

The euporia of traumatic ontology

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From the moment when philosophy developed a critical dimension and became historical with Aristotle's first book of the *Metaphysics*, one of its fundamental tasks became *thinking through*. Philosophy as *thinking through* implies the existence of medium that needs to be traversed and a movement from one side to the other. In this sense, Heidegger remarks in a Marburg lecture from 1924, glossing on the Aristotle's meaning for ἀπορία, that “the α-privative shows that one must πορεύειν in general [...] and the τέλος is εὐπορεύειν, *getting-through-well*” (GA 18: 159-160/ 108), consequently the aim and responsibility of thinking is *euporia*¹ (the state achieved by *getting-through-well*).

For a young researcher, Heidegger's thinking in the thirties seems an impassable medium, utterly aporetical with its multifaceted narratives involving *the turn*, *the overcoming of the metaphysics*, *the history of being*, the political views, the poetic solutions, the puzzling interpretations of the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Schelling, Hegel and Nietzsche, all

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bound in a distressing language. Furthermore, the Heideggerian scholarship on this subject appears to add more complications to an already impenetrable problem, either by fixating on a particular theme and losing the bigger picture, or by giving different accounts on what the bigger picture is.

Richard Polt's new book, *Time and Trauma*, is an inspiring project that successfully gives course to three substantiated strategies of *thinking through* the problematic of the thirties and succeeds in *euporia*, in *getting-through-well*. First of all, Polt employs a hermeneutical approach which starts in the aftermath of *Being and Time*, by focusing on Heidegger's context, drives and questions that motivated the transition "from the understanding of being to the *happening of being*" (GA 40: 218/233). Through a precise reading of Heidegger's core intentions of *Being and Time*, Polt pinpoints the "squared" transcendental project ("being as a condition of possibility of the experience of beings; time as a condition of possibility of the understanding of being" p. 19) as standing in the way of seizing "the origin of ecstatic temporality itself" (p. 23). This results in Heidegger's abandonment of the transcendental investigation and his focus on the idea of events - *intense moments when human temporality itself can be said to arise* (p. 9). The first chapter, *Into the Happening of Being*, consists in a systematic approach of the three basic themes that stem from this line of thought: *a conception of history centered on **inceptions** which appear in moments of crisis or **emergency** that trigger the question of **selfhood** and shared selfhood*. In Heidegger's view, the foundational character of the events extends beyond temporality and history to the shared selfhood of a community.

Passing Through the political, the second chapter, follows extensively Heidegger's political reflections of the thirties in close relations to the philosophical development of his ideas. Through a meticulous interpretation, Richard Polt exposes the intertwining themes, beliefs, questions and solutions that composed Heidegger's lines of thought: the necessity of *founding a community*, *the belief that National Socialism could bring a new inception of Western history*, the emergency of creating a new world and metaphysics, the belief

in the founding power of a leader, the founding will of power, the founding as struggle and enmity, *founding as collective being-there*, *poetic founding*, *founding as abyssal self-assertion*, “the “metapolitics” that springs from the fundamental silence of the people and the mystery of the homeland” (p. 103), the consequences and manifestations of modern metaphysics, the Greek first inception of philosophy, the possibility of another inception, etc. Furthermore, Polt thoroughly explains the philosophical particularities of Heidegger’s assessments (concerning: liberalism, biologism, materialism, Marxism, *biological-liberalism*, *Judeo-Christian egalitarianism*, antisemitism, subjectivism, totalitarianism, democracy, nihilism, American pragmatism, machination, etc.), as well as exposing the dynamics of his beliefs (from acceptance to rejection of the National Socialism), philosophy (from one of action and *will to power* to one of *release* and passivity) and political stance (from the need of founding a new political order to an apolitical awaiting for a catastrophic conclusion).

Richard Polt’s second strategy of *thinking-through* consists in a critical evaluation of Heidegger’s political views, understood as “a chance to rethink politics in a productive struggle with him” (p. 162). Besides a welcomed assessment of Heidegger’s manifold politico-philosophical failures, in the third chapter named *Recovering Politics*, the author questions whether there are also some worth pursuing elements. For example, Heidegger points out in his critique regarding the metaphysics of the Enlightenment that the rationalistic approach has a tendency to be ahistorical and to overlook “our nonrational familiarity with the standards and practices of our community” (p. 166). A nonreductive understanding of ourselves and our world is a just aspiration, but it cannot be the ground for a rejection of rationalism, particularly in the political dimension. Heidegger’s commitment to consider all praxiological and political affairs strictly from a metaphysical point of view, inevitably results in simplistic and reductive accounts, that often become crude, especially when taken up against Arendt’s depiction of *the sphere of action*, as Polt does.

In the first two chapters, the author *thinks through* by means of a hermeneutical exploration of the three themes

(*inception, urgency, selfhood*) to their microscopic fibers in Heidegger's web of thought. In the third chapter, Polt *thinks through* - critically, by indicating the web's weak spots and promising threads. In the final chapter, he weaves the promising threads into an auspicious *traumatic ontology*. Accordingly, the third strategy of *thinking through* implies a double motion of what could be called an "appropriative-creation", that starts from the central theme of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and transcends it in careful way, by being in the same time attentive to its inner limits and to our own situation's thinking needs. Firstly, an interpretative summary of Heidegger's *temporal ontology* serves as a propaedeutic to the merge of a *Being and Time* inspired phenomenology of the transformative moments, with a the ontologization of the two historical themes (*emergency and inception*) explored in the thirties. This results in a pluralized form of ontology - **traumatic ontology** - which implies "a traumatic empiricism - an understanding of experience as driven by and centered on challenging and disturbing events" (p. 209) and "a way of thinking the origin of the temporal ecstases themselves" (p. 208). Polt clarifies the meaning of *trauma* in terms of emergency, disruption, crisis, transformative moment, "essential affliction", limit situation or as a "situation in which sense and excess collide" (p. 221). Since "beings show themselves as being more than how they show themselves" (p. 211), **sense** and **excess** become the key elements of a traumatic ontology. By extending the field of emergency to the basic crises involved in our existence, Polt's project is able to recover a plurality of meaningful events and inceptions. To give just one powerful example, the indication that excess can be encountered in the form of others and that "the most transformative events in our lives" originate in *the deeper interactions with the others* (p. 220) is uplifting.

The *euporia* of Richar Polt's *Time and Trauma* has multiple senses: hermeneutical clarification, critical analysis, practical relevance, comprehensive depth, but the pinnacle of its adventure to *think through* consists in the *traumatic ontology*. Its *emergent thinking* provides an essential opening to a better questioning of our selfhood, senses of being, time, world

and history. *Time and Trauma* is truly a euphoric event of the Heideggerian scholarship, whose generous sense remains to be properly thought.

NOTES

¹ “In relation to ἀπορία, Aristotle is himself aware of a series of characteristic expressions. He speaks of ἀπορεῖν, εὐπορεῖν, διαπορεῖν, προαπορεῖν. Πορεῖν meant “running,” “going,” in the sense of λέγειν, in a discursive mode, λέγειν in the function of ἀποφαίνεσθαι. Απορεῖν: “to not get through” in this being-in-progress, in running-through, in the course of this exhibiting. The α-privative shows that one must πορεῖν in general. To ἀπορία belongs πορεῖν, that one is in progress in general, that one maintains oneself in an exhibiting. The τέλος is εὐπορεῖν, getting-through-well.” (GA 18, [*Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*], p. 159-160, *Basic concepts of Aristotelian philosophy*, p. 108).

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