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REVIEW

## The Rhetorical Dimension in Heidegger

Stuart Elden, *Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

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Stuart Elden's book is, as the title suggests, a book that seeks to tie together seemingly disparate concerns: rhetoric and number, polemics and calculation, politics and measurement. This sense of opposition will mark the entire work as an investigation into the re-rendering of words that makes Heidegger's project so enthralling for some, and idiosyncratic for others. The theme of reinvention becomes immediately obvious in the first chapter, which is concerned with Heidegger's confrontation with Aristotle, and whilst the systemization of the word *logos* will be familiar to readers of Heidegger what is less obvious is that by reinstating *logos* as related to speech a number of political implications are embedded into Heidegger's deployment of *logos*.

It is these unresolved implications that Elden believes are the subtle guiding threads of Heidegger's *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*. We have then contained in this chapter three important points: (1) *Being and Time* is not just, as we usually presume, a book concerned with a critique of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, but a book that is positively charged by an engagement with Aristotle. (2) The re-rendering of *logos* described earlier slips unnoticed, by the reader, into *Being and Time* and so inscribes the definition of truth, and language given in that work with a commitment to a political and communal orientation (3) *Being and Time* is not, as it is often portrayed, an apolitical work: 'It is notable that *Being and Time*, thought to be so apolitical, and indeed mentioning politics only rarely, carries forward so much of this analysis.' (p.33)

The shift toward a more critical position occurs in the second chapter. Here Elden notes that Heidegger's position on speech leads him toward an anti-democratic position, and although Heidegger admitted this lack of faith in the *Der Spiegel* interview it nonetheless places another barrier to the non-political reading of *Being and Time*, and helps us to account for the rhetoric employed during his Rectorship. This more explicit engagement with politics Elden now traces to the influence of Plato: 'If there is a political sense that emerges around this time, it seems important to recognise that one of the crucial elements in this story is not merely Heidegger's reference to peoples like Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages and Leopold Ziegler, but his relation to Plato, rather than Aristotle.' (p.73) It is here that Heidegger begins to adapt the language, or in Elden's colourful language 'ontic mud,' of modern politics into his lectures as we witness the transcribing of ancient Greek *polemos* into the modern German *Kampf*. (p. 84) This chapter treads familiar terrain, but Elden collates the material in such a manner that the entire affair is not treated in a biographical manner, but one intimately tied to the rhetorical excess that Heidegger derived from the same ancient Greek source that will play such a significant role in his turn toward the history-of-being.

The third chapter brings us directly to the issue of calculation that will drive the book toward its conclusion. It deals with a mature Heidegger who no longer sees a distinction between the technological impulses of National Socialism and its counterparts: Americanism and Soviet Russia. All three are manifestations of a technological impulse rooted in a mathematical projection that is tied to the question of number. Here Elden provides a detailed analysis of an overlooked excursus that Heidegger introduces into his lecture course on *Plato's Sophist*. This excursus, which is concerned specifically with Aristotle's *Physics* Book II, deals with Aristotle's distinction between the natural scientist and the mathematician. The mathematician is depicted as abstracting from things that are immediately given. This seemingly unimportant observation is for Heidegger an especially acute one in that this very abstraction leads to separation, and through a complicated development of functionality, number, arithmetic, and geometry finds its purest expression much later in the work of Descartes.

Elden manages in these final pages to trace the transformation of the critique of Descartes in *Being and Time* and the Nietzsche lectures into a more nuanced critique that takes place in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. This text, unpublished until 1989, reveals a muted critique of National Socialism that is veiled within a broader critique of calculation and its various off-shoots: ever-expanding functionality, gigantism, machination, and technology. Here the mathematical reigns supreme as the measure by obliterating the rhetorical dimension of *logos*. It is here, in this seemingly obscure and ambiguous text, that Elden discovers the political critique emerging in Heidegger, but a careful, distant critique indifferent to casual explanation. This is a repetition of the move that Elden makes with *Being and Time*—namely politicizing those works of Heidegger that usually escape the political gaze. Elden's work forces the reader to

question the political inheritance of Heidegger not only in relation to his engagement with National Socialism, but elsewhere...in works where we do not expect to find the political dimension.

Elden's book manages to reinvigorate a seemingly tired debate regarding Heidegger's political engagement. This is a unique achievement in that he succeeds in re-opening a question that continues to haunt readers of Heidegger: to what extent can we separate the man from his thought? This book can be read in a number of ways, but two are worth mentioning in particular: the second chapter 'Against: Polemical Politics' provides a meticulous examination and introduction to Heidegger's *philosophical* engagement with National Socialism and the third chapter 'Number: Calculative Politics' is likely to serve as the basis for a number of works that delve into the all-too-often neglected area of the mathematical dimension in Heidegger's thinking.

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