

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# HEIDEGGER'S ONTOLOGICAL LOGIC

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Review of: Martin Heidegger, *Heraclitus: The Inception of Occidental Thinking and Logic: Heraclitus's Doctrine of the Logos*, trans. Julia Goesser Assaiante and S. Montgomery Ewegen, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

*Logos* and logic are familiar themes with Heidegger. The relation between the two was foundational to his early thinking that led up to the publication of *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*.<sup>1</sup> Following its publication, *logos*, in particular, anchors or at least informs key concepts of ontology, truth, language and poetry found throughout his work. Further, logic and *logos* as concepts are critical to gaining an understanding of his distinction of pre-Socratic and post-Platonic *thinking* and his effort to return to and disclose a more “originary” thinking that becomes lost in philosophy’s turn toward metaphysics. Along the path of this process, Heidegger’s 1943 and 1944 lectures on Heraclitus find him at a midway point in his thinking on these two terms, translated here to English for the first time by Julia Goesser Assaiante and S. Montgomery Ewegen as *Heraclitus: The Inception of Occidental Thinking & Logic: Heraclitus's Doctrine of the Logos*.<sup>2</sup>

Heraclitus’ *logos* (λόγος) has been endlessly interpreted, translated and appropriated to advance core concepts in Stoicism, Christianity and contemporary continental philosophy. The word remains as vital as ever in philosophical discourse. Yet today’s post-structuralist usage often points

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, in English, Heidegger’s *Logic: The Question of Truth*, which is compiled from his 1925-26 lectures in Marburg. See as well his *History of the Concept of Time*, from 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Full citation: Martin Heidegger, *Heraclitus: The Inception of Occidental Thinking and Logic: Heraclitus's Doctrine of the Logos*, trans. Julia Goesser Assaiante and S. Montgomery Ewegen, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. All parenthetical references to page numbers are taken from this source.

dismissively to a fixed, a priori, near inescapable dogma. Heidegger's aim with *logos* and logic was to return to their abandoned Greek sense, to open to their fluidity and openness. By revisiting the terms, he offers a speculative revisitation to a different kind of thinking, one that is inconceivable today. Opening to the word *logos* opens to thought that no longer exists, but which for Heidegger should re-enter contemporary discourse to reorient our thinking of being, language, listening, poetry and philosophical practice. Problems of the commonness of thought and the thinking that does not think are ethically aligned in Heraclitus and Heidegger. The book is valuable therefore for scholars of Heidegger, Heraclitus and pre-Socratic philosophy, but as well for those working toward reorienting familiar and unchallenged thinking about *logos* and logic.

Specifically in regard to Heidegger's work, there are two distinct aspects to this text to identify for the purposes of review. First, simply, is that these lectures illustrate Heidegger's thinking at this time on these concepts. Second, and worth deeper scrutiny, is that Heidegger's attempt here is to act as teacher toward understanding not only these concepts but Heraclitus' thinking in the latter's *own* time. While this is an impossible task, as he admits, it is nevertheless an effort to attend to and unfold Heraclitus's project, as distinct from the application of such terms through Aristotle, Kant, Hegel or others. Along this journey, Heidegger both aims toward the "inception of" Occidental thinking while also marking a distinction between inceptual and Occidental thought. The latter, developed through Plato and Aristotle, is what became metaphysics and what we now think of as philosophy. Its influence today is Aristotelian but mostly taken up in the aftermath of Kant and the Enlightenment. "The Occidental definition of the essence of the human should be recalled: ζῷον λόγον ἔχον, animal rationale, the rational living being..." (19). Its modern aims, process and method are entirely different from the inceptual thinking that gave birth to it. Inceptual thinking is "originary" thinking, and for Heidegger, only three Greek thinkers can lay claim to the *inception of* Occidental thought *at its origin*: Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus (4).<sup>3</sup> Because his thinking is

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<sup>3</sup> "Inceptual thinking" is translated from the German as *anfängliche/anfängliches/anfänglich (Denken)*. His use echoes his earlier *Contributions to Philosophy*, in which he describes inceptual thinking as a leap away from

inceptual, and because we today (the 1940s in this case) live in an Occidental age, Heraclitus' cosmology, ethics and use of language is so difficult to think.

Logic is an example of this historical process. It is a core term to grasp in this text, not only as a distinction of inceptual thinking and Occidental metaphysics but in its relation to *logos*. "Logic' is originary when it consists of the thinking 'of the' Λόγος..." (139). Logic becomes metaphysics through Hegel's system, and, at the point of Heidegger's lectures, is expressed in definitions such as "correct thinking," or thinking correctly about "the structure, form and rules of thinking" and applying them to other situations; logic is necessitated therefore on consistency, a correspondence to *logic* (143). Heidegger's argument is that this Occidental logic is not relational to thinking but in correspondence to matter, situation or process. This is how one comes to apply the word logic to some natural thing. To better our thinking, we therefore need to get out of the structure of logic and its rules. "Many a person seemingly possesses 'logic,' but still never thinks a single truthful thought" (143). His critique here is of the whole modern system of logic and how it comes to function as the dominant mode of thinking, laying claim over our thought of things in the world. In logic there is the logic of thinking and the logic of things. He wants to examine the former, but the problem of logic is that it is already beholden in Occidental thought to the latter. In this sense, logic adheres entirely to pre-existent structures. Any claim of logic is pre-figured in accordance to consistency, not *thinking*. This is a useful method for achieving such consistency in making a point or a claim in applying its structure to a particular situation, but it belongs fundamentally to things. Heidegger wants, in part, to free thought from such a correspondence so one can think in a more originary way.

This leads him back to the etymology. Prior to "logic" there was "*logos*," and out of that became logic. His effort then is to go back to *logos* to attempt a thinking-through of what Heraclitus was thinking, which is an originary or inceptual way of thinking rather than the Occidental, metaphysical thinking we have now in philosophy. "More truthful" would then be more "originary," as

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the world of beings/representation/appearances toward the openness of *historical-be-ing* as another beginning.

in, prior to “logic.” But in his speaking on logic, truth does not yet enter the picture. Instead the emphasis is on an activity that is more authentic in that it is a “letting be,” an unfolding “of being out from its own truth” (177). Logic’s originary connection to *logos* “is essentially without doctrinal content,” rather “the unceasing practice of—or perhaps even just the preparation for—taking a simple step in one’s thinking into the realm of the authentic to-be-thought” (177). This is not a thinking that thinks in a vacuum but one that is a gathering of what is, a “harvesting” of thought. Heidegger, here and in other works, is fond of such agrarian terms in his account of *logos*, something he acknowledges. *Logos* is an older practice, more rural, lying outside of the structures of academia and instead a thought given to the *phusis* or nature that emerges through “unconcealment.” In an originary manner, logic “is the shortened expression for ἐπιστημὴ λογικῆ, and now means: having an understanding of what pertains to λόγος” (156). Such a move toward what is originary in Heraclitus is also original (in the sense of new) in Heidegger, in that such an exercise does not conform to any system (logic) but is a gathering of being (*logos*). Inception logic is “deeper” than the logic we have post-Aristotle:

“the essence of λόγος must be thought the deepest in ‘logic,’ especially if the latter is the metaphysics of λόγος. Seen in this way, pre-Platonic thinking becomes pre-metaphysical thinking, the kind of thinking that is still incomplete and is still on its way toward metaphysics. What the pre-Platonic thinkers said about λόγος can only be thought from out of later metaphysics. This is the situation that came to pass, and it is still happening now.” (196-197)

Inceptual thinking as originary is also placed counter to “common” thinking. The “rubbish” of the cosmos in Frag. 50 is what Heraclitus means by common thought (124). Heidegger also phrases the distinction as one of essential versus conventional thinking, of which Heraclitus was well aware. Essence, while incomprehensible to conventional thinking, is not necessarily complicated, rather it is too simple. It is not too distant but too near. Essence is conceived not as an end but as a “sojourn” that does not move but listens to what is unsaid in the saying (135). “This sojourn presupposes a place whose place-ness is not easily found by the human. That is why he must set out to seek for, and inquire about, this place of its essence” (256). Heraclitus is known as “The Obscure” not because he was intentionally trying to hide, Heidegger states, but because obscurity is necessary to preserve the essence within any

saying. In other words, concealment is necessary for inceptual thinking. Darkness is needed to give contour to the light.

Many of the terms already mentioned are familiar to readers of Heidegger. He retraces many of his paths in his lectures here, but it is worth highlighting four concepts to gain a sense of the direction he is moving in this connection of logic and *logos* in the inceptual versus Occidental worldviews. The first two, arguably the two most central concepts to Heidegger's project, must be kept in mind when reading this text: his ontology (the Being of beings) and his epistemology (truth as *aletheia*). *Aletheia* (ἀληθεία) is often translated directly as truth but this is not quite accurate, as Heidegger says. It is "revealing into unconcealment" that is "thought in the saying, though it is not named in it" (130). When *aletheia* speaks, it is speaking inceptually. Necessary to illustrate these core concepts are the two additional Greek terms worth highlighting: *phusis* (φύσις, nature) and *ethos* (ἦθος, ethics). Heidegger and Heraclitus agree that nature prefers to hide, as we read famously in Frag. 123. For Heraclitus, nature comes through in signs and as *logos*; for Heidegger, *Being*, as nature, comes through *aletheia* in its unconcealment, and this is its truth revealed as visual. Truth in this sense must be drawn out because it hides in a concealment within sheltering. Nature, Heidegger says, is a bad translation for *phusis*; it is rather emerging to appearance (20). But such emergence requires creation (τέχνη, *technē*) to be made visual and known. This is not mere appearance but what is inconspicuous in all things that do appear—as he phrases it, in "the inconspicuous shining" (109). Conventional thinking cannot see *phusis* because today we are directed toward objects, measuring what can be objectified. *Phusis* can only be thought inceptually. It is not invisible, rather "it is what is seen inceptually which, however, is for the most part never properly beheld" (109). If nature hides, it is from the eyes of humans. *Phusis* doesn't need to hide since human ignorance will keep it hidden. Regarding *ethos*, Heidegger wonders if *logos* and *ethos* are not involved in the same process. Ethics is, as he defines it, the human in a relation to the whole of being. Could the same be applied to *logos*? He responds that the difference is that *logos* is always caught up in a particular activity, a particular harvesting, while ethics is done in regard to one's relation of the whole of humanity. Logic, then, is more about *ethos* than *logos* because it is the whole that is applied to a situation: "logic is the ethics of

λόγος, the ethics of asserting” (164).

How does all this happen, this revealing through nature’s concealment? Through *logos*. But *logos*, as relational, requires action or activity. This is where *legein* (λέγειν) steps in conceptually. It is the *activity* of *logos*, bound as the two are within thinking, or that which gathers—the harvesting as the verb of *logos*, the harvest. Heidegger states it quite simply in his summary with the following: “λόγος/λέγειν is harvest/to harvest, gathering/to gather” (281).<sup>4</sup> Out of the *logos* relation, something comes into thought; this something is the activity. It is not simply the action, but that the process becomes actualized. For Heidegger, what becomes actualized is thought in a visual sense; truth as *aletheia* is an emergence into light.

In this familiar Heideggerian emphasis on vision and light, it is easy to forget that *logos* involves an act of listening. Heidegger acknowledges this in his deep study of Heraclitus’ famous Frag. 50, commonly translated to English as “Listening not to me but to the *logos*, it is wise to say that all things are one.” But Heidegger does his own fragment translations throughout the text, which are then translated from German to English for this edition. In so doing, he necessarily complicates the issue to help us think through the fragment in a new way (that is to say, an older, more inceptual approach). Frag. 50 through Heidegger then becomes: “If you have listened not merely to me, but rather have listened to the *Logos* (in obedience to it, hearkening to it), then knowledge (which subsists therein) is to say the same as the *Logos*: one is all.” (187) There is a criticism to be found here in Heidegger: that understanding *obeys* what is prior to the act, that one’s *logos* activity attunes to *the logos* that is. This hearing-as-obeying aspect is a refrain for Heidegger. It appears not only in this text, but in a lecture devoted to the same fragment in 1950.<sup>5</sup> For Heidegger, then, *logos* leads to obedience, an obedience *to logos*—in other words, to *Being*, to what *is*. The move he has made therefore is to inject “is” into Heraclitus’ paradox. This reminds us that Heidegger is continuing his project of a return to ontology, a turning toward being. This is further illustrated in the distinction between *logos* and *the logos*, which Heidegger spends considerable time working through. The

<sup>4</sup> See also 203.

<sup>5</sup> See the text *Early Greek Thinking*.

first is a human process and thereby aligned with Aristotelian interpretations; the second is more difficult to ascertain, not only because this is the “originary” aspect as *Being* or *Beying* for Heidegger, but also because it lies both with the world and the human who listens.

As in common with Heidegger, his process circles around a core concept—in this case the connection of an originary logic and *logos*—and slowly penetrates toward the question. The question penetrated here, in suggestions and foreshadowing, is: what is *logos*? Heidegger reminds us that Heraclitus never says what it is. Indeed, the core of the concept is that one cannot say. For Heidegger, it lies in the relation itself, in one being caught up in preserving a disclosure of nature that has no matter. It is the journey, the conversation, the act of preserving; it is the most difficult bearing without grasping what offers no guarantee of a correspondence. “Even when humans listen with their ears, it is not guaranteed that they have listened to what they have heard, and that they have gathered themselves toward it in a hearkening way” (297).

As much as Heidegger wishes to seek out the Heraclitus that has been forgotten, what one finds in reading his account is Heidegger’s own thought in the process of being thought, or rather re-thought. This is indeed the value of the work. Of interest to scholars here is in assessing from the text the degree to which Heidegger has disclosed an inceptual thinking of Heraclitus against the degree to which Heidegger is appropriating Heraclitus toward illustrating and enlivening Heidegger’s own work. This is not to suggest an either/or, for there is indeed overlap here in the topics, terms and their interrelations explored. But it should not be forgotten that in this period of Heidegger’s life, the question of *logos* here is answered in a way that functions for his project: an inceptual *logos* is, to Heidegger, a relation not only to, but of, *Being*. Everything stated in these lectures and documented as the text cycles back toward this fundamental thesis.

As with so much of Heidegger’s work during this period—he was forbidden by the Nazi party from publishing and what we have of this time are lectures—to review the book is to review his speaking notes gathered into a book, which are then translated to and edited into this English edition. One should keep in mind therefore that in this book is Heidegger’s literally *unorthodox* translations of Greek fragments, presumably taken from “inceptual” Heraclitean thinking, into German, which are then translated here to English. The aim of the book is

express the inexpressible in language, a radical and speculative synchronic investigation translated and re-translated. One may then fairly question the value of the effort and its place in English philosophical scholarship as it pushes forward. Nevertheless, this could be said of many translations and works regarding ancient philosophy and incomplete works, of Heraclitus' own for example. The interpretation, the work of translation, becomes a fertile exercise that opens to thought that is difficult to know. This should not be taken as a dismissal—for the text is a fascinating and thorough investigation of the untranslatable—but in fact opens to new discussions.

Regarding the structure of the book, there is the familiar “Translator’s Forward.” But sorely missing is a longer, proper introduction. Overviews of Heidegger’s thought are perhaps redundant for a text like this, unlikely as it is to be a reader’s introduction to his work. But this text in particular, this series of lectures, needs to be placed in its time. His development of thought over the years on the core concepts of *logos* and logic are key to introducing the subject matter. Heidegger’s concept in *logos* experienced important growth and rethinking between the years of 1925-1952 in particular and revisited in depth again in ’67-68. It is mentioned in early sections of *Being and Time* and developed more fully in *Was Heisst Denken*. But texts and lectures before, after and in between these two famous books deserve to be situated for the reader to offer a sense of this evolution. A second aspect of the text worth mentioning is how Heidegger’s own arrangement of his lectures repeats itself. This may be redundant for some readers and helpful for others. Noted in the text are “Review” sections for some, but not all, lectures. Heidegger additionally provides a brief summary at the end of the third lecture. Finally, there is the decision to include at the end a “first draft” of a supplement Heidegger wrote as a continuation of these lectures. This should not be ignored as it is interesting to see how once again he has consolidated, clarified and rephrased many of the key topics and terms explored.

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