



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Heidegger and the Radical Temporalities of Fundamental Attunements

Emily Hughes

Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology, Volume 27, Number 3, September 2020, pp. 223-225 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ppp.2020.0027>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/765591>

# HEIDEGGER AND THE RADICAL TEMPORALITIES OF FUNDAMENTAL ATTUNEMENTS

---

EMILY HUGHES



IN “MELANCHOLIA, TEMPORAL disruption, and the torment of being both unable to live and unable to die” (Hughes, 2020), I discuss the way in which the temporal desynchronization of melancholia can disrupt the melancholic’s relation to their own death and, on a Heideggerian interpretation, the meaning and significance of their life. In their thoughtful commentaries, Kevin Aho and Gareth Owen draw out some important points for further elaboration and clarification, the most pressing of which invoke Heidegger’s interpretation of time and the radical temporalities of fundamental attunements. As Aho anticipates, this is the conception of time that underpins my interpretation of melancholia and, because this is important to understanding the conception of death and demise I put forward in my article, it is this that I will focus on in the following response.

In “Heidegger on melancholia, deep boredom, and the inability-to-be,” Aho (2020) rightly emphasizes that to understand the temporality of attunements, it is important to grasp that for Heidegger Dasein “*is time*, the temporalizing event that opens up a space of meaning and possible ways to be in the world” (Aho, 2020, p. 215). This temporalizing event is composed of three

temporal dimensions or “ecstases”: having-been (past), being-alongside (present) and being-ahead-of-itself (future) (Heidegger, 1984, p. 205/GA, 26, p. 266). The three ecstases are not consecutive or successive, which means they cannot be separated out into three separate sequential “moments” in time. The “future is not later than having been, and having been is not earlier than the present” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 401/GA, SZ, p. 350). Rather, the ecstases are inter-reliant and belong together as a unified totality. This means that at any given time, “Dasein is not only in the moment but rather is itself within the entire span of its possibilities and its past” (Heidegger, 2003, p. 169).

For the most part, Dasein is not aware of its time as being three-dimensional because it is absorbed in “ordinary time.” That is, time understood as a chronological sequence of present “nows” which can be measured by the clock. It is only when subject to the radical temporalities of fundamental attunements like anxiety, profound boredom, and melancholy that Dasein is wrenched out of its immersion in ordinary time. Initially, each fundamental attunement modifies or transforms Dasein’s threefold temporality in a distinctive way, by denying and withholding

certain ecstases in varied configurations and constellations, so that although some are refused, others are intensified. Briefly, Heidegger follows Kierkegaard in considering that anxiety temporalizes by denying the present and past, and attuning Dasein toward the ecstasis of the future, which becomes intensified (Heidegger, 1962, p. 395/GA, SZ, pp. 344–45). By contrast, as Aho demonstrates, profound boredom temporalizes by denying the past and withholding the future, while attuning Dasein toward the ecstasis of the present, which becomes intensified (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 152–153/GA, 29/30, pp. 228–29). Beyond his thematization of the distinct temporalities of anxiety and boredom, Heidegger notes that his thesis of the temporality of attunements can be expanded to other attunements, including those “founded existentially upon one’s having been; this becomes plain if we merely mention such phenomena as satiety, sadness, melancholy, and desperation” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 395/GA, SZ, p. 345). Although Heidegger does not pursue these analyses in any depth, he intimates here that melancholy can be seen to temporalize by denying or withholding the future and the present, and attuning Dasein toward the ecstasis of the past (having-been), which becomes intensified. This concurs with the initial stages of melancholic time that I discuss in my article.

Depending on the attunement with which Dasein finds itself affected, then, the three ecstases are modified in distinctive ways. Yet, what is critical for Heidegger is that, regardless of the particular configuration of refusal and intensification, *all* fundamental attunements ultimately come to disclose the unified threefold temporality of Dasein as a whole, because any single ecstasis that has been withheld or denied “presences immediately in its absence” (Heidegger, 1972, p. 13/GA, 14, p. 13). The modification of an ecstasis from presence into absence should therefore be understood as a *privation* rather than a negation (Heidegger, 2001, p. 48/GA, 89, p. 61). This holds especially for radical desynchronization, the most extreme form of melancholic time that I discuss in my article, in which all three ecstases are refused to the extent that one finds oneself “beyond” or “outside” of time. Whatever the degree of privation, the refused

ecstases come to presence in their absence, such that Dasein’s threefold existential temporality is disclosed in its entirety.

One of Owen’s leading concerns in “Reflections on Phenomenological Method in Depression” (Owen, 2020) is that if the future is “blocked” or “closed off” in melancholia then one necessarily becomes “indifferent” to the future to the extent that there can be “no experience of the future at all” (Owen, 2020, p. 220). Quite the contrary; as the above makes clear, for Heidegger it is precisely through being withdrawn into absence that the ecstasis of the future is lit up so profoundly. A “blocked” future is a future that has been made an issue, made explicit (Fuchs, 2005), in a way that is often profoundly distressing. Similarly, in the most extreme cases of being held out into abyssal *timelessness* or *a-temporality* (a condition implied in Heidegger’s accounts of anxiety, profound boredom, shock, awe, and restraint, and wonder as the necessary precursor for the moment of vision or appropriation), there is still an inherent relation to time by virtue of the fact that radical desynchronization (the refusal of all three ecstases) both disrupts and discloses the three-dimensional temporality of Dasein as if from the outside. Indeed, it is the privation (as opposed to negation) of temporality that makes it possible for it to be attributed with a “normative flattening” or “negative valence” in the first place (Owen, 2020, p. 220). More significantly for my article, it is the privation of temporality which makes it possible (albeit inadvertently for Heidegger) for the melancholic to experience their death as infinite and their demise as impossible. As Heidegger writes, “*except on the basis of temporality*, attunements *are not possible* in what they ‘signify’ in an existentiell way or in how they ‘signify’ it” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 391/GA, SZ, p. 341).

What is more problematic for the interpretation of the temporality of attunements more generally is Owen’s related concern (Owen, 2020, p. 221) that, if we are to concede that melancholia initially temporalizes by withholding the future, then how do we make sense of the fact that severe depression can exist comorbidly with mania, which is widely considered to temporalize by intensifying the future? For Heidegger, these temporal differences

are what make it possible for mania to signify the future with a positive valence and melancholia a negative one (Owen, Martin, & Gergel, 2018, p. 375). Yet, how is it that these heterogenous temporalities and significations might be unified within a single affective disorder such as bipolar disorder? The cycles of the negative withholding and positive intensification of the future could plausibly be seen to conform to the cycles of depression and mania. But it is difficult to see how this could be the case for rapid cycling bipolar or mixed or hypomanic states where the future would need to be almost simultaneously absent and present, both withheld and intensified, and afforded both a negative and positive valence. In addition, how is it that anxiety (also often found comorbidly with melancholia) and mania can both temporalize through an intensification of the future while *signifying* this future very differently, that is, as threatening in anxiety and hopeful in mania? Owen provokes an excellent line of thought here, one that can be seen to pose a challenge for our understanding of the temporality of mixed affective disorders and indeed the categories we use to define and differentiate them.

Heidegger would likely argue that, regardless of the different configurations of withholding and intensification, melancholia, mania and anxiety are all indicative of an increasingly unstable and tenuous connection to time. That is, regardless of what each attunement “signifies” at an individual (“existentiell”) level, what is important is that each ecstasis (absent or present, withheld or intensified) is disclosive of Dasein’s threefold temporality as a whole. It is the underlying ontological desynchronization *itself* which unifies melancholia and mania, or melancholia and anxiety. I do find this explanation compelling. Nevertheless, when limited to the ontological framework of Heidegger’s philosophical project we still do not have the means through which to understand how it is that desynchronization can signify so differently across different attunements, including those that exist within the one affective disorder. These complex problems open up promising possibili-

ties for further research. For example, in-depth phenomenological interviews—perhaps modeled on the “micro-phenomenological” method—could interrogate how it is that heterogenous temporalities can co-exist within a singular affective disorder such as bipolar disorder and, relatedly, how singular temporalities can give rise to manifold significations. Addressing these questions is a difficult yet vital step if we are to deepen our understanding of the critical role temporality plays in affective disorders, including the way in which it can disrupt one’s relation to death and demise.

#### REFERENCES

- Aho, K. (2020). Heidegger on melancholia, deep boredom, and the inability-to-be. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 27 (3), 215–217.
- Fuchs, T. (2005). Implicit and explicit temporality. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 12 (3), 195–198.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Heidegger, M. (1972). *On time and being* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). New York: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- Heidegger, M. (1984). *The metaphysical foundations of logic* (M. Heim, Trans.). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics* (W. McNeill & N. Walker, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (2001). *Zollikon seminars* (F. Mayr & R. Askay, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (2003). Wilhelm Dilthey’s research and the struggle for a historical worldview (1925). In *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*. J. van Buren (ed.; pp. 147–176). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hughes, E. 2020. Melancholia, temporal disruption, and the torment of being both unable to live and unable to die. *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, 27 (3), 203–213..
- Owen, G., Martin, W., & Gergel, T. (2018). Miscalculating the future: Affective disorder and decision-making capacity for treatment—A temporal understanding. *Psychopathology*, 51:371–379.
- Owen, G. (2020). Reflections on phenomenological method in depression. *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, 27 (3), 219–222..