differences, share a few norms that are more or less characteristic

of analytic philosophy in general: skepticism about transcendental reasoning; the pursuit of stylistic simplicity and clarity; reliance on the common sense of a social or scientific community. Even when these norms are not explicitly endorsed, they implicitly underlie the methodological strategies dominating analytic philosophy, namely: the use of thought experiments (e.g., the prisoner's dilemma) and the aim to achieve reflective equilibrium (i.e., moving back and forth between common sense and particular judgments). To uncover the chronopathology underlying these strategies and norms, Reynolds invokes Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida (whom he views as the most sophisticated representatives of poststructuralism).

In Reynolds's reading of Deleuze, the philosophical value of thought experiments and the method of reflective equilibrium is questioned (chapter three). Instead of generating genuine philosophical problems, Deleuze would say that thought experiments tend to pose simple questions that can be answered by predicting a series of possible outcomes, which are knowable and admit calculation. Likewise, the method of reflective equilibrium is so much invested in preserving and judging the coherence of already existing ideas, that it becomes highly improbable that it will generate genuinely new ideas. From Deleuze's perspective, analytic philosophy is committed to a theoretical conservatism that resists the interruptive force of the future; therefore, it will rather reinforce the status quo than challenge it.

A similar critique emerges from Reynolds's confrontation between Derrida and John Rawls (chapter four). Like most analytic political philosophers, Rawls insists on a narrow understanding of the political. He starts from the assumption that responsible decision-making can be calculated on the basis of an already existing conception of justice. Rawls's aim is rather to preserve and reinforce the values of liberal democracies than to question and to challenge them. According to Reynolds, Derrida would dismiss such a narrow conception of the political as conservative and irresponsible. For Derrida, there is both a calculable and an incalculable side to responsible decision-making. As Reynolds puts it, 'Derrida insists that incalculable ethical absolutes (e.g., justice) need to be put to work in contingent political calculations that are irretrievably context bound (e.g., law)' (p. 66). In Derrida's view, there is no responsibility without a moment of undecidability, which disrupts the calculated expectations and makes room for unforeseeable outcomes. This disruption does not dismiss the value of political calculation, but rather problematizes it. However, to Reynolds's mind, Derrida gives too little attention to the practical aspects of political calculation. In the end, Derrida subordinates political calculation to the incalculable future. Reynolds agrees with Deleuze and Derrida that analytic philosophy tends to reinforce the status quo by giving too much priority to common sense and

the calculable. At the same time, he laments that Deleuze and Derrida fall into the opposite extreme by focusing almost exclusively on an unforeseeable and incalculable future.

This brings us to the second step of Reynolds's argument (chapters five through eight). Although poststructuralism makes the temporal problems of analytic philosophy visible, it does not really solve them. Instead, by giving priority to the diachronic and futural dimension of time, poststructuralism falls victim to its own chronopathology. Reynolds holds that, despite their fundamental differences, Deleuze and Derrida share an interest in what he calls 'the politics of futurity'. In their work the emphasis lies on the unknown future. This future is not understood as a 'soon to be present', but rather as a diachronic counter-time that simultaneously disrupts and conditions the living-present. As disruption it makes room for the new and the different; as transcendental condition it generates the living-present. Deleuze and Derrida characterize this diachronic dimension of time as an (impossible) event that is yet to come and cannot be grasped in terms of already existing possibilities (i.e., it is incalculable and non-teleological). Moreover, this unknown, future event has a normative ethical import that assigns a secondary status to habit and bodily coping that integrate the living-present.

Although Reynolds acknowledges the importance of the diachronic counter-time, he rejects the way in which Deleuze and Derrida use it to legitimate both a hierarchy of time and an ethical pathos (or quasi-morality). In his view, this constitutes another chronopathology. Moreover, Reynolds questions the 'forced dilemma' that poststructuralism constructs between the sameness of common sense (known and calculable) and the difference of the future event (unknown and incalculable). The privilege given to the latter, results in a lack of attention to practical issues concerning the given world. For Reynolds, this indicates that the poststructuralist critique of conservative thinking has been carried too far. Further, Reynolds argues that poststructuralism unjustifiably neglects the importance of habitual behavior and embodied coping. In his view, phenomenological and scientific research has sufficiently shown that the body is a quasi-transcendental condition for the living-present. Therefore, even if there are good reasons to complicate this account, the embodied coping techniques cannot be dismissed altogether.

In the third and last step of his argument, Reynolds tries to remedy the chronopathologies of analytic philosophy and poststructuralism (chapters nine through thirteen). To this end, he turns to an embodied phenomenology in which the bodily experience of the living-present is given a central role. As Reynolds acknowledges, phenomenology is not free from temporal biases either. It has the tendency to ground all aspects of temporality in the living-present, emphasizing the integrative aspect of time that binds the various temporal dimensions together.

However, Reynolds suggests that this does not necessarily lead to a similar one-sided approach to time as in analytic philosophy and poststructuralism. He illustrates this with the example of a professional cricket player who constantly has to deal with slightly different circumstances.

As such, any given cricket stroke will never be totally new, but neither will it be brute or instinctual repetition either, having to be attentive to the difference presented by each ball, but still implicitly drawing on one's repertoire of past experiences that contribute to each shot. (p. 170)

Reynolds concludes from this example 'that it is precisely the integrative aspects of temporal experience that open up a horizon in all of its difference and variability' (p. 174). Embodied coping integrates the living-present and gives it meaning, without reducing it to a self-contained unity.

Despite his positive evaluation of phenomenology, Reynolds still agrees with poststructuralism

that life is not exhausted by bodily coping (and the time of the living-present, *l'habitude*), that even the activity of the cricket player is not done justice to without some reference to what we might summarize as time out of joint, in both its formal and also more experiential guises. (p. 177)

However, this caveat does not warrant the dismissal of the living-present as an 'epiphenomenon' or a 'transcendental illusion'. Instead, as Reynolds points out, the dispute between phenomenology and poststructuralism shows the need for a pluralist methodology that makes room for competing accounts of lived-time. Reynolds therefore argues for 'a mutual contamination between the phenomenological and poststructuralist accounts of time' (p. 223) in which lived-time is irrevocably split between synchrony (a continuous living-present that is conditioned by embodied coping) and diachrony (the interruption of this living-present that becomes the condition for more radical changes). This pluralist approach provides a methodology in which the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of time, its calculable and incalculable aspects, determine one another in a reciprocal and symmetric way.

Although Reynolds acknowledges that analytic philosophy can play a positive role in this pluralist approach, he does not really explain what this role can be. This lack of clarity somewhat interferes with his intention to narrow the gap between the analytic and the continental tradition. The piers are put in place, but the bridge still has to be built by the reader. In a sense, this is also true for the book as a whole; it feels a bit like a collection of essays that have been given an overarching theme.

BOOK REVIEWS

The key concept that gives the book its title – chronopathology – is only developed in a preliminary way and does not really become an object of reflection. Moreover, the poststructuralist philosophers that figure in the subtitle – Deleuze and Derrida – dominate the discussion in all three parts of the book. This not only threatens to undermine Reynolds's plea for a genuine dialogue, but also weakens the structure and clarity of his general argument. These minor criticisms aside, Reynolds makes an important contribution to the philosophical study of time. He convincingly shows that the analytic and continental branches of philosophy need each other to become aware of the temporal and normative biases that bedevil them.

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