



in Italian, and maybe western, capitalism, but his attempts at theoretical totalization render certain of his conclusions Eurocentric and incomplete. These problems do not, however, affect the fundamental significance of these texts, which is in the insistence on autonomy and social transformation in response to domination, an insistence that is as vital today as when the texts were written.

Andrew Robinson
University of Nottingham, UK

Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language, and the Politics of Calculation

Stuart Elden

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Stuart Elden has produced a textually rich, logically rigorous, always erudite, and ultimately quite significant book that takes on the relationship between Heidegger's thought and 'the political'. For a rather large group of scholars and students, this text must simply be essential reading; that group includes all Heidegger scholars (the largest subset) along with anyone who has grappled with Heidegger's thought in relation to the concerns of the field of political theory.

This is a powerful and important yet sometimes puzzling text. The text proves puzzling — and perhaps productively so — because of the title: it tells you where the book winds up, but does not quite describe what the book is 'about'. And because the text eschews a linear logic of argumentation, one does not quite know where one is headed until one gets there. To put this differently, the three main chapters of the book, despite generally following chronology, fit together like pieces of a puzzle. In Chapter one, Elden provides a detailed reading of Heidegger's early lecture courses (from the mid 1920s) on Aristotle. Against the prevailing view in the literature that Heidegger has no proper political thought, Elden convincingly demonstrates that Heidegger's engagement with Aristotle opens up a productive thinking of the political. This encounter with the political emerges most strikingly in the form of a concern with being-together (*Mitsein*), thought not as being-in-the-world but as being-in-the-*polis*. However, contends Elden, Heidegger does not pursue this promising line of thought, both because he restricts his treatment of Aristotelian *phronesis* to the ontological level — thereby covering over the particular political rendering of *phronesis* in Aristotle — and because *Being and Time* drops the thinking of being-in-the-*polis*.

These are the lacunae that render Heidegger's political thought during the Nazi period — the subject of Chapter two — problematic for reasons that go



well beyond his own political actions. Elden rejects the inclination to exonerate Heidegger for his role in the Nazi party based upon arguments about the importance of Heidegger's philosophical contributions. And, perhaps more importantly, Elden refuses to reduce Heidegger's thinking of the political to the political choices that Heidegger himself made during this period. It's not a question of damning Heidegger's thought because of his actions, nor of seeing how that thought might 'transcend' the actions. Elden's concern lies with the politics of the thought itself, and this makes possible a much more sophisticated understanding of the relation between thought and action. Specifically, Elden shows that the failures in Heidegger's political thought during the Nazi period need not be reductively attributed to Heidegger's decision to become Rector of Freiberg University and join the Nazi party; those failures can be traced back to the earlier gaps in his thinking of the political. Thus, Elden offers his readers a complicated and extremely subtle critique of Heidegger's political thought during this period. He patiently demonstrates how Heidegger's earlier refusal to follow through on the thinking of *Mitsein* and Aristotelian *phronesis* makes it possible for Heidegger to fill in those gaps with the discourse of National Socialism. Then, after his resignation of the Rectorship, Heidegger remains very much equivocal: he begins to work out a number of resistances to Nazism, while he remains committed to a certain ideal vision of National Socialism.

These equivocations during 'the Nazi period', along with the earlier work on Aristotle, become the ground for Heidegger's most significant political claims from his later writings. When it comes to a broader engagement with the terms of political theory, Chapter three is by far the most important in Elden's book. Here, we see the jigsaw come into focus, as Elden explicates Heidegger's reading of Descartes, his critique of calculative thinking, and its relation to the machine technology of the modern age. For Heidegger, calculative thinking predominates in modernity, but it does more than this: it produces a particular ontology that sets the conditions of ontic possibility. Elden derives this Heideggerian critique from a painstaking reading designed to show that, according to Heidegger, Greek thought had no concept of 'space'. The Cartesian revolution thus runs much deeper than we might have thought: in conflating the mathematical concern for space with the geometrical concern for place (or orientation, *topos*), Descartes makes it possible to read a Cartesian concept of space as extension back into Euclidean geometry. Heidegger's mature political thought helps us to *understand* (as Elden would stress) not only Nazism but also liberalism — both appear more clearly as products of a certain calculative thinking, of an ontology of coordinate space.

Thus, the chapters of the book come together in the following way, as Elden summarizes: 'what we have here is the critique of calculative politics brought to bear on the categories employed in Heidegger's political period, dependent on



his earlier failure to think being-together-politically in an adequate way'. In other words, 'thinking through the politics of calculation is a response to the political action, which itself was dependent on intellectual failings' (pp. 171–172). As any reader can clearly see, this is no simple formula. The end result proves to be a powerfully illuminating picture of the encounter between Heidegger and the political, although it must be noted that the steps along the way often lose sight of this 'big picture'.

As a work of Heidegger scholarship, the text sets exceedingly high standards: Elden knows both Heidegger's corpus and his biography backwards and forwards, and Elden carefully but patiently unpacks Heidegger's German and Aristotle's Ancient Greek in a manner that should be satisfying both to language specialists and to non-specialists. In other words, if you know the German and Greek you'll be pleased with the care Elden shows in working with language, and if you do not know German and Greek, you'll be delighted to find that you do not need to. The readings of Heidegger remain lucid throughout, and while Elden does occasionally digress into areas that might not be of great interest to non-Heideggerians, the text consistently maintains an impressive level of clarity. Anyone who has ever attempted an exegesis of Heideggerian texts or an elucidation of Heidegger's thought knows that this is no mean feat; Elden should be applauded for writing with such sharp focus, while simultaneously never reducing the genuine complexity of Heidegger's thought.

Some readers, however, will probably be disappointed that this text itself does not engage more fully with the field of political theory. The trade-off in the detailed attention to Heidegger's life and works comes in the form of a relative neglect of other figures in political theory. Elden tantalizes his readers with a provocative two pages (the final two of the book) on Alain Badiou, but aside from a couple of references to Foucault, no other contemporary political theorists make much of an appearance. Given Elden's clear focus on, and thorough knowledge of, Heidegger, these absences rarely prove conspicuous. An exception might come in the form of Gadamer. Elden's meticulous focus on *phronesis* proves to be the highlight of the book's encounter with 'the political', but this makes it all the more odd that Elden would make no mention of Gadamer, who places a reading of *phronesis* at the crux of *Truth and Method*.

Of course, this has little bearing on the sizeable impact that the text should have on the study of Heidegger. And the book makes a fine contribution to political theory by redefining the terms through which we might consider Heidegger's contribution to political thought. Elden's book must now be taken as a starting point for work on Heidegger and the political.

Samuel A Chambers

University of Wales Swansea, Swansea, UK