PARRHESIA NUMBER 15 • 2012 • 14-23

THE BAFFLING "NATURE" OF TIME

John McCumber

> *Quid autem familiarius et notius in loquendo commemoramus quam tempus? Et intellegimus utique cum id loquimur, intellegimus etiam cum alio loquente id audimus. Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quærat, scio; si quærenti explicare uelim, nescio.*
>
> But what in speaking do we refer to more familiarly and knowingly than time? And certainly we understand when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another. What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.[1]

Asked what time is, Augustine moves from a condition of knowing to one of bafflement. The bafflement lasts as long as he "wishes" (*uelim*) to explain what time is to the person asking him. Then he reverts to his usual condition of "knowledge" of what time is. There is reason to believe that Augustine is not alone in his bafflement; the ongoing influence of his discussion of time in the *Confessions* suggests that not knowing what time is, when you are asked about it, is something others share with him.

Augustine solves his problem by defining his knowledge of time in terms of "nothing:"

> Yet I say with confidence, that I know that if nothing passed away [*nihil praetererit*, nothing would move beyond] there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming [*nihil adveniret,* nothing would arrive], there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time.

That "nothing" could move beyond something or arrive somewhere is an enticing thought reminiscent of Hedegger's *Nichts* which *nichtet*.[2] But we need not yield to the enticement, because it is counterfactual for Augustine: time is not a "nothing" for him, but a something. Only so can it be the subject of an answer to the

question, what it is. But time is an odd sort of something: a something that escapes us *when we are asked about it*. Not only does time escape us, but it is itself an escaping or transgressing: it is the movement-beyond the present into the past, and the arrival-in-the present from the future.

Augustine's subsequent investigation of the nature of time presumes that these two kinds of escape are separate: that the fact that the nature of time escapes us when we are asked about it is different from the fact that something escapes the present by moving into the past, and escapes the future by arriving in the present. Augustine's perplexity when asked what time is is thus extrinsic to the nature of time. But what if we do not make that presupposition? What if the fact that the nature of time escapes us when we are asked about it informs us about the nature of time itself? What if it were "essential" to the movement of something from the future to the present, and from the present to the past that when asked about it, we suddenly do not know what that movement is? In such a case, would not time constitute itself in our bafflement at being asked what it is? Might time's nature itself be, not something that occasions bafflement, but a sort of bafflement itself?

There is the time we know and speak about; and the time we do not know and are asked about. This suggests that there is something very peculiar about being asked what time is. But maybe we should begin further back. For things in general get peculiar, I suggest, when we are asked any question whatsoever. So let us move to a meta-question, a question about questions: what is it to be asked a question?

This is not the usual meta-question. The word "question" is usually understood actively: a question is something someone *asks*. Indeed, when "question" is used as a verb, it means to ask or pose a question. From this point of view, the obvious meta-question is not, "What is it to be asked a question," but "What is it to ask a question?" Heidegger's discussion of questions at the beginning of *Being and Time* is conducted from this point of view,[3] and the tactic did not originate with Heidegger. The Socratic method, after all, is called "Socratic" because he *asks* the questions.

The view that we can't understand the nature of questions by understanding what it is to ask a question, rather than be asked one, places our inquiry comfortably into the ancient Western conceptuality of action and passion, with pride of place given to the former. But what if we reversed course? What if we looked at questions from the point of view of Socrates' interlocutors—of Euthyphro, Gorgias, Charmides, Adeimantus, and the rest? What if we looked at Socratic questioning as a method of being asked questions, rather than of asking them?

What, then, is it to be *asked* a question? I would like to advance, in a phenomenological spirit, three more general characteristics of such a situation.

> I. To be asked a question is to be *interrupted*. Since someone else asks the question, it is not my question. To be asked it is to be taken out of whatever states and activities I was in before and deposited into a different situation. This new situation, to be sure, may not be entirely different from my previous one: the question may arise in the course of an ongoing shared inquiry. And I may, on occasion, ask a question of myself. Even in such cases, however, to be asked a question is to be interrupted: I must stop whatever I am doing and answer the question. In being-asked I am moved from one situation to another; and since questions usually do not take long to ask, I am usually moved suddenly.
>
> II. To be asked a question is thus to be interrupted. Augustine, in particular, is interrupted *by another person*. This, I suspect, is the more basic form of being-asked, with being asked a question by oneself as a modification of it. In any case, being asked a question by another person, as Augustine is, is the more important case here. The other person is not merely a questioner. Since asking a question is an intentional act—no one asks a question inadvertently—someone who asks a question has a purpose in asking it. She is seeking something, her question is part of a quest. And her quest may be very different from the question itself. The quest behind the question "have you read Žižek on Spielberg," for example, may in fact have nothing to do with Spielberg or Žižek. The question may simply be an

effort to find out how culturally up-to-date someone is.

The posing of a question is thus not, for the asker, an interruption. It grows out of some ongoing concern she has—i.e. from her immediate past. She is seeking something by asking her question, Hence, the questioner is more deeply a *quarens*, a seeker.

III. When first asked a question, I never know the answer; because the question interrupts what I was doing, it always takes me a second to find or retrieve a response, and during this time I am in a momentary state of bafflement. Augustine's bafflement is an extension of this more ordinary kind: it will not go away because the answer, stubbornly, will not come.

To be asked a question thus puts me into a special relationship to past and future. My immediate past is gone, not merely having slipped by as it usually does but in having been *pushed* away by the *quarens*: I cannot continue with what I was doing, because I must now answer her question. It is the past of the *quarens*, her ongoing quest, which now directs my actions. To be asked a question is thus to be forced to substitute one past for another, hers for mine. Instead of carrying forward my own activities and concerns, I am suddenly involved with two pasts at once. And instead of my immediate future being whatever I was about to do next, my future becomes opaque; it now amounts to something I do not know, namely the answer to the question.

As long as Augustine and his interlocutor are *talking* about time, they know what it is. What Augustine subsequently *says* he knows (*dico me scire*) places his view of time on what J. M. E. McTaggart famously calls the "A series:" time as an ordering of events in terms of past, present, and future.[4] McTaggart contrasts this with the "B-series," time as an ordering of events in terms merely of before and after. McTaggart argues that neither series can constitute the nature of time. The B-series is not time because it does not allow for change: the relations of "before" and "after" are permanent, so that if event e_1 is before e_2, it is always before e_2. The A-series, for its part, accommodates change but is incoherent: past, present, and future are contradictory properties, and to assert all of them of any event e is to contradict oneself. The only way to deny the contradiction would be to say that e does not have these properties at the same time, and in that case the A-series could not be time, because it would presuppose time. Since neither the A-series nor the B-series (I will leave out McTaggart's hybrid C-series) can be time, McTaggart concludes that time does not exist.

McTaggart's argument begins from how time "appears to us prima facie:"[5] from our ordinary experience of time. It has generated an enormous literature, as people try to prove that either the A-series or the B-series is (a) real and (b) constitutes time. I will avoid this literature because, in talking about the A-series and the B-series at all, it accepts two of McTaggart's presuppositions:

I. The A and B series each incorporates necessary features of our ordinary experience of time; otherwise such experience would merely deliver subjective impressions, which might not tell us anything about what McTaggart wants to investigate: the nature of time itself.

II. Time cannot be experienced in some third way; the A-series and the B-series are the only fundamental ways in which we experience time. Otherwise their incompatibility with time would not support the conclusion that it does not exist.

Common to both ways of experiencing time is that time is an ordering of events, which in turn are things with properties (being before and after, in the B-series; being past, present, or future in the A-series). Augustine's thought experiment, as I have interpreted it, is however outside this framework because it denies (2). In Augustine's thought experiment, if we may call it that, we are in fact presented with two orderings of past events—that of the *quaerens* and one's own—and no ordering of future events, for there is no guarantee that my quest for an answer will "lead" anywhere. Indeed and more generally, there is (as we will see below) no guarantee that the future itself will contain any such thing as an "event."

Augustine's account of being asked about the nature of time makes sense only to us if we are beings who do not necessarily experience time as an ordering of events, which means that we do not always experience time as either an A or a B series.

For McTaggart, "event" is defined minimalistically: an "event" is merely "the contents of any position in time."[6] McTaggart thus does not take the term in a Deleuzian or Badiouian sense as indicating something which exceeds its conditions; indeed, he does not even specify that the content of any single position in time must differ from those of all other positions, so events need not be unique. But even on this minimal concept of "event," we can ask: what would an eventless future look like?

We can hardly expect to "know" the answer to this in any strict sense, first of all because an eventless future would be without content, and what is without content cannot be captured in any determinate concept: if events form the content of time, an eventless time is empty and so, strictly speaking, inconceivable. Yet that there may be such a future is fairly easy to imagine, if not conceive: it would be the future of the universe at the moment of its total extinction. The eventless future of an individual thing would also be the future at the time of its total extinction. We may doubt the logical coherence of such an image: does not a being which is about to be extinguished have, not an eventless future, but no future at all? The fact remains, however, that Western culture has two traditional names for such an individuated eventless future: "heaven" and hell." In heaven and hell, eternity reigns and nothing changes; the last thing to befall one is one's definitive assignment to one or the other. The Christian image of the future in particular, figures it as eternity, an existence without events.

Kierkegaard's appropriation of his Christian heritage trades upon this connection between eternity (heaven and hell) and the future.[7] Our future for him is our temporal opening onto eternity, and we are moving toward it across the events of our various lives. Kierkegaard establishes the connection between eternity and the future on the basis of their common inconceivability:

> The eternal first signifies the future because the future is the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time[8] (*CD* 89).

The future is "incognito," and eternity is "incommensurable" with time. That these two unknowns can at once be incommensurable and related is the absurdity which constitutes the core of Christianity for Kierkegaard:

> What now is the absurd? The absurd is—that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that god has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other human being, indistinguishable from other individuals[9] (Kierkegaard 1941a: 188).

If the future is eternity and so inconceivable, then we cannot conceive it as containing events. Some of this inconceivability of the future was anticipated by Hume; his discovery of the "scandal of induction" leaves open the possibility that the future will be so unlike the past as to contain nothing that we now know of—including, then, things and events.[10] Kierkegaard adds a number of things to this, including the specifically Christian notion that our future is a giant Either/Or, according to which we will go either to someplace inconceivably wonderful or someplace inconceivably terrible, depending on what we do right now—indeed, at every "right now." Every moment is thus crucial—and dreadful. It is this dreadful cruciality which, for Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Dread*, establishes the "present" of Christianity as opposed to the "now" of paganism.

Time for Kierkegaard is most basically, however, just an "infinite vanishing"—the continuous passing away of everything in which "every moment, like the sum of all moments, is a process, a going-by"—i.e., an event[11]. From this "pagan" point of view, which is McTaggart's (it holds in both the "A" and "B" series), any given moment is simply the point so far reached on the ever-extending time line. It is only when I realize that the given moment is the moment in which I must commit myself to Christianity (or not do so) that the moment becomes a present:

> The moment [i.e. the Øjeblikket, what the Germans will call the *Augenblick*] is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of temporality is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time[12].

If we subtract from Kierkegaard's account of time what is specifically Christian in it—the part about going definitively either to heaven or to hell, with no other options and no subsequent changes (which would be events)—we are left with just the view that the future is, as Hume thought, wholly unknowable. But in contrast to Hume, whose interest in the future here is purely theoretical, the future for Kierkegaard is something to which we are ineluctably underway. It is thus of great—indeed, paramount—practical significance.

The view that the future is *wholly* unknown is, I take it, an ingredient in our experience of time, and not only when we are asked about it. For to *know* that the future contains things and events would require us to have experience of the future—and that we have not had, or ever will. The future is then a sort of Kantian thing-in itself—but one which is coming at us, from only a nanosecond away. And just as we can, for Kant, take things we know—categories—and, by subtracting the conditions of sensibility from them, come up with "noumenal" inhabitants of this unknowable realm (cf. CJ 175), so we can tell ourselves that the future will contain events and things similar to those we already know: we can make predictions, i.e. *talk* about the future. In this way we can come up with the McTaggartian notion of time as a single ordering of events that extends from the past through the present to the future. Such a future is somewhat more reassuring than the empty dreadful future that Kierkegaard has uncovered; but we can no more *know* that it will come about than we can know a thing-in-itself.

When we *talk* about the future, we have to see it as containing the sort of thing we can talk about: content, i.e. events. When we *are asked* about time, or about anything, this linguistic presupposition falls away and we are left in a state of *Angst* before an empty future: not, to be sure, in Kierkegaardian fear and trembling before eternity, but merely Augustinian anxiety about whether we will be able to answer the question we have been asked.

Being-asked about time, or indeed about anything, also brings me before a past which is not *an* order of events. For when I am asked a question, I experience not one but two pasts: mine and that of the *quaerens*. If these two orders of events were the same, the question would not pose an interruption to me, but would follow naturally on what I was doing before it was asked. Different pasts therefore go with different people, leading them to do and undergo different things in the present; everyone has what I will call her "personal past." The question then arises of whether or not these personal pasts are experienced as components of a single larger series containing all past events. If so, then there is such a thing as "the" past; if not, there is merely a plurality of personal pasts.

This question is easily associated with the Leibniz/Newton controversy over the metaphysical "substantiality" of time: is time a single thing unrolling on its own, as Newton claimed, or is it merely what Leibniz called "the successive order of things?"[13] A personal past would be one (of many) successive orders of things (or, we may say, events); a single larger ordering would place us in the vicinity of Newton.

We are not speaking metaphysically here, however, but of time as we experience it. And here, even Newton agrees: we commonly experience time relationally, and indeed as a plurality of pasts:

> Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without regard to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time ...[14]

"Absolute, true and mathematical time" differs from "relative, apparent and common time." Even for Newton, the latter is what we commonly measure, and as "apparent and common" is what we usually experience. Indeed, as Kant observed, it is impossible for us to experience time as a single order of events, i.e. of all events, because

we cannot experience all events.[15] Absolute, true and mathematical time, Newtonian time, is a thing-in-itself.

In the realm of experience, in other words, we are all relationists. What we experience as the past is some particular "succession of things" (or events), beginning in the past and ending in the present. Personal pasts, in particular, are important because our present circumstances not only follow after them but usually result from them. Not only are some of the things with which I must cope right now the results of events in the past, but knowing which is important. If the drizzle of the moment is following on a violent storm, the rain is probably ending and I probably do not need my raincoat; if it following bright sunshine, I had better take the raincoat with me.[16]

But there is more to it. In the case of the personal past, the present with which it normally ends is our present; but we also, for example in being-asked, experience pasts which end in someone else's present. My personal past differs from that of the *quaerens* in that it contains different events. What distinguishes an event that is part of my personal past from one which is not?

Not merely that I remember it, or even that it happened to me. First, as suggested above, my own personal past may well contain events that I cannot remember. My birth, for example, is part of my personal past—its results are still with me today—but I do not remember it. The birth in my case was rather dramatic, as it happens, because it was during World War II. Doctors were hard to find and my parents had to drive to a nearby military base, a delay which almost caused my demise. So World War II is also in my personal past, which goes beyond what I can remember to include not only events which I cannot remember, but events which occurred before I was born, yet which had effects on me today.

Some of these events, indeed, lie centuries in the past: the death of Socrates, which inspired me to go into philosophy, is one of them. Part of my present professional activity is determined by the fact that that death occurred in the way that it did, and that it occurred so long ago yet is still remembered. So my personal past is not merely the set of things that have happened to me in the past, or even the subset of these that I actually can remember. It is rather the set of those events with whose results I must, today, cope, whether they reside in my own personal psychology or in the social and environmental worlds in which I live. The personal past is thus very extensive.

Another feature of personal pasts comes to the fore when we realize that my own personal past is not always the past that matters most to me. The example of being-asked, once again, shows this. When I am asked a question, my own recent personal past is, as I have noted, displaced in favor of the personal past of the *quaerens*: the question grows from her concerns, not mine, and I must step outside my own ongoing projects to answer it. Of course, her question results in my attempts to answer it and so immediately becomes an event in *my* past; and along with it come whatever events in her life prompted her to ask the question. These events may be wholly unknown to me and may have had no effect whatsoever on me until she posed her question. But when she does that they become events with the results of which I must now cope, and those events thus join my personal past.

Events in someone else's past can thus become events in my past: personal pasts are not only extensive but expansive. They can merge, as they do when I am asked a question. This leads us to another important feature of personal pasts: they are not only highly expansive but highly unstable; long ago events are continually joining my personal past. That personal pasts of different people can merge with one another in this way is very clear in the immigrant experience: someone who emigrates to a new country takes over the history of that country. I have ancestors, for example, who died on both sides of the American Civil War. The heritage of slavery in the United States is clearly part of my personal past; it helped make me what I am. Indeed, it was the aftermath of the Civil War which led my great-grandfather to leave the South and raise his family in Illinois, where his daughter met my grandfather: without American slavery, I would not exist, and I must cope with its effects every day. But so also must my wife, who immigrated to the United States in 1979. She has no ancestral connection to the Civil War, but she must also cope with its effects, and on a day-to-day level she must cope

with them very much as I do. This holds generally, as I argued in my *Reshaping Reason*,[17] for anyone who joins any group: they must then cope with the ongoing results of the history of that group. To recognize this is for them to take *responsibility* for that history.

This leads to another dimension of personal pasts—a moral one. The meaning of the phrase "must cope with" above is obscure,[18] for the word "must" may express either obligation or compulsion. I am compelled, in my daily life in Los Angeles, to cope with the fact that English is its official language but is spoken at home by only 42% of the population, a virtual tie with Spanish. But that I must also, in my daily professional life, cope with ongoing results of the death of Socrates is my choice, an obligation that I have assumed: most people, including many philosophers, do not see their profession that way. Which sense of "must" is in play at a given time is often unclear, and usually a matter of degree. Am I *compelled*, in my daily life in the United States, to cope with its history of racial oppression? Or is that something I am obligated, and so must choose, to do? I would say the former; but there are plenty of people, and by no means are very many of them recent immigrants, who maintain that American racial oppression is something in the past which has no bearing on American life today. In their view, it is not something they must cope with or something they are obligated to cope with, but a matter of choice. And if they choose not to cope, then American racial oppression is not admitted into their personal pasts at all. Though I think they are wrong, the point is that the events themselves give them leeway to think this way.

This leeway is important, for it obviously makes a great difference in the way I cope with the results of my personal past whether I accept or deny certain events as belonging to it. Again, the distinction between one's personal past and what we might call one's accepted personal past is not hard-and-fast: Americans who do not admit their country's history of racial oppression into their personal pasts are coping with it all the same—by denial.

I hope to capture this movement from latent to accepted personal past by saying that my personal past is not a given order of events (be it a McTaggartian A-series or a B-series), but an order*ing* of events which has produced me and for which I am sometimes free to assume or not assume responsibility. The events of my personal past are, often, not things I ever did or chose; but when I accept them into my personal past I assume responsibility for them, in the sense that I undertake to cope with their results. And that acceptance, when it happens, results from a choice. The construction of an accepted personal past is thus, to some degree, a *moral* enterprise. Sometimes the ordering is more independent of me, so that past events shape themselves into the production of a present reality with which I must cope. Other times I have more leeway to see the past as obliging me to cope with its results. In every case, however, I experience the past in fundamentally Leibnizian terms, as a "succession of things."

There are many such successions, and the most important one to me is obviously the one which is my own personal past, the succession of events which has resulted in my present situation. As the experience of being-asked indicates, this sequence is itself unstable: events may be added into it. When someone asks me a question, things that have happened to her become things with which I must cope in answering her question; they become part of my personal past as well.

This all lands us, not in Kierkegaard, but in his greatest foe: Hegel. Not the Hegel against whom Kierkegaard and so many others have so long inveighed, but the Hegel uncovered by scholars since World War II and highlighted by the new critical edition being done by the Hegel-Archiv in Bochum. This is a Hegel who did not think he had achieved a final statement of anything, but who revised even his Logic in the most basic of ways. If Hegel's Logic, the part of his system most removed from nature and history and so the part with the strongest claim to *a priori* status, can change, so certainly can the rest of it.[19]

This Hegel is evident where Hegel most clearly discusses the constitution of the past—in his *Philosophy of History*. There, he explicitly disavows any claim to tell history as it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). The

facts of history present a "slaughter bench" which has no claim at all to exhibit the progress of reason. And yet we cannot stop there:

> Without rhetorical exaggeration, a simple, truthful account of the miseries that have overwhelmed the noblest of nations and polities and the finest exemplars of private virtue forms a most fearful picture and excites emotions of the profoundest and most hopeless sadness, counterbalanced by no consoling result. We can endure it and strengthen ourselves against it by thinking that this is the way it had to be—fate; nothing can be done. And [so] we draw back into the vitality of the present, into our aims and interests of the moment; we retreat, in short, into…selfishness (*Selbstsucht*).[20]

This melancholic quietism and selfishness are at bottom a refusal of responsibility: there is nothing we can do, all is fate. This is not, however, the only way in which Hegel thinks we can experience the past:

> But in that we contemplate history as the slaughter bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed, a question necessarily arises: for what, to what final cause (*Endzweck*), have these monstrous sacrifices been made?[21]

The "necessity" Hegel refers to is hypothetical: *if* we are going to refuse the fatalistic quietism of our selfishness, *then* we must ask that question. We do not have to do so. We can remain in the irresponsible vitality of our selfish present. Not doing so means accepting past events and ordering then into a story which, if only provisional, transcends them enough to give us courage and hope without forgetting or denying them, and thereby to enable our time "to find itself, come to itself and intuit itself as concrete actuality."[22] Hegel's approach to history thus arises from a decision, a decision not to let the grim facts of the past excuse us from the responsibility to accept them as events with whose results we philosophers must cope.

It is my contention that history done in Hegel's "philosophical" way is a paradigm for the way we should construct our personal pasts—with attention to the comprehensiveness and narrative clarity of our story supervening upon an honest and complete presentation of the facts and maintaining an equally honest sense of the provisionality of the conclusions.

But what about something I have been conspicuously avoiding: answering Augustine's question? Can we say in positive terms just what time is? Have the preceding considerations advanced us even a single step toward that goal, or even shown that it is a proper goal?

It would be astonishing if we had an answer, but I think we have made some progress—at least enough to see what roads are open. Once we have admitted Hegel and Kierkegaard into the game, a panoply of other thinkers stands ready to help us. Marxian dialectics, Foucaldian and Nietzschean genealogy, and Heideggerean "history of being" provide tools for understanding and constructing pasts; Sartrean nihilation, Beauvoirean disclosure of being, and Derridean deconstruction show us how to articulate new futures. And Deleuze's complex account shows us ways in which these approaches can be non-reductively thought together.[23]

But I will confine myself here to the general claim that there are standards for how we should deal with the past and the future—for the past and future are, in part, products of our doing. This idea is nothing new; the very word "time," like "tense," is allied to the Greek *temnein*, to take a cut, and it is we who do that—when we separate an hour, a year, or a season off from what went before and will come after and call it a "time." But, if I have been right here, we do more than that, and time has, not merely tenses, but rubrics: sets of directives which treat the past as the set of possible connections, and the future as the set of necessary ruptures. So considered, time is not merely an abstract container or event-series, but a fertile, and perhaps inexhaustible, field for phenomenological, dialectical, and deconstructive investigation.

But this is only time as we experience it. What about time itself, which as a series of events turns out to be about as far removed as anything could be from the terrifying emptiness of the future and the depressing savagery of the past? What is the relation between time as we experience it and time as scientists, logicians, and metaphysicians (such as McTaggart) say it is?

It has become conventional to reserve the name "temporality" to our experience of time, while reserving the name "time" to what is explored by physics, explorations which remain keyed to the idea of time as a series of events. But the two are not, of course, entirely separate. We can begin to understand their relation with this "Augustinian" suggestion: in order for us to talk about past and future, we must populate them with content. (*et intellegimus utique cum id loquimur, intellegimus etiam cum alio loquente id audimus)*.[24] We must then see them, in McTaggart's usage, as orders of events. But when we do that, we suppress two facts about our experience of time, facts which are highlighted in Augustine's account of being-asked: that the future is intrinsically less knowable than the present and the past, and that the past is not only relational but personal, and so unstable and malleable.

If we are empiricists, what scientific, logical, and metaphysical theories of time have to explain is our experience of it. If the view of time as an event-series falsifies that experience, then it cannot explain it; theories based on that view may, at best, be explaining *something*; but they cannot explain temporality. The considerations in the preceding paragraph suggest, in fact, that we should reverse the order of explanation: the account of temporality which I have just given can explain how theories of time arise, namely through our efforts to convert time as we experience it ("temporality") into something we can talk about—into a series of events, things with properties ("time"). The concept of an event-series is, for sure, more comfortable for us than the kind of thing I have discussed here. Future events can be predicted, so the Kierkegaardian terror recedes; and past events cannot be changed, so our Hegelian responsibility attenuates.

But it isn't it the job of philosophers to be guided by something other than their own comfort?

JOHN MCCUMBER is Professor in the Department of Germanic Languages at University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author of many books including *Time and Philosophy* (Acumen 2011); *Metaphysics and Oppression: Heidegger's Challenge to Western Philosophy* (Indiana, 1999, winner of a Choice book award); *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Northwestern, 2000); and *Reshaping Reason: Toward a New Philosophy* (Indiana, 2005; also winner of a Choice book award).

NOTES

1. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* lib xi, cap xiv, sec 17 (ca. 400 CE)
2. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*. Trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977, 95–112.
3. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 24–28.
4. J. M. E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," in *The Philosophy of Time* . Eds Robin Le Poidevin and Murray McBeath. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 23–34.
5. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time", 24.
6. McTaggart, loc cit.
7. On this reading of Kierkegaard cf. my *Time and Philosophy,* Durham: Acumen, 2011, 77–96.
8. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*. Trans. Reidar Thomte. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1980, 89.
9. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Scientific Postscripts*. Trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1941, 188.
10. "Let the course of things be allowed hitherto ever so regular; that alone, without some new argument or inference, proves not that, for the future it will remain so:" David Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" in Hume, *Enquiries*. Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon, 1894, 38.
11. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* 85–6.
12. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* 86.
13. *The Leibniz/Clark Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander. Manchester University Press 1956, 152.
14. Newton In Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica Quoted at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_time_and_space#cite_note-Newton-0 accessed 26 Oct 2011.
15. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965 "B" edition, 454–457.
16. Among the various pasts I experience, my own obviously plays a special role—not because I know it directly, for the vagaries of memory ensure that I do not; but, in part anyway, because the easiest and ordinary way of measuring relative durations of all kinds is by the events in one's own life. The Suez Crisis happened in 1956, but when I remember it I date it first to my childhood; the fall of the Berlin Wall happened in my middle years. In this way, we relate even world-historical events to the sequence of events which—usually—matters the most to us, that of our own lives. One use of my "personal past," then, is to measure time in this way.
17. John McCumber, *Reshaping Reason*. Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 2005.
18. Not much progress is likely to be made in clarifying its second word, "cope," because pretty much anything we do counts as coping with results of the past in one way or another. Simply to utter a thought, for example, requires me to exploit, and thus cope with the results of the incredibly long and complex history that produced the language in which I utter it. Brushing my teeth requires me to cope with some results of evolution itself.
19. For a detailed account of this Hegel see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
20. G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History*. Trans. Robert S. Hartman. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963.
21. Hegel, *Reason in History*, 27; translation altered.
22. Hegel, *Reason in History*, 31; translation altered. This does *not* mean imposing some arbitrary goal, such as the governmental structures of Hegel's Prussia onto past events as their necessary outcome.
23. Cf. James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
24. "And certainly we understand when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another."