

The Time of Our Lives

A Critical History of Temporality

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Preface

This book is the first volume in a planned two-volume study of the history of consciousness. This volume represents a history of time-consciousness. The next volume, currently in progress, focuses on the history of self-consciousness. This order is itself a philosophical problem and it involves some crucial philosophical decisions. Some philosophers would expect the study of self-consciousness to come before the study of time-consciousness. These philosophers have intuitions formed by the Kantian and neo-Kantian tradition. According to this tradition, time is a form of intuition and is imposed by the mind on experience. Holders of this view might well expect, then, a theory of self-consciousness to come before (both logically and temporally) a theory of time-consciousness.

By starting with time-consciousness, this book challenges the logical ordering that puts mind before time. The thought that is being explored in the phenomenological tradition is that temporality is a condition for the possibility of subjectivity. The assumption that the reverse is the case must therefore not be taken for granted. Along the way, however, several other aspects of the Kantian tradition are also called into question. Among them is the very idea of something “coming before” something else. The transcendental program of showing the logically prior “conditions for the possibility of experience in general” is challenged here. Simply reversing

the ordering of the relation of mind and time would not break with transcendental philosophy. To make that break, a thoroughly pragmatic or hermeneutical philosophy will have to give up the project of explaining which is the more primordial, mind or time, and which is derived. Furthermore, the very concepts, *mind* and *time*, must be problematized. Although they are not necessarily abandoned, the extent to which they surreptitiously carry with them much philosophical baggage should become clearer as this historical study of time- and self-consciousness unfolds. In this volume, the idea of time-consciousness itself is called into question right at the beginning. Whether it survives at the end or not, it undergoes conceptual transformations that might well make it unrecognizable to its most famous proponent, Edmund Husserl.

A subsidiary thesis of this book is that the history of philosophy can make a philosophical difference. The method of *critical history*, or *genealogy*, is intended to challenge predominant understandings of what the philosophical issues are supposed to be by shaking the foundations of philosophy and showing that philosophical concepts and issues are not fixed in stone forever. The thought that there are perennial problems of philosophy that have not changed is thus itself to be questioned. What philosophy itself is concerned with and how it has changed needs to be shown by a critical history of philosophical themes. This history has the potential to reveal and perhaps even to cause meaning changes, conceptual shifts, and even tectonic transformations in the overall philosophical landscape. If these studies contribute to those transformations even to a small extent, they will have served their purpose.