
Wyndham Lewis contributed to the 1920s debates in perhaps his most important single book Time and Western Man (TWM – 1927) but the lively controversies of that period did not lead to any generally accepted resolution. Two decades later philosophical hesitancies were still more evident than firm convictions. In The Idea of Nature (1945) R. G. Collingwood, at Oxford, questioned whether the ideas of space and time were ‘nothing but abstractions from the idea of movement’, or were they, on the contrary, ‘logical presuppositions of that idea’?2 His Cambridge contemporary, K. J. W. Craik, suggested that ‘it is probably impossible to expound the nature of space and time to any great extent’, and that ‘the very nature of the physical world and of human perception’ might make exact definition impossible.3 Human perception of space and time is not easily reconciled with the physical world. For Jürgen Habermas, for example, the words space and time have different meanings ‘according to whether they are applied to objects in the world or the linguistically constituted world of the speaking subjects themselves’. We deal in one case...
with physically measurable properties and in the other with the ‘intersubjective experience of configurations of symbolically mediated interactions’.4

From a different approach Bruno Adriani has argued that ‘when we use the word “space” in connection with artistic problems, neither the geometrical concept of three-dimensional space nor the physicist’s theory of [the] four-dimensional unity space-time is applicable’, because they ‘are not accessible to our senses’.5 In critical musicology the concept of ‘musical space’ frequently appears, a concept serving, as Susanne Langer says, ‘to develop the temporal realm in more than one dimension’.6 A humble example of a scrambling of concepts of time and space is the estate agent’s puff: ‘five minutes from main-line station’. A more classical instance occurs in Aristophanes’ The Frogs: ‘When the shadow is ten steps long, come to dinner’.

In 1900 the conventionally held views of time and space rested on those of Kant, for whom external reality constituted a perception of particular objects and events, while space and time included all objects and all events (and so implied the possibility of infinity and eternity, though neither could be actually experienced).7 In the early years of the new century Henri Bergson, soon to become among laymen the most popularly esteemed contemporary philosopher, challenged the Kantian orthodoxy by postulating human consciousness of reality as a state of flux. He subordinated a geometrically organised spatial consciousness to a psychochronological transposition from one vital moment to the next, leading, in Lewis’s view, to a ‘common worship of Time and Change’ that dissolved a static reality into a fluctuant stream of consciousness.8 Bertrand Russell said that he did not fully understand Bergson’s philosophy and therefore could not ‘hope to explain it with all the lucidity which it doubtless deserves’, so we may on good authority put further consideration of it on one side.9

A second development of the early 1900s, the ‘Einstein revolution’ in theoretical physics, reconceptualised time and space into a single (not necessarily homogeneous) four-dimensional space-time, an explanation widely taken as persuasive by 1920 (when quantum mechanics had not yet further complicated the theoretical picture). But, by dynamising space, the space-time continuum merely accentuated, for Lewis, the Bergsonian subordination of space to time, and he spoke of Bergson and Einstein together as ‘river officials of the great River Flux, of its conservancy staff’.10 Lost in the river were the ‘clearness of outline, the static beauty, of the things you commonly apprehend’ and also the clearness of outline of personal individuality.11

Also among the ‘conservancy staff’ of the River Flux was the Australian-born philosopher Samuel Alexander, whose once-influential Space, Time and Deity (STD – 1920) Lewis regarded as the mission-statement of time-philosophy. In a chapter deleted from the published text of TWM, Lewis speaks of Alexander’s work as ‘bergsonianism-beyond-Einstein in its most authoritative transformation’.12 In the published text he speaks of him as someone who ‘out-Bergsons Bergson’, and whose attribution of Time as the ‘mind of Space’ begged description.13 TWM was thus as much a response to Alexander as to Bergson and Einstein. Its publication in 1927 also coincided with that in Germany of Martin Heidegger’s influential Sein und Zeit (SZ – later translated as Being and Time). Curiously, both authors promised, and both failed to produce, a second volume on their chosen subject. In a preface to the seventh edition of SZ, 25 years later, Heidegger announced that ‘the second half could no longer be added unless the first were presented anew’. Lewis’s declared intention ‘soon to publish’ a follow-up volume to specify further ‘the particular beliefs that are explicit in my criticism of the philosophy of time’ simply did not appear.14
Heidegger’s cryptic dismissal of his failure to produce the second volume – like the omission itself – invited peer comment. As recently as 1999 Slavoj Zizek (whose first published book was on Heidegger) devoted a section of The Ticklish Subject to ‘Why Did Being and Time Remain Unfinished?’ He suggests (a) that other writings by Heidegger, including his subsequently published 1927 lectures at Marburg, appear ‘to cover precisely the remaining sections of the original Being and Time project’ and so provide a ‘rough realized version’ of the project; (b) that the part of SZ that was actually published ‘somehow strikes us . . . as if nothing is really missing’; and (c) that Heidegger found it necessary to step back from a conjectured ‘abyss’ of his own intellectual making.17

Comparable, differently detailed, causes could explain Lewis’s failure to produce a successor to TWM, or he may have switched his main attention elsewhere in face of a lessened public interest in matters of time and space at the end of the 1920s, a loss not fully made good until the 1980s, when Stephen Hawking’s Brief History of Time became a best-seller. Hawking’s belief in ‘profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe’ underlying the proliferation in theoretical physics of such non-observable particles as quarks and gluons reanimates the themes of Alexander’s STD, and thus of Lewis’s response and, correspondingly, Heidegger’s publication, of 1927.16

In a late work, The Writer and the Absolute (TWTA – 1952), Lewis publicly examined Heidegger’s ideas for the first time, mainly through the intermediary writings of J. P. Sartre, treating Heidegger primarily as a precursor of the French Existentialism of the late 1940s, the main topic of TWTA. Lewis comments that the ‘key-word [sic; i.e. key-work] of this new school [of Existentialism] was published about the same date as my Time book, its title Sein und Zeit – Being and Time’. The concept ‘time’ had, he recalls, been ‘a quite unifying principle’ of a school of thought he had opposed in TWM. Had he known of Heidegger at that point, Lewis adds, he ‘would have been one of my most valuable exhibits’.17 SZ was not translated into English until 1962, and is a difficult work in any language (some, like Theodor Adorno in The Jargon of Authenticity, say stronger things). Lewis seems to have relied in 1952 on a Sartrean interpretation of Heidegger rather than on the German original (although Heidegger himself repudiated Sartre as an interpreter).

The ‘Time’ of the title of Lewis’s book, and the ‘Zeit’ of Heidegger, both refer mainly to its subjective (or ‘internal time consciousness’) aspect. The second part of Lewis’s title, ‘Western Man’, for him represents ‘the environment in the midst of which we have been scrutinizing . . . the ravages of the doctrine of “Time”’, a doctrine which was not ‘emotionally and psychologically, essentially Western’, but rather ‘the mongrel westernized-orientalism of alexandrian mystical doctrine . . . contributing beyond doubt to our ever-deepening confusion of mind’. The concept ‘Western’ was also, in his view, becoming universalised, so that ‘before long the great asiatic populations will have been turned into “Westerners” pur sang, and the factory hand of Wigan and Hanchow “meet” long before the Trump of Doom’.18

In Heidegger’s book the concept associated with Zeit was not so much the ‘Sein’ of the title as its extension, Dasein, or (as conventionally translated) ‘being-there’. In his detailed study of Heidegger, J. H. Mehta speaks of the major part of SZ as comprising ‘the analytic of Dasein i.e. an analysis and interpretation of human nature’.19 So Sein, refracted through Dasein, brings us back to Man (an entity which Heidegger spoke of as alone ‘existing’ within his philosophy, for ‘Gott ist, aber er existiert nicht’). Since Heidegger also envisaged a ‘complete Europeanization of the earth and of mankind’ based on the ascendancy of Western scientific thought, Man once more
effectively comes to mean Western Man and, as Mehta explains, ‘the Western metaphysical tradition’ assumed for Heidegger ‘a planetary importance, far exceeding the limits of a geographically localized “culture” or “civilisation”.’

Adjusted to take account of these considerations, and today’s demands of political correctness, the titles of the two books can be resolved into one embracing topic area: ‘Internal Time Consciousness and Western Man’s (and Woman’s plus an indeterminate but increasing number of non-Westerners’) Being-there’. This compression-cum-expansion of subject matter does not suppose an identity or interchangeability of arguments, particularly given the technicality, idiosyncratic – and potentially addictive – terminology and plasticity of Heidegger’s ontological methods.

Importantly, both books are split into two parts. The First Division of SZ is called ‘Preparatory Fundamental Analysis of Dasein’ and the Second Division is a study of ‘Dasein and Temporality’ (temporality describing time in natural processes and historical happenings, not numerical relationships). Lewis calls Book One of TWM ‘a carefully constructed body of criticism against various contemporary literary and other modes of thought and methods of expression’, entitled ‘The Revolutionary Simpleton’. Book Two, ‘An Analysis of the Philosophy of Time’, comes closer, in less technical language, to the ontological arguments of SZ.

The core of Heidegger’s exploration of Dasein and Temporality lies in the idea of human ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ in the face of mortality. In Roger Scruton’s useful synopsis, personal ‘authenticity’ for Heidegger depends on a resolution that ‘time must form and determine all my outlook on the world, separating the future, which is the object of resoluteness, from the past, which is the object of guilt and responsibility’. Hence ‘I am a being . . . whose freedom lies in that freedom which time alone provides . . . to change from thrown-ness [Geworfenheit] to resolution’.

Had Lewis been able, as he says in TWTA, to use SZ as one of his ‘most valuable exhibits’ in 1927, he would have seized on the idea that ‘time must form and determine my outlook on the world’ as a prime example of a time-philosophy in action, although Heidegger intricately the argument thus: ‘Dasein’s constitution and its ways to be are possible ontologically only on the basis of temporality, regardless of whether this entity occurs “in time” or not. Hence Dasein’s specific spatiality must be grounded in temporality. On the other hand, the demonstration that this spatiality is existentially possible only through temporality, cannot aim either at deducing space from time or at dissolving it into pure time’. Heidegger specifically rejects ‘Bergson’s thesis that the time one has in mind . . . is space’. He argues that Bergson ‘is in accord with Hegel’s thesis that space is “time”’ but ‘merely says the reverse: that time (temps) is space’. He added that he would ‘come back to this’ in the second volume, a footnote necessarily deleted in the later editions of SZ, but Lewis had picked the point up in TWM where he says ‘the Time conception of Bergson seems to us entirely to misrepresent the role of Space, and, as it were, shuffle and transpose their respective “realities”’.

The ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ of Heidegger’s exposition has an implicit concreteness contrasting sharply with the Bergsonian interminable flux. He specifically uses the term ‘konkreten’ when he says that to proceed with ‘the everyday kind of Being . . . in a way which is phenomenally adequate to the full disclosedness of the “there”, we must work out these existentiaali concretely’. Heidegger’s emphasis on such concreteness (for him ‘Being-in-the-world has a spatiality of its own’ and ‘unconcealment occurs only where there is ‘work-in-the-world’) places him much closer philosophically to Lewis than to Bergson. The Third Chapter of Part I of Book Two of Lewis’s TWM is called ‘Spatialization and Concreteness’. A further
comparison between Lewis and Heidegger makes evident a similarity in their treatments of intersubjectivity. For Heidegger ‘Others’ are not ‘everyone else but me’, but ‘those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself’. For Lewis ‘The individual, in the sense that you and I are individuals, is anything but an isolated speck . . . for all intents and purposes my opinions are those of a sizable group’.

If there is an ‘abyss’ to be found in his thinking, one which became apparent to Heidegger after he had published SZ, it would have been methodological in its origins. A clue may lie in the work of a younger philosopher, M. Merleau-Ponty, working in much the same ontological and intersubjective mode, who insisted on the primacy of perception (a trait shared by Lewis). If Heidegger has, in a final assessment, to be numbered among the time-philosophers, Merleau-Ponty stands among the space-philosophers. For him space is ‘the in-itself par excellence. Its definition is to be in itself. Every point of space is and is thought to be right where it is – one here, another there; space is the evidence of the “where”. Orientation, polarity, envelopment are, in space, derived phenomena inextricably bound to my presence’.

In his book on Heidegger’s Crisis, Hans Sluga speaks of the ‘activism inherent in the concept of Dasein held in Being and Time’ giving way in Heidegger’s own later writings to a ‘call for stillness’. And if we look at the later writings collected and translated as Poetry, Language, Thought, we find evident, though in words that are very different, an approach often reminiscent of Lewis in 1927, notably the importance attaching to the ‘clearness of outline, the static beauty’ cited above. But had Lewis known, and teased out, the elaborate arguments deployed in SZ before he published TWM, he would scarcely have been deterred from bracketing Heidegger and Bergson together as ‘time-philosophers’, members of the same coven, linked by the ‘quite unifying principle of time’ against which he ranged his own deliberately partisan arguments. Their different degrees of malpractice would have seemed secondary to their complicity.

Lewis himself accepted space and time alike as ‘mere appearances’, having only a ‘relative reality’, but pointed out that the same argument applied to a space-time continuum. And if space and time do not ‘really exist’, they clearly exist in an anthropic sense. People, conscious of themselves ‘existing’ in space and time, behave and reason all the while as if these ‘mere appearances’ did ‘really exist’ (an argument not applicable to a space-time continuum). Intersubjectivity unites the subjective and objective aspects of time and space. ‘Real’ events occur for ‘real’ people in a perceived common time and common space. That intersubjectivity permits agreement on common arrangements, often very precise, for measuring those ‘mere appearances’. That outcome, Lewis recognised, lay at the heart of civilised life. In the 1890s the French mathematician and philosopher Henri Poincaré had reasoned that ‘hypothetical beings living in a non-isogeneous space would of necessity be led to conceive of it as isogeneous, because their measuring instruments would vary proportionately to the bodies to be measured and their own bodies and the relation of measure would therefore remain constant’.

Lewis’s distaste for time-philosophy extended into political aspects. He believed it went hand-in-hand with a dangerous millenarian political tendency that disregarded factual possibility. That belief needed a certain leap of thought, but it is entirely credible that any time-philosophy will be disposed to celebrate the centrality of the political ‘decisive moment’, whether as memorialised history, current opportunity or future aspiration, all of them saturated by romantic vision and inescapable imbalances of judgement. A space-philosophy will have a quite different inclination, based on the territorial imperatives in politics, on the topography of frontiers and boundaries and on the economic and psychological pressures of a need for ‘roots’, and desires for expansion.
Another leap of thought lies behind Lewis’s evaluation of Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* in Book One of TWM, as a prime example of a ‘time-book’, redolent of ‘a self-conscious time-sense’ which ‘has embraced the time-doctrine very completely’.

Another exponent of Joyce, Anthony Burgess, comes to a contrary view: for him Joyce’s novel ‘has a spatial scheme in which time has been divested of its bullying hurry-along authority’. The book ‘clamps down on time instead of riding with it’. And, in both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, ‘Time is the great enemy’ which the books ‘triumphantly trounce’ and put in its place. These conflicting judgements cannot be reconciled and underline the difficulties of interpretation of time and space which Barbour’s recent book has again brought to the surface. Lewis and Burgess were looking for different things and found different things, though Lewis did suggest that Joyce had written a time-book ‘to some extent, by accident’. Unlike Proust, another time-book author, who ‘*returned to the temps perdu*’ (past memory being for him, as Jeffrey Meyers has noted, more ‘real’ than imprecise perceptions of the present), Joyce, Lewis suggests, never left it: ‘it was *his* present’.

**Notes and References**

BT = M. Heidegger: *Being and Time* (Oxford 1962)
TWM = W. Lewis: *Time and Western Man* (ed. P. Edwards) (Santa Rosa 1993)
TWTA = W. Lewis: *The Writer and the Absolute* (London 1952)

6. Ibid., p. 117.
8. TWM p. 422.
10. TWM p. 389.
11. TWM p. 167.
12. TWM (‘Two Cancelled Chapters’) p. 536.
13. TWM pp. 418, 149.
17. TWTA p. 125.
20. Ibid., pp. 244–5.
21. TWM p. 111.
23. BT p. 418.
24. BT pp. 500–1; TWM p. 416.