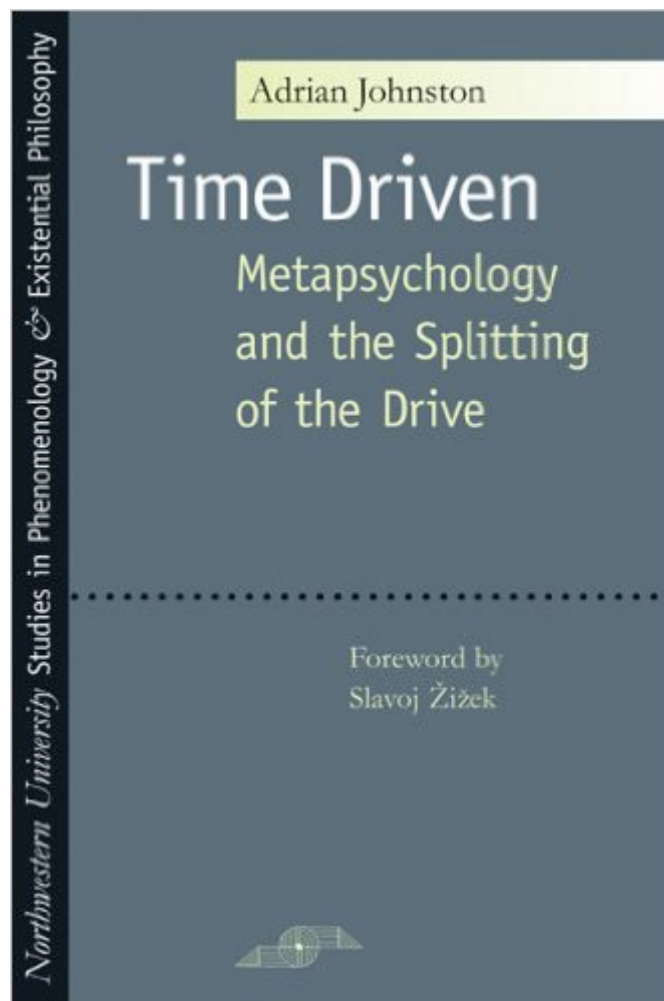


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# Time Driven: Metapsychology And The Splitting Of The Drive (Studies In Phenomenology And Existential Philosophy)



## Synopsis

Elaborating the fundamental concept of *Trieb*, or drive, Freud outlines two basic types of conflict that at once disturb and organize mental life: the conflict between drives and reality; and the conflict between the drives themselves (as in amorous Eros against the aggressive death drive). In *Time Driven*, Adrian Johnston identifies a third distinct type of conflict overlooked by Freud: the conflict embedded within each and every drive. By bringing this critical type of conflict to light and explaining its sobering consequences for an understanding of the psyche, Johnston's book makes an essential theoretical contribution to Continental philosophy. His work offers a philosophical interpretation and reassessment of psychoanalysis that places it in relationship to the larger stream of ideas forming our world and, at the same time, clarifies its original contribution to our understanding of the human situation. Johnston draws on Jacques Lacan's oeuvre in conjunction with certain philosophical resources—elements from transcendental philosophy, structuralism, and phenomenology—to rectify the inconsistencies within the Freudian metapsychological model of drive. In doing so, he helps to answer a question haunting Freud at the end of his career: Why is humanity plagued by a perpetual margin of discontent, despite technological and cultural progress? In *Time Driven*, Johnston is able to make sense of Freud's metapsychology both as a whole and in its historical development of Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud, and of the place of both Freud and Lacan in modern philosophy.

## Book Information

Series: Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy

Paperback: 421 pages

Publisher: Northwestern University Press; 1 edition (July 27, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0810122057

ISBN-13: 978-0810122055

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,843,928 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in [Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Movements > Existential](#) #630 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Existentialism](#) #2951 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > Spiritualism](#)

## Customer Reviews

Adrian Johnston gives us an ambitious and provocative book on psychoanalytic concept of the drive. What Johnston sets out to investigate is the place time has in Freud's theory of the drives. Freud famously said that the unconscious is without time, and yet psychoanalysis is rich in complicated temporalities, such as, the retroactive reconstruction of childhood memories. What role do these temporal torsions have in the structure of the drive? That such questions remain is evidence that Freud and Lacan failed to adequately theorize time. The basic idea behind Johnston's book is that the drive itself is split between an atemporal, noumenal, structure called the axis of iteration, which is the drive's constant pulsation, and a temporal, phenomenal, structure called the axis of alteration, which is an unfolding of the drive through its various object-representations. Based solely on the question it poses, and the argument it espouses, Johnston's book is destined to be a CLASSIC of contemporary psychoanalytic literature--right up there with *Sublime Object of Ideology* and *Read my Desire*. That it has not already become the center of controversy is strange, since it makes a powerful yet contentious critique of Freud. In other words, it avoids the trap of simply repeating psychoanalytic insights. Rather, it identifies a real problem, and goes to great lengths to resolve it. I did not give it a full five stars because it has some weaknesses. The greatest drawback of the book is Johnston's style. The Preface, Introduction, and Conclusion are fabulously written. In many ways they encapsulate everything that is so great about the book. But almost every substantive chapter is not so well written.

A lucid, engaging account of psychoanalytic temporality. The thesis is compelling and important, although as some others have noted, Johnston's book could have been reduced by 50 or maybe even 100 pages; those in a hurry could read the introduction and the conclusion and not miss a great deal at an abstract, conceptual level. I found it engaging to read through a number of his digressions, although the central thesis is repeated often enough in the development that one comes to wonder if the various chapters weren't stitched together out of a number of (partially overlapping) articles. By the time that the book's central components are introduced (the Axis of Iteration and Axis of Alteration), the reader has been so thoroughly prepared that there is little left to add. There are a few problematic aspects: Johnston's account seems to waver between asserting on the one hand, with Žižek, that the state of primordial satisfaction is a retrospective fantasy of full *jouissance* produced by the symbolic, and claiming on the other hand that such a moment actually took place but is irretrievably lost. The attempt to link metapsychology with Kant's TUA is occasionally insightful but also a bit preposterous; one thinks that Kant might have suggested that the psychoanalytic axioms Johnston deploys (a sort of formalized paranoia, or to use Ricoeur's

coinage, a hermeneutic of suspicion) would be an instance of the *Rasen der Vernunft*. This is not to suggest that the book's problems are anything other than minor. To be extremely clear: Johnston offers the single most lucid and comprehensive account of temporality and the drive in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis that I have ever read.

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