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Publication Information

Hösle, Vittorio. 2019. "The Tübingen School". Edited by Alan Kim. *Brill's Companion to German Platonism*, Brill's companions of philosophy. Ancient philosophy, , no. volume 3: 328–48.

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Brill's Companion to German Platonism

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Brill's Companion to German Platonism

Edited by

Alan Kim



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Cover illustration: *Western Sea* by Lyonel Feininger. Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts. James Philip Gray Collection. Photography by David Stansbury.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kim, Alan, 1968– editor.

Title: Brill's companion to German Platonism / edited by Alan Kim.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2019. | Series: Brill's companions to philosophy. Ancient philosophy, ISSN 2588-7823, volume 3 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018049822 (print) | LCCN 2018054158 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004285163 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004250673 (hardback : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Philosophy, German. | Plato—Influence. | Platonists.

Classification: LCC B2528.G73 (ebook) | LCC B2528.G73 B75 2019 (print) | DDC 141/.20943—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018049822>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2588-7823

ISBN 978-90-04-25067-3 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-28516-3 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Kyriakos Demetriou of Cyprus University, the series editor, for his patient guidance. I have also received valuable advice, help and encouragement from various friends over the years: Stephen Menn of McGill; at Dartmouth, Amy Allen (now of Penn State); and at Stony Brook, Eduardo Mendieta (now also of Penn State), Allegra de Laurentiis, Jeff Edwards, and Lee Miller.

Plato criticized writing for leaving one's thought vulnerable to misconstruction. An editor would therefore seem to have a special responsibility towards the defenseless writings placed in his care, namely to make them as fine as possible before sending them forth into the world. In trying to fulfill this duty, I discovered an unexpected and unique privilege: when failing to understand something, I was able simply to ask the writer where I had gone astray and reasonably expect an answer—ὥστε μοι σχεδὸν τι πᾶς ὁ λόγος γέγραπται (*Theaetetus* 143a). Thus, the relationship between editor and writer, I have found, may elude Plato's critique, and hold reading and writing within the bounds of philosophical χάρις. I thank my collaborators for their ideas and patient "defenses".

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in the Canon of the Sciences) (Würzburg, 2010); *Einführung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (*Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*) (2nd ed., Darmstadt, 2005); *Geschichte und Geschichten. Studien zur Geschichtsenphänomenologie Wilhelm Schapp's* (*History and Histories: Studies in Wilhelm Schapp's Phenomenology of Histories*) (Würzburg, 2004); *Geschichtsphilosophie* (*Philosophy of History*) (Freiburg, 2000); *Platon in Marburg. Platonrezeption und Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie bei Cohen und Natorp* (*Plato in Marburg: The Reception of Plato and the Philosophy of the History of Philosophy in Cohen and Natorp*) (Würzburg, 1994); *Gegenstand Geschichte. Geschichtswissenschaftstheorie in Husserls Phänomenologie* (*History as Object: The Theoretical Epistemology of History in Husserl's Phenomenology*) (Dordrecht, 1988).

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Introduction

Alan Kim

Our title, *German Platonism*, does not name a tradition so much as a syndrome. I mean the peculiar preoccupation with Plato running through German thought from the late Middle Ages up through our own era: German philosophers develop their philosophies by arguing over and with Plato. Thus, what we think of as the German philosophical tradition is not merely rooted in Plato's philosophy; in many cases it is an elaboration of it, and, in a few exceptions, a radical reaction against it. One aim of this book, then, is to describe these roots, ramifications, and reactions, chiefly in the chapters on Cusanus, Leibniz, Mendelssohn, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Cohen, Natorp, Husserl, and Heidegger.

If the philosophical interpretation of Plato is a central theme of both the German tradition and our volume, its pursuit nonetheless gives rise to involutions and "spandrels"¹ corresponding to turning points within that tradition itself. That is, as philosophy becomes more self-conscious and reflects upon the conditions of possibility of knowledge, there arise parallel reflections on those cognitive modes called interpretation and understanding. And just as the former epistemological inquiry uses Platonic dialectic and the Forms as inspiration or foil, so too do the latter hermeneutic reflections chiefly concern the correct interpretation and understanding of Plato's dialogues. This hermeneutic turn corresponds to the awakening of historical consciousness in the early nineteenth century, in which the influence exerted by Plato on modern (German) thought becomes a topic of philosophical reflection in its own right. Earlier assumptions regarding Plato's psychological, ethical, and metaphysical doctrines are subjected to historical and textual critique, revealing the dialogues as deep riddles that call the reader forth to reconstitute them ever anew.² A second aim of this book, then, is to exhibit ways in which reflection on the activity of interpretation, on the one hand, and the substantive interpretations of Plato's dialogues, on the other hand, mutually determine each other; this is mainly pursued in the chapters on Schleiermacher, the Tübingen School, and Gadamer.

¹ Cf. Gould and Lewontin (1979), 581, *et passim*.

² Cf. Todorov (1984), 14, ff.

Whereas each chapter illustrates these points regarding a particular philosopher or school, I want in this Introduction to trace the overarching themes binding them into a distinctly German tradition. In doing so, I suspend judgment as to the rightness of a given reading as an interpretation of Plato; the purpose of a *Companion* is not to judge, but to show things in a new light.

• • •

Any interpretation of Plato's philosophy must inevitably unravel a tissue of interwoven ontological, epistemological, and psychological questions. Given that the Forms are "most real", how is their reality to be interpreted? What does it mean to know them, and how is such knowledge achieved? Indeed, is the human mind or soul so constituted as to know them adequately? This volume presents an overview³ of how the German tradition varies the basic theme of *soul knowing Forms*, with the ontology of the Forms in constant tension with concomitant psychological and epistemological commitments. When we look past the rich detail our contributors provide, their essays, viewed synoptically, reveal a relationship between two opposing schemes, which we may call "transcendental" and "transcendent", or (to borrow a distinction from Cassirer)⁴ "functional" and "substantial", respectively. Each scheme implies a variety of conceptions of logic, science, and dialectic, of soul, God, and world. Broadly speaking, the thinkers in our volume who understand Plato along transcendent-substantial lines include Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger; by contrast, Leibniz, Mendelssohn, Hegel, Cohen, Natorp, and Husserl fall into the transcendental-functionalist camp.⁵

The transcendent-substantial view is the more traditional and familiar, on which Plato's Forms are *substances* that really exist in a separate, higher, *transcendent* "realm". This realist, dualist metaphysics entails the coordinate epistemological-psychological view that for Plato, these transcendent Forms are the objects of true knowledge, which the soul achieves by some kind of (passive) intellectual intuition. Now, the passages that support this transcendent reading—like the Sun Analogy, Divided Line, and Cave in the *Republic*, or the myth of the soul's chariot in the *Phaedrus*—appear to others as the

3 Unfortunately, one that is not exhaustive. Many other scholars, like Tennemann and Tiedemann, Trendelenburg, Hermann, Fischer, Zeller, and Wilamowitz; the philosophers, Fichte, Schelling, Herbart, and Lotze; and the "prophetic" tradition of the Stefan George *Kreis*, all deserve further exploration.

4 Cassirer (1910).

5 As we will see, many of these cases are ambiguous and overlapping; even here, however, the basic contrast remains useful for *recognizing* the overlaps.

metaphoric effervescence of Plato's poetic *élan*. These critics argue that what he more soberly means, either explicitly or unconsciously, is that the Forms are *a priori* concepts akin to categorial *functions*, the *transcendental* conditions of possible experience. Contrary to the transcendent view, the transcendental approach rejects the former's two-world metaphysics. The Forms are brought down from their hyperouranian realm somehow⁶ to serve as the constitutive infrastructure of *this* world construed objectively. Instead of passively adoring a divine spectacle, the soul on the transcendental-functional view is the active architect of its earthly domain. Thus, where the traditional substantial interpretation sees the Forms as themselves the objects of a divine science, the functional interpretation grasps them as the theoretical framework within which the mundane may be scientifically captured. Since this framework is not handed down from on high, but laid down and raised up by our own efforts, "knowing the Forms" is ultimately human self-knowledge.

This latter view is of course most famously advanced by the Marburg Neo-Kantians,⁷ who, for their part, look back to Nicholas of Cusa, Leibniz, and Kant for their ancestry—a lineage confirmed in this volume. Nicholas of Cusa ("Cusanus") (1401–1464) stands at the threshold of the Middle Ages and the German Renaissance, and at the nexus of the cosmopolitan universalism of the Holy Roman Empire and the incipient self-consciousness of a specifically German religious and philosophical orientation. Although Cusanus is the *fons et origo* of the German transcendental reading, yet this spring, too, is nourished by more obscure streams reaching back through Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280), via the Christian Neo-Platonist (Pseudo-) Dionysius the Areopagite (late fifth to early sixth century), to the latter's likely teacher, Proclus (412–485). As Claudia d'Amico explains in the opening chapter of this volume, Cusanus' reading of Plato centers on the ontological priority of the One—the divine origin that as such lies essentially beyond human comprehension and enfolds within itself all plurality and opposition. Instead, what we face is the sensible multiplicity unfolding out of God. It is in the face of this manifold that human reason undertakes its task: synthesizing intelligible unities, i.e., *beings*. Because the divinity is inaccessible to us, reason must pursue its task through what Nicholas calls "conjecture", a procedure by which we gradually collate a symbolic map of the universe. The symbols we conjecture are the Forms.⁸

6 There is little agreement on this point; for some, like the young Cohen, the Forms are psychological factors; for others, like Natorp and Husserl, the Forms are akin to laws. In all cases, however, their crucial role lies in synthesis: unifying and organizing the otherwise chaotic data of the senses.

7 Cf., e.g., Natorp (1994), 57–62.

8 Cf. Cassirer (1974), 34.

These are therefore neither separate, divine objects, nor “things in themselves”, but rather *entia rationis*. They are neither in the world nor beyond it but are the means by which the sensible is rendered intelligible.⁹ In Nicholas’s conjecturalism we may detect an echo of Socrates’ method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*—a way of acting within the limits of human reason while expanding them, just as, conversely, Socrates’ method anticipates Nicholas’s paradoxical notion of “learned ignorance”. In Nicholas, then, our main themes are sounded: reason is an activity of synthesizing unities; being is a function of thinking. Thinking is a temporal process, which nevertheless is guided by ideal, atemporal standards of perfection.

In the next two chapters, on Leibniz and Mendelssohn, Jack Davidson and Bruce Rosenstock provide insight into the early roots of the transcendental-functional view of the active soul. Davidson shows how Leibniz is less concerned with understanding Plato’s philosophy as such, and more with adopting and adapting Platonic elements into his system. In particular, Leibniz thinks Plato was right in holding that “intelligible things” are more certainly than their sensible “appearances”. But as example of such Platonic *intelligibilia*, Leibniz names mind and soul rather than, as we might expect, the Forms.¹⁰ He is thus naturally drawn to the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* as confirmations of his own view that this is the best of all possible worlds, caused by a perfect intellect, and that hence the ground of explanation should be sought in purposive ends, not in matter. Leibniz touches on the Platonic Forms obliquely, namely in the guise of innate ideas, which he finds imperfectly anticipated in the *Meno*.

In the next chapter on Moses Mendelssohn, we find an elaboration of the Leibnizian Plato by someone steeped in the philosophy of Wolff. Rosenstock’s detailed analysis of Mendelssohn’s famous *Phädon* illuminates the transcendental view of the active soul adumbrated in d’Amico and Davidson’s chapters, namely as the spontaneous power of unification, or, in Rosenstock’s words, the power to synthesize a manifold. More precisely, Mendelssohn attempts to modernize the arguments of the *Phaedo* by deploying Leibniz’s infinitesimal calculus. On Mendelssohn’s view, the calculus allows us not only to explain the soul’s essential power of representing manifolds as unities, but also thereby to gain insight into the soul’s nature itself, viz., its “will to perfect itself within the moral order of the universe”. In Leibniz’s tenor, Mendelssohn argues for a this-worldly interpretation of the Forms as active in, or indeed as rational souls.

9 Cf. Cassirer (1974), 32, ff.

10 See p. 53.

In his chapter on Kant and Plato, Manfred Baum explores both the evolution and the continuity of Kant's understanding of Plato, from his pre-Critical *Inaugural Dissertation* to the *Critiques*. On the one hand, according to Baum, the pre-Critical Kant interprets the Platonic *idea* in light of Leibniz and Wolff's notion of an *ens perfectissimum*; that is, by his "*idea*", Plato meant a *noumenon perfectio* or rational standard of perfection against which sensible phenomena are to be judged. Here again, Kant does not attribute a two-world metaphysics to Plato, but distinguishes rather between God's productive intuition and human discursive thought. In this, he echoes Cusanus's opposition of a divine truth unknowable in itself, but which can be symbolically reconstructed through conjecture. In the Critical period, Kant moves beyond the *Dissertation's* simple opposition of sensibility and intellect, parsing the latter into the Understanding and Reason. He accordingly interprets the *ideai* as the antecedents of what Kant calls "*Ideen*", i.e., concepts of Reason, in contrast to "*Kategorien*", i.e., concepts of the Understanding. The characteristic role of the *ideai* is providing a standard of perfection, especially for moral and political praxis. Although in this way Kant grants the Platonic Forms an indispensable regulative role, he takes himself to be stating clearly what Plato at best intimated and obscurely expressed in ecstatic metaphor. In other words, although Kant interprets the Forms *transcendentally*, he attributes to Plato a *transcendent* intent.

Jere Surber lets us see how Kant's distinction between what Plato actually said, on the one hand, and what he was trying to say or should have said, on the other hand, comes to be worked out in much greater detail by Hegel. For, according to Surber, Hegel is the first German thinker to subject the Platonic texts themselves to detailed study, out of a conviction that Plato not only articulated the constitutive problems of Western philosophy, but also germinally anticipated their solutions. The Platonic Form now takes on a much more important role than before, as Hegel sees in Plato's *eidos* the nascent state of his own worked-out "*Begriff*", which he characterizes as "identity-in-difference". Since the *Begriff* unfolds and articulates itself in and as history, Hegel rejects, like his predecessors, the transcendent interpretation of the "eternal Forms"; but he also rejects a *species* of transcendentalism that regards the Forms as merely psychological constructs. Surber shows how Hegel's *geschichtsphilosophisch* preoccupation with Plato compels more clear-cut interpretive commitments than his predecessors saw fit to make. Although he rejects the very idea of an esoteric, unwritten doctrine not found in the dialogues, Hegel does not consider the dialogues the ideal vehicle for presenting the written doctrine they contain. Thus, his interpretations of the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Republic*

aim to recollect and organize systematically Plato's theory of the *Begriff* as we find it diffracted through the dazzling prisms of his dialogues.

For Schopenhauer, Plato inspires what Robert Wicks calls the "philosophical ascension to a ... better consciousness through art, morality, and asceticism". To the complaint that the sensible world is a prison, Schopenhauer discerns a Platonic solution, namely in the description of time as "the moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus*); hence Wicks concentrates on Schopenhauer's interpretation of time in Plato. Initially, Schopenhauer understands the Forms much like Leibniz or the early Kant, as "realities existing in God[,] [t]he corporeal world [being] a concave lens that diffuses the rays emanating from the [Forms]".¹¹ Human reason, by contrast, is like a convex lens that recollects and reconfigures the original non-sensible Forms, if less perspicuously than before. In other words, since it is space and time that distort the intelligible truth, neutralizing their function will let the intelligible *noumenon* once more present itself. Is such a thing possible? In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer identifies in the aesthetic experience of beauty an instantaneous, time-less intuition of the ideal order beyond appearance. And it is in Plato's conception of the *exaiphnēs* that Schopenhauer discerns just such a "moment" which lacks all duration and is therefore timeless. Thus, if we can utterly focus the mind on what is present to it, then what we so perceive must be the "eternal Form" or "pure Idea" itself. This transcendent state is Schopenhauer's "better consciousness", dwelling beyond turmoil and suffering, an ascetic ideal he also associates with Plato. Through his radical recombination of Kant and Plato, Schopenhauer lays down a new interpretive line focusing on Platonic genius: his "philosopher and prophet" circumvents Nietzsche and reaches a dubious apotheosis in the poet, Stefan George, and the intuitionistic interpreters of Plato, the visionary.¹²

Nietzsche's antipathy to Plato is well known: "It is all Plato's fault! He is still Europe's greatest misfortune!" By contrast, Nietzsche calls his own philosophy an "inverted Platonism". Richard Bett does not attempt to overturn this standard picture, but rather to complicate it. In his ascription to Plato of a two-world metaphysics and body-hating morality, Nietzsche holds him responsible for originating the decadent, cowardly, life-sapping nihilism that conquered the West in the form of Christianity. Bett suggests that the substance of this view is taken over from Schopenhauer's Plato, and indeed, as we know from Wicks's chapter, Schopenhauer did think of Platonic dialectic as a

11 Schopenhauer, *MR* 1: §15 "Earliest Sketches, 1809–10", "On Plato", "De Republica, lib. VI, in fine", II.

12 See my (2010) and (2018a), and Rebenich (2018).

way of “attaining the divine being and getting behind the veil of appearance”. Of course, Schopenhauer endorses this Platonic insight, whereas Nietzsche condemns it. The Schopenhauerian legacy aside, however, Nietzsche’s direct estimation of Plato (as opposed, perhaps, to Platonism) is quite positive. Plato exhibits a noble strength of mind in his challenges to conventional wisdom, provoking a salutary “tension of spirit”. Thus, Plato’s innovative theory of the tripartite soul not only reflects but also explains psychological complexity. In this way, Plato represents for Nietzsche a necessary, productive stage in the evolution of higher forms of life. Finally, although it is not meant in a mundane political sense, according to Bett, Nietzsche’s approving comparison of the *Republic*’s caste system and the Laws of Manu unhappily anticipate the “political Plato” of the 1930s.¹³

In his chapter on the Marburg School’s Plato, Karl-Heinz Lembeck expounds the work of two *fin-de-siècle* neo-Kantians, as significant as they are neglected: Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. Pressing beyond purely intellectual-historical considerations, the Marburgers strove, like Schleiermacher, towards a systematic interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. Lembeck traces Cohen’s development from his psychologistic interpretation of the Forms in the 1860s to the transcendental perspective dominant from the 1870s onwards. Guided by the third *Critique*’s notion of purposiveness, Cohen interprets the Forms as regulative functions. Unlike empirical “things [*Dinge*]”, functions do not “exist”; rather, they “have validity [*gelten*]”, like laws. Thus, Cohen comes to liken the Forms to Kantian Categories, that is, synthetic functions laid down, like Platonic *ὑποθέσεις* (*hypotheses*), as the generative infrastructure of experience.¹⁴ For Cohen’s student, Natorp, Plato represents the “autochthonous” origin of (critical) Idealism. Natorp tried to buttress this view through concrete philological analyses, which, however, were vitiated in the eyes of his contemporaries by his unabashed “systematic” purpose. This system becomes clearer to the unfamiliar reader through Lembeck’s presentation of Natorp’s “logical-epistemological interpretation” of the Forms: their ontological significance is entirely elided as Natorp reduces them to the laws legislated by mind for the purpose of constituting particular ontic unities. Lembeck finally turns to Natorp’s obscure late period, in which he seemingly retreats to a Neo-Platonic position reminiscent of Cusanus.

As I argue in my own contribution to this volume, Edmund Husserl vividly illustrates the essential tension in German Platonism between the transcendent and transcendental. For while he explicitly rejects the “static Platonism”

13 See my (2018a).

14 Cf. my (2018b), 256, ff.

of the transcendent vision of the Forms, Husserl nonetheless insists that he himself is a *Platoniker*—and this, as I show, in the transcendental sense. I lay out the Platonic provenance of certain key Husserlian themes: the scientificity of philosophy; the starting-point of philosophical reflection in sensibility; the “reductions” as paths from the sensible world to that of pure essences or *eidē*. Finally, I discuss Husserl’s construal of the *eidē* as genetic conditions of experience, in accordance with which particulars are constituted in consciousness. In particular, I argue that Husserl’s method of eidetic reduction corresponds to Plato’s recollective ascent from conflicting particulars to harmonious Forms, which Husserl interprets as the laws of which the particulars are participating cases. But I go beyond merely pointing out parallels, and show that Husserl read Plato in just this way: that the Forms, in fact, are what Husserl says his *eidē* are, viz., real in the Lotzean sense of “valid” (*geltend*). In this way, a deep kinship between Husserl and Natorp’s Plato-readings comes to light.¹⁵

The last of our purely philosophical interpreters of Plato is Heidegger. As Francisco Gonzalez shows, Heidegger’s public anti-Platonism is strangely matched by a subterranean—indeed, esoteric—appropriation of key Platonic ideas. Gonzalez argues that Heidegger does not regard Plato as the wellspring of the history of Western metaphysics as “nihilism”, but rather treats him as an “exception to this history”. To understand this point, we must keep in mind that for Heidegger *both* the transcendent and transcendental interpretations of the Forms remain hostage to the traditional theme of *subject-knowing-object*. Heidegger considers the preoccupation with the nature of mind, on the one hand, and with the Forms as the proper objects of that mind, on the other hand, to be noxious symptoms of Western metaphysics. He instead reads Plato’s dialogues through the lens of his so-called fundamental ontology, i.e., the analysis of everyday human existence. Viewed from this perspective, Plato’s main concerns appear to be *logos* and its varieties, both authentic and inauthentic, as Heidegger explores in his 1924 lecture-course on Plato’s *Sophist*. Authentic *logos* is what Plato calls “dialectic”, which lets us truly see beings as they are. Yet this favorable interpretation leads Heidegger to criticize Plato’s (alleged) presupposition that “being” means “presence”. Thus, the *Sophist*-lecture is the first sign of the tension in Heidegger’s Plato: on the one hand, an affinity in thinking “being in relation to our own being, and thus dynamically”;¹⁶ on the other hand, confining Plato’s conception of being to “presence”. Taking Heidegger to task for the tendentiousness of his “official” critique, Gonzalez points to Heidegger’s more nuanced Plato-lectures of the 1930s. Gonzalez’s

15 Cf. my (2018b), esp. 260, ff.

16 See Renaud in this volume.

analysis of Heidegger's seminar on Plato's *Parmenides* is especially interesting, not least because it is here that Heidegger discerns a new conception of time as the *exaiphnēs* (the instantaneous).¹⁷ Gonzalez supplements Heidegger's sketchy notes with class transcripts by Herbert Marcuse, first made available in 2012. On this evidence, it is even more impossible, Gonzalez argues, to overlook Plato's centrality as the only other philosopher before Heidegger to have thought "being and time together".

So far, I have described a German "Platonism" stretching from Cusanus through Husserl. At bottom, it contrasts the sensible world of experience with the intelligible transfiguration of that *same* world. The fluctuating manifold given by sensibility summons the mind to seek its intelligible unity—both by resolving individual unities within the manifold (i.e., "entities"), and by connecting them into a systematic whole ("nature", "universe"). Whether such ultimate unities are conceived as ectypes of divine archetypes, or more soberly as mere *noumena*, the common thread is always this: they are not *given* to humans; we must *work* for them. This work, be it Cusan *coniectūra*, Kantian "grounding", or Husserlian "reduction", at best yields a reconstruction of the postulated inner systematicity of the world. Such conjectural models are the products of the active mind, and what it knows just is its intelligible model, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the phenomenal world as interpreted, as rendered intelligible through that model. But the world and its ontic contents *an sich* lie forever beyond mind's grasp. On this world-view, then, the Platonic Forms are not, and cannot be, the ultimate ideas of God, since then they would not be knowable by us.¹⁸ Instead, as Natorp argues, they are the *logoi* that the mind itself lays down as unifying concepts by which the phenomenal manifold may be resolved and understood. As *conceptūs* or *Be-griffe*, the *eidē* collect, divide, determine, and thus *concupere*, *be-greifen*, *grasp* what would otherwise forever elude us. We "know" these hypotheses because we laid them down, and are therefore able to justify them (*logon didonai*).¹⁹ For it is only insofar as we can anchor our view in a *logos* that we are justified in a claim to knowledge.²⁰ Thus the Forms, as our minds' hypothesizings, are the ultimate *a priori* conditions of possibility of knowing. The "realm of Forms" simply names the logical medium²¹ of coherent experience.

17 Wicks discusses the same point in his chapter on Schopenhauer. Cf. esp. Natorp (1994), 262, ff.

18 Cf. *Prm.* 134c, ff.

19 *Ph.* 101d6.

20 Cf. *Men.* 98a.

21 Cf. *Ph.* 99d–100a.

This general picture holds firm for the thinkers I have identified as taking a transcendental view of the Forms: Cusanus, Leibniz, Mendelssohn, Cohen, Natorp, and Husserl, and, with some qualifications, Hegel and Schopenhauer. Importantly, Kant, while clearly a transcendental philosopher, does not give the Forms a transcendental interpretation: he thinks that Plato himself intended the Forms as *transcendent substances*, rather than the ideal rational standards of perfection towards which he was groping (i.e., Kant's *Ideen*). Nietzsche and Heidegger follow Kant in this transcendent-substantial interpretation of Plato's Forms, if in little else. Nietzsche imputes a crude, almost Scholastic realism not only to Plato, but to the entire tradition of Western Platonism—to which this volume's account of *German* Platonism should decisively give the lie. Heidegger's official position echoes Nietzsche's critique, but his more subtle "esoteric" approach does *not* again approximate the transcendental reading. Rather, Heidegger attempts to fold Plato into a larger critique of the critical philosophy that classes both the Neo-Kantians and Plato as examples of a forgetfulness of Being, the eliding of ontological difference.²² I have argued in separate places that each of these criticisms fails on its own terms, but this is not the point here. Rather, as Gonzalez argues, it is especially in the close analysis of the dialogues that we find in Heidegger's lectures the positive appropriation, even reenactment of Platonic *philosophizing*. This is no longer a matter of substantive doctrine, but rather of the philosophical spirit of dialectic. And this brings us to the second, smaller group of figures examined in this volume, namely those for whom the question of interpretation joins the doctrinal issues at the heart of Platonic studies.

The central figure is Schleiermacher who, as Thomas Szlezák says, "sparked the most far-reaching revolution in Plato-interpretation since Marsilio Ficino". In the first of two chapters on Schleiermacher, André Laks treats the relation between philological form and philosophical content in Schleiermacher's analysis of the dialogues. Laks focuses on Schleiermacher's *Grundlinien* (1803) and the general *Introduction* to his translation of the dialogues (1804), showing both affinities and differences between the two thinkers. If, as Surber says, Hegel is the first to give Plato his due as a philosopher, Schleiermacher (Hegel's exact contemporary) goes much further, translating most of the dialogues into German. Schleiermacher interprets the Forms as active, though not as transcendental functions. Rather he treats them as transcendent causes, the "Ideas of God" by which He "poetically composes" the world as a work of art. For Schleiermacher, it follows from this physical postulate that ethics for Plato is

22 That is, on the one hand Plato (allegedly) makes Being = *the Good* = an *ens*; similarly, the Neo-Kantians see "the Good" = *Law* = but only *of* beings.

one of *Bildung*, the “formation” of the good soul: by “approximat[ing] the Ideal” we should “becom[e] similar to God”. Thus, we can see that Schleiermacher attributes to Plato’s thought a systematic unity, viz., between physics and ethics. Yet unlike Hegel, who considers dialogue form an inappropriate medium for systematic thinking, Schleiermacher sees it as ideal for allowing the reader to participate in thought’s dialectical unfolding and to retrace Plato’s progress from a first “seminal intuition of the systematic unity of the sciences”. It is this goal, then, that governs Schleiermacher’s interpretation of the individual dialogues as well as their correct sequence.

Thomas A. Szlezák’s chapter criticizes Schleiermacher’s “blunders” in interpreting the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, which led him mistakenly to dismiss the esoteric dimension of Plato’s thought. In order first to display Schleiermacher’s radical originality, Szlezák renders the historical context of German Plato-reception prior to 1804. He then gives a detailed analysis of the *Phaedrus*-critique in order to counter what he sees as the lingering, deleterious effects of Schleiermacher’s interpretation of the relation between writing and “orality”. In essence, Szlezák tries to show that Plato in the *Phaedrus* argues that the philosopher must not put *all* of his thinking into written form; indeed, he must take care to reserve its deepest treasures for oral transmission alone. Since Schleiermacher, for his part, holds that the dialogue form serves the pedagogic function of “setting the reader’s own thought into motion”, he rejects the very notion of Platonic esotericism: what Plato may leave unsaid in a given dialogue simply reflects a pedagogic tactic of not prematurely revealing a truth for which the reader is unprepared, but to which he will be and indeed eventually is led in later dialogues. Against this, Szlezák shows the dialectician doing in other dialogues just what the *Phaedrus* seems to recommend, namely, keeping silent about and withholding his higher knowledge, and coming in person to the aid of his arguments. Thus, it follows for Szlezák that Schleiermacher was also wrong about the purpose of the dialogue: it is precisely not “to bring the not-yet-knowing reader into knowledge”, knowledge which may ignite only in the living friction of argument.

The Tübingen School names the interpretive tradition begun by Hans Joachim Krämer and Konrad Gaiser in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and to which our contributors, Thomas Szlezák and Vittorio Hösle, both belong. This tradition argues, *in nuce*, that the dialogues do not contain the kernel of Plato’s teaching, the so-called *Prinzipienlehre* or Doctrine of Principles, i.e., the One and the Indefinite Dyad, which, on the Tübingen view, was systematically transmitted within the Academy through oral instruction. The Tübingen School is therefore “radically anti-Schleiermacherian”, as Laks points out, since Schleiermacher rejected the esotericism of Tiedemann and Tennemann,

and believed the dialogues to contain the whole of Plato's thought. Höhle, in his chapter, lays out the Tübingen approach and its critics. The Tübingen School's starting point, according to Höhle, is that certain of Plato's students at the Academy, notably Aristotle, "attribute to [Plato] certain metaphysical doctrines [not found] in the dialogues".²³ As Schleiermacher's approach and chronology failed to gain general support, scholars undertook in earnest the reconstruction of the *agrapha dogmata*, beginning in the nineteenth century with Trendelenburg, and continuing into the twentieth with the work of Robin, Stenzel, Wilpert, and Ross. Nevertheless, according to Höhle, the common assumption was that these teachings remained unwritten because they stem from Plato's late period, when he simply lacked time or energy to commit them to paper. Both Cherniss and the Tübingeners challenge this assumption: Cherniss because he regards Aristotle as an unreliable witness of others' views; the Tübingen men because they reject the developmentalist assumption. Höhle helpfully discusses Krämer's first book *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles* (1959)—which is out of print and remains untranslated—and then surveys the work of Gaiser, Szlezák, Jens Halfwassen, as well as his, Höhle's own contributions. He concludes with an account of Vlastos and Sayre's criticisms and sketches a rebuttal.

The other major stream in twentieth-century German Plato interpretation is the hermeneutic approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002),²⁴ whose long life brought him into contact with many of the figures in this volume. He wrote his doctoral dissertation under the direction of Natorp at Marburg in 1922, studied under Husserl²⁵ and Heidegger, and was a friend of Wolfgang Schädewaldt, the teacher of both Krämer and Gaiser. In the concluding chapter of our volume, François Renaud discusses Gadamer's Plato in the light of Heidegger, as well as his treatment of the *Phaedo* and the paradigm of number. Heidegger's phenomenological analyses of concrete everydayness set Gadamer's orientation towards the practical, pragmatic aspects of Platonic dialogue. Yet just as Natorp tried to avoid Cohen's speculative excesses by exquisite attention to the texts, so too Gadamer made his own way into the dialogues through rigorous training in classical philology under Paul Friedländer.²⁶ Against Heidegger's official interpretation, Gadamer comes to contend that

23 Cf. Nikulin (2012) 1–38.

24 On the relation between Gadamer and the Tübingen School, see Grondin (2010).

25 Moran (2011), 75.

26 Friedländer was a student of Nietzsche's nemesis, Wilamowitz (1848–1931); Natorp studied under Hermann Usener (1834–1905). See Calder (1999), and my (2010), 186–229.

“Plato is not a Platonist”: that is, the dialogues are not the site of metaphysical dogmatism, but embody a dynamic praxis rooted in everyday concerns. Thus, as with so many of our thinkers, the opposition of Form and particular does not imply a two-world metaphysics, which Gadamer considers contrary to Plato’s intentions. The Forms are, in effect, transcendental conditions of experience, but *not*, as Natorp holds, *qua* scientific laws; instead, the Forms are the conditions of dialectic, understood as authentic being-in-the-world. Renaud shows how Gadamer’s “Socratic Platonism” guides his interpretation of the Forms in the *Phaedo* as implicit in everyday language and dialogue themselves, viz., as the starting points, not the endpoints of philosophical inquiry; and in the *Parmenides* as embedded in an ideal systematic nexus, like numbers. Renaud distinguishes Gadamer from the Tübingen School: the written dialogue retains primacy, and the very notion of a “doctrine”, written or otherwise, conflicts with the ineluctable openness of dialogue as a way of being.

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Note on the terms “Idea”, “Idee”, “Form”, and ἰδέα: The problem of translating “ἰδέα” and “εἶδος” into English for the purposes of this volume has vexed me somewhat. In contemporary anglophone Plato-scholarship, the use of the English word, “Idea”, has been abandoned in favor of “Form”. But virtually all German interpreters of Plato naturally use the German word, “Idee”, to translate “ἰδέα”—and it would be absurd to translate “Idee” into English as “Form”. So, my general editorial policy in this volume is this: wherever the conceptual content of Plato’s so-called Theory of Forms is at issue, the texts use the word, “Form”. But in those chapters in which the term “Idee” as a translation of “ἰδέα” is itself at issue, “ἰδέα” shall be translated as “Idea”.

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Plato and the Platonic Tradition in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa

Claudia D'Amico

The purpose of this chapter is to present the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa in relation to the texts of Plato and other authors of the Platonic tradition. I will highlight the Greek philosopher's importance for one of the earliest and most excellent exponents of German philosophy. In Section 1, I outline Cusanus' philosophy; in Section 2, I focus on his Platonism. Section 3 explores Cusanus' Neo-Platonic sources, while Section 4 describes his effect on the German Platonic tradition. Finally, in Section 5, I close with a discussion of Cusanus' Christian Platonism.

1 Cusanus' Philosophy

Nicholas Cryfftz was born in the small town of Kues on the Mosel in 1401.¹ He received his first training in liberal arts at the University of Heidelberg, before going to Padua to study canon law and receive the title of *doctor decretorum* in 1423. He returned to Germany and the University of Cologne to devote himself to ecclesiastical politics. He would come first to have a prominent place at the Council of Basel (1431), defending the conciliar position, and then at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445), already as a member of the papal party. As a member of the papal delegation he traveled to Constantinople to conclude the Union, which lasted only a few years until the fall of the Byzantine Empire. From Byzantium Nicholas brought back important manuscripts. In 1448, he was created cardinal and two years later preached Jubilee sermons and visited monasteries throughout Germany; that same year he became a papal legate. After that, he was named Bishop of Brixen and, in his last years, served as a Camerlengo of the Sacred College of Cardinals and Vicar General of Rome. He died at Todi, Umbria, in 1464. The fate of his remains symbolizes what could be considered his dual citizenship: his body rests in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome, but his heart rests in Kues (now Bernkastel-Kues, Germany),

¹ For further biographical details, see Meuthen (1992) and Miller (2009).

in the chapel of the St. Nikolaus Hospital. Nicholas founded the so-called *Cusanusstift* as a home for exactly thirty-three old men from all social strata; together with its associated library, it remains active to this day.

In 1430, the year in which he was ordained, Cusanus wrote his first work, a sermon: he never stopped writing. His first treatise, *De concordantia catholica* (1434), supported the position of the conciliarists with theoretical arguments. However, his first important philosophical work is *De docta ignorantia* (1440), written after his trip to Constantinople. As he declares in a letter to Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, he had an intuition during his Mediterranean travels that would determine all his philosophical thought: man seeks truth, but truth is itself inaccessible; nevertheless, it is possible to achieve truth in a way that is also inaccessible.

The paradoxical formula, “*attingere inattingibile inattingibiliter* [to reach (or touch) the unreachable in an unreachable way]”, epitomizes the notion of learned ignorance, referring to the knowledge of the absolute as a kind of non-knowledge or an “ignorant knowledge”. Cusanus identifies the absolute truth with the concept of *maximum*.² If the maximum is “that greater than which nothing can be” and such a maximum is conceived as *absolutum*—that is to say, unbounded—then it cannot be understood as opposed to the *minimum*, but must necessarily coincide with it (viz., as unbounded). From the postulation of this *coincidentia oppositorum*, it is clear that nothing can be found outside of it, but everything is somehow enfolded in, as he puts it, the *complicatio absoluta*. That which derives from such a principle cannot but be eternally in Him. This corresponds to the bold assertion that nothing can exist beyond the absolute, i.e., in a sense, God is all things. However, just as this absolute unity is the principle of the identity of everything, there is also a “contracted” or determinate unity operating as a principle of plurality: *uni-versus*. The unity of diversity is unlimited because it embraces everything that actually is. Thus, the universe is infinite and any point in it is its center: another bold statement that breaks the limits of the Aristotelian cosmos of the fixed stars. The understanding of God as *coincidentia oppositorum* and *complicatio absoluta*, and of the universe as the “unfolding of God” (*explicatio dei*), synthesizes a doctrine that conceives, on the one hand, the absolute as absolute negation, in the manner of a hidden God; and, on the other hand, the world as theophany, the manifestation of this hidden God.

The question of truth reappears in his second great work, *De coniecturis*, finished around 1443.³ Cusanus takes as a starting point a parallelism that he

² Cf. Miller (2003), 16, ff.

³ Cf. Miller (2003), 68, ff.

will maintain in all his later works: just as God unfolds in the world, the human unfolds in his own human world, the so-called conjectural world. This idea, so central to Cusanus' thought, is easily misunderstood. For him, the Latin term, *coniectura*, does not mean "a guess or hunch—some provisional belief or thesis to be investigated or checked against (usually empirical) evidence", as Miller puts it.⁴ Nor is it a hypothesis to be tested experimentally. Rather, *all* apprehension of truth by humans, being necessarily partial and perspectival, counts for Cusa as conjectural. As such, conjectural knowledge is a sort of *symbol* of Knowledge itself, conjectural truth a symbol of Truth itself. Our world as conjectural is thus "symbolic", for it does not reach truth in itself, but only as it is revealed in otherness (*veritas in alteritate*). In this way, learned ignorance and conjecture complement each other.

After a series of brief works published between 1445 and 1447—*De deo abscondito*, *De filiatione dei*, *De quaerendo deum*, *De dato patris luminum* and *De genesi*—he addresses an objection lodged by a professor at Heidelberg, Johannes Wenck. The *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (1449) is a defense of his main doctrines. A year later, in the dialogues of the *Idiota*, the themes of the inaccessible character of God and the essence or "precision" of all things, as well as the capacity of the human mind to create a symbolic universe, reappear. In the early twentieth century, the Marburg School drew special attention to the third of these dialogues, *De mente*, with Ernst Cassirer, for example, calling Cusanus a precursor of Kantian philosophy.

The unfortunate events involved in the capture of Constantinople by the Turks motivate his ecumenical writing, *De pace fidei* (1453). That same year he writes *De visione dei* about the omnipresent gaze of God and human ascent to mystical vision. A new formulation of the principle of the coincidence of opposites appears in *De beryllo* (1458), considered a turning point in Cusanus' thought.⁵ From this work on, there is, on the one hand, a deepening of the metaphysics of Negativity, as for example in *De principio* (1459) or *De li non aliud* (1462); and, on the other hand, a formulation of a metaphysics of Possibility, as in *De possest* (1460), *De venatione sapientiae* (1462), and *De apice theoriae* (1464).

Nicholas of Cusa is considered by most philosophical historiographers to be the first German philosopher. Although it is possible to recognize German medieval thinkers before him, such as his important predecessors, Albert the Great or Meister Eckhart, yet Cusanus himself emphasized his own German heritage as such, for example by apologizing for his rustic use of Latin, and by

⁴ Miller (2003), 80; cf. 83, 85.

⁵ Cf. Flasch (1998).

acknowledging that his way of reasoning about divine questions is German.⁶ Perhaps he came to feel his roots more strongly because he lived out part of his intellectual formation and much of his professional career in the brilliance of early-fifteenth-century Italy. Often, he considered himself a sort of German “graft” in Italian lands.⁷

His contact with Plato and the Platonic tradition was determined by this fact, for Cusanus lived in a uniquely important time for the reception of Plato in the Latin world. During the first half of the fifteenth century, a set of new translations appeared, which would only be completed by the second half of the century by Marsilio Ficino: the “re-entry” of Plato’s dialogues into Western consciousness. But already the first half of the century witnessed one of the most impassioned controversies between Platonists and Aristotelians witnessed by Christendom. However, it is necessary to note that the names, “Plato” and “Aristotle” go beyond their actual works to function as shorthand for two philosophical traditions. In both Florence and Byzantium, various important philosophers, many of them close to Cusanus personally, sided with one or the other. For this reason, as has been long remarked, the study of Cusanus’ reception of Plato and Platonism needs to take into account this controversy.⁸

Yet another context must be taken into account, namely the German tradition, related to the Dominican *studium generale* at Cologne, which Nicholas attended after returning from Padua. The thinkers of this German school gave Cusanus an outlook rooted in the Christian Platonism of Dionysius the Areopagite,⁹ enriched, from the second half of the thirteenth century on, by the assimilation of works by Proclus translated by William of Moerbeke. Finally, direct contact with the Dionysian and Proclean texts would come to determine the major topics of the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa. Thus, as an intellectual of the first half of the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa had to choose between Plato and Aristotle: he does not hesitate in taking sides with the *divinus Plato*, i.e., with Platonism to the detriment of the *profundissimus seu acutissimus Aristoteles*, i.e., Peripateticism.

6 Cf., e.g., *DCC*, Praef. (h XIV n. 2); *DDI* (h I n. 1).

7 Cf. *DC* II (h III n. 116). Cf. also Thurner (2002).

8 Cf. Garin (1961) and Senger (1986).

9 The philosopher Cusanus and his contemporaries knew as “Dionysius the Areopagite” (as he is called throughout this article) is now called “Pseudo-Dionysius”; see Corrigan and Harrington (2014).

2 Cusanus' Platonism

Cusanus' valorization of Plato and Platonism is a complex issue. There are many references to Plato and the Platonists in his work, and I do not intend in this study to produce a catalogue.¹⁰ Rather, given the limited scope of this chapter, I will here focus on particular passages illustrative of his approach.

Cusanus accepts and appropriates some of the doctrines found in the Platonic dialogues known to him, or from quotations included in other texts. Thus, the importance of the *Timaeus* in the constitution of the Cusan doctrine of place and matter has received scholarly attention.¹¹ In the *De docta ignorantia*, he also revives the notions of a God who lacks envy, and of the cosmos as a living animal. However, here he introduces an important modification: he identifies God with the world-soul of the *Timaeus*.¹² There are other formulas taken from the *Timaeus*—for example, in the *De dato patris luminum* (h IV n. 102) he refers to the world as *deus sensibilis* (“the sensible god”) and in the *De beryllo* (h XI/1 n. 35) he calls God the *conditor intellectus* (“Creator Intellect”). In the *De beryllo*, too, we find the famous image of the Sun from the *Republic*:

Plato in his book, *The Republic*, takes the sun as a symbolic illustration and takes note of its power in perceptible objects. And from the likeness of the sun he elevates himself to the light-of-intelligence of the Creator-Intellect.¹³

Thus, Nicholas of Cusa follows a path walked by many Christians, from the Apologists to such thinkers of late antiquity as Eusebius of Caesarea or St. Augustine, finding various Christian doctrines to have been anticipated by Plato or the Platonists. He mentions Eusebius as one of those who recognized in Platonism an anticipation of the Trinity.¹⁴ Moreover, in many of his *Sermons* he recalls the celebrated passage at *Confessions* VII.ix.13, in which Augustine associates the opening of John with what he had read in the *libri platoniorum*. Similarly, Cusanus does not hesitate to refer to these Christian thinkers as “Platonists”.¹⁵

On the other hand, certain Platonic doctrines are explicitly rejected in Cusanus' writings. To illustrate this, we may cite his criticism in the *De beryllo*,

10 Cf. Hirschberger (1970) and Führer (2002).

11 Cf. Thiel (1998).

12 Cf. *DDI* (h I n. 98, n. 166, n. 176). See also Davidson in this volume.

13 *DB* (h XI/1 n. 27); trans. Hopkins (1998).

14 Cf. *DB* (h XI/1 n. 39); *Sermo* II (h XVI/1 n. 4).

15 Cf. *DDI* (h I n. 32). Cf. Vansteenbergh (1920), 410.

where he reproaches Plato for stating that the Creator-Intellect is moved by necessity, and not freely.¹⁶ More importantly, he does not accept that Forms and numbers are separate entities. (Not only does Nicholas reject the notion that Forms are separate from sensible particulars, he holds that they do not even subsist within the divine Intellect.) This central criticism of Plato arises in the context of a justification of the Hermetic formula, “*homo secundus deus* [man, a second god]”, which turns man into a creator of “*entia rationis* [rational beings]” and “*artificiales formae* [artificial forms]”. This unfolding of the human intellect, which makes it the creator of its own work, is something Plato could have considered, but did not:

Plato is seen wrongly to have concluded—when he saw that mathematical entities, abstracted from perceptible objects, are truer in the mind—that therefore they have another, still truer, supra-intellectual being. But Plato could rightly have said that just as the forms of a [given] human art are truer in their beginning, viz., in the human mind, than they are in matter, so the forms of nature's Beginning (i.e., natural forms) are truer in that Beginning than they are outside it.¹⁷

As we might expect, Cusanus frequently exploits the opposition between Plato and Aristotle. Often this opposition seeks reconciliation, as, for example, in *De mente*, in relation to the topic of universals. Nicholas shows that it is possible to overcome the controversy between the Academics and Peripatetics on this subject. Whereas he criticizes the former for the subsistence of an *ante rem* separate form, he reproaches the latter for the construction of a universal that is only *post rem*. The Cusan solution lies in considering a real form that does not subsist separately from the thing, yet which is unknowable to us, so that genera and species turn out to be creations of human reason, or *entia rationis*. As the truth of things is unattainable, man recreates a world of notions or conjectures. So here we have another original Cusan proposal.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in the passages in which Nicholas of Cusa decidedly takes the side of Plato, “Plato” means “Platonists”, and these passages deserve special attention. One might not unreasonably think of Cusanus as yet another link in the aforementioned dialogue between Byzantium and Italy. However, the terms in which he lays out the discussion align him with a Christian Platonism that has its roots in Dionysius the Areopagite, where the reception of Proclus

¹⁶ Cf. *DB* (h x1/1 n. 38). Cf. *Ti*. 28c.

¹⁷ *DB* (h x1/1 n. 56); trans. Hopkins (1998).

¹⁸ Cf. *De mente* (h v n. 66–67).

plays a central role. Thus, as I have indicated, this discussion places him more in a context that responds to his German roots (via the aforementioned Dominican connection), rather than that of his Greek and Italian contemporaries. The topics he emphasizes are especially the notion of the One; the coincidence of opposites; and the primacy of negation over affirmation. In this frame, if we were to point out one Platonic dialogue standing above the rest in importance, it would certainly be the *Parmenides*, as interpreted by Proclus.¹⁹ Indeed, Cusanus often speaks of Plato and Proclus without apparently differentiating between them. And many times, he links the thought of Dionysius Areopagite with that of Plato and Proclus. All three of them are explicitly or implicitly present everywhere in his writings.

Having stated the coincidence of opposites in the first chapters of *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus remarks: “from this principle there might be deduced about it as many negative truths as might be written or read”.²⁰ This mention of “negative truths” leads Cusanus directly to quote certain works of the Areopagite, viz., *De mystica theologia*, *De divinis nominibus*, and *Epistola* 1. Such quotations reveal the theses that he himself endorses: God is everything as well as nothing of everything; yet, at the same time, according to Dionysius’ enigmatic formula, He is everything in everything and nothing in nothing.²¹ God is beyond all affirmation and negation, that is, beyond the disjunction of opposites; and, thus, He is known beyond all intelligence.²²

19 Cf. Klibansky (1943); Willer (1974); Beierwaltes (1987); D’Amico (2007) (2009); Gersh (2014).

20 *DDI* (h 1 n. 43: “Ex quo principio possent de ipso tot negativae veritates elici, quot scribi aut legi possent ...”. Cf. Casarella (2008).

21 Cf. Kremer (1986), 199, ff.

22 “Qui hoc enim intelligit, omnia intelligit; omnem intellectum creatum ille supergreditur. Deus enim, qui est hoc ipsum maximum, ut idem Dionysius *De divinis nominibus* dicit, non istud quidem est et aliud non est, neque alicubi est et alicubi non. Nam sicut omnia est, ita quidem et nihil omnium. Nam—ut idem in *fine Mysticae theologiae* concludit—tunc ipse super omnem positionem est perfecta et singularis omnium causa, et super ablationem omnium est excellentia illius, qui simpliciter absolutus ab omnibus et ultra omnia est. Hinc concludit in *Epistola ad Gaium* ipsum super omnem mentem atque intelligentiam nosci” *DDI* (h 1 n. 43). Hopkins (1981a): “For whoever understands this [point] understands all things; he transcends all created understanding. For God, who is this Maximum, ‘is not thing and is not any other thing; He is not here and is not there’, as the same Dionysius says regarding the divine names; for just as He is all things, so He is not any of all the things. For, as Dionysius concludes at the end of *The Mystical Theology*: ‘above all affirmation God is the perfect and unique Cause of all things; and the excellence of Him who is unqualifiedly free from all things and is beyond all things is above the negation of all things’. Hence, he concludes in his *Letter to Gaius* that God is known above every mind and all intelligence.”

Even though Proclus' name is not mentioned in *De docta ignorantia*, there is a clear contact with certain passages in earlier works by Nicholas, as is shown by one of the books in his possession, the *Codicillus* of Strasbourg (Cod. Argentoratensis 84), which contains, among other texts, a fragment from Moerbeke's translation of the *Expositio in Parmenidem Platonis*, and three fragments from the *De theologia Platonis* in Traversari's version. In the *Codicillus*, Nicholas of Cusa would have read the following passage of *In Parmenidem*: "In omni enim oppositione necessarium est unum exaltatum esse ab amobus oppositis et non esse neutrum ipsorum aut ipsum magis nomine melioris appellari".²³ Thus, it is not improbable that this reading, together with the study of Dionysius' texts, could have contributed to his formulating the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The topic of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is reconsidered in *De coniecturis*. In the conjectural universe (i.e., our universe) the divine can be considered "beyond the coincidence of opposites".²⁴ Cusanus presents an ontological-gnoseological outline of correspondence typical of the Neo-Platonic systems. Once again with no explicit references, he presents the conjectural world as structured into four units, in descending order: *Deus, intellectus, anima, corpus*. Each of these is "unparticipable" in itself and "participable" in the one immediately inferior.²⁵ This presentation points to the brief text of *De theologia Platonis*, contained in the *Codicillus*, where those very same four units appear related to each other in this way.²⁶

From *De coniecturis* on, one can notice a preference for "henology" or the thought of the One. Thus, in *De filiatione dei*, Nicholas affirms that "the One is the Kingdom of Heaven", and this—he says, clearly alluding to Plato's *Parmenides*—is what Zeno, Parmenides, and Plato had sought. The text is interesting because here Cusanus' affirmation that the notion of the One as being above all contrariety has clearly been inspired by the Platonic tradition.²⁷ Not long afterwards, in *Sermo LXXI* (1446), he explicitly declares the correspondence between the Christian doctrine and that of the "followers of the *Parmenides*", whom he calls "*platonici*", listing as points of agreement the origin

23 Proclus, *In Parm.* VI, 1123. Dillon and Morrow translate: "For in the case of each antithesis it is necessary that the One either be exempted from both of the opposites and not be either of them, or that it should be called rather by the name of the superior of the two ..." (Proclus [1992]: 465). Haubst (1961), 27; (CC 186, fol. 1 49"; *Plato Lat.* 111, p. 106, n. 21—Ed.).

24 Cf. *DC* (h III n. 12–16).

25 Cf. *DC* (h III n. 54–60).

26 Cf. Haubst (1961), 36–7; Beierwaltes (2000).

27 Cf. *De fil.* (h IV n. 83).

of everything in the One; the One as absolute necessity, the cause and reason of everything; and, in this sense, the enfolding of everything as cause.²⁸

However, on other occasions, he remarks on the deficiency of the term, “*unum* [one]”. In *De genesi*, for instance, he proposes a word to name the absolute that he considers better than the *platonici*’s “*unum*”, viz., “*idem* [same]”, which precisely expresses the absolutely simple character of the One itself. In this dialogue, Nicholas says to his interlocutor: “... everything that is the same [*idem*] is one [*unum*], but not vice versa”.²⁹ (This deficiency, as we will see, will be recovered in *De li non aliud*.) Finally, the dialogue, *Parmenides*, is again mentioned in *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* to show Plato as a sort of father of the *via negativa*. Nicholas affirms that Dionysius the Areopagite is a follower of Plato on this point,³⁰ further supporting that we are dealing with the Proclean *Parmenides* here.³¹

This perspective was enriched with a new reception of texts during the 1450s. By this time, Cusanus had become acquainted with many of the works already mentioned, now no longer only partially, but in their complete versions: Eusebius’s *De interpretatione evangelica*; Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the version of Bessarion; works by Avicenna, Al-Ghazālī, and Averroës; Albert’s *Super Dionysium de divinis nominibus*; and Proclus’ *Expositio in Parmenidem*. Cusanus ordered two copies of this last work: one copy he presented to his friend, Pope Nicholas v, containing twenty notes of his own (Cod. Vat. Lat. 3074); the second he kept for himself and profusely annotated (CC 186). Now, if we pay attention to the marginal notes, which often repeat the Proclean text, we can see which parts of this work concern Nicholas the most. Proclus conceived the “*unum exaltatum*” not only beyond all opposition but also beyond all negation. In this way, he shows that, even though the pair of opposites, true/false, can be admitted for the nameable, it cannot be admitted at all for the un-nameable.³²

28 Cf. *Sermo* LXXI (h XVII/5 n. 9).

29 (Hopkins 1994, 395). “Omne enim idem unum est et non e converso”. “For everything that is the same is one, but not vice versa”, *De gen.* (h IV n. 145).

30 *Ap.* (h II n. 13).

31 Cf. *Ap.* (h II n. 13).

32 See the aforementioned quotation from *In Parm.*, translated by Morrow and Dillon. Further: marginal note 616 to *In Parm.* VII: “nota: primo non convenit hoc nomen ‘unum’, sed noster conceptus ipsum format; et sic circa ipsum non sunt negationes, quia exaltatum super omnem oppositionem et negationem, sed de ipso” (“Observe: in the first place this name, ‘One’, does not apply. It is our own concept that forms it; and thus, because it is elevated above all opposition and negation, there are no negations with respect to it, but from it.” [–Ed.]) (CT III 2.2: 152–3); and 620, to *In Parm.* VII: “contradictio in indicibili simul falsa, in solis dicibilibus dividit verum et falsum” (“When referred to the Unsayable,

It might be an exaggeration to speak of a development (*Entwicklung*) of Cusan thought, although there certainly is a reformulation of certain topics, taking as a turning point *De beryllo* (1458) and *De principio* (1459).³³ As H.G. Senger has shown, in reformulating his own philosophy, Nicholas incorporated the critical examination of the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophies.³⁴ As a matter of fact, in *De beryllo* he puts the most important philosophical traditions under a lens (the beryl stone of the title), which is capable of making visible to us the tenet of the coincidence of opposites. That is, the different authors—ancient and medieval, pagan, unbeliever, or Christian—are evaluated through the lens of the coincidence of opposites, which refuses to be ruled by the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction. Two conflicting paradigms are thus clearly laid out: that which affirms that the principle is one, placing it beyond the disjunction of opposites; and that which starts from the opposition being/not-being, without accepting their coincidence.

De beryllo is the first work where Proclus is explicitly named. Nicholas does not hesitate to include Proclus among the supporters of the aforementioned lens or beryl stone, that is, those who considered the coincidence of opposites in the One, and he aligns him with “*nostri theologi*”,³⁵ among whom he undoubtedly includes Dionysius the Areopagite. We can see here a continuity between Plato, Dionysius, and Proclus with respect for the preference of negation over affirmation.³⁶ And again, the *unum absolutum* or *exaltatum* is differentiated from the *unum cum addito*,³⁷ just as Proclus distinguishes the *unum exaltatum* from the *unum coordinatum*—a distinction established by Cusanus in his marginal notes.³⁸ The reference to Plato’s *Second Letter* is surely taken from Proclus, as is also stated in Cusanus’ marginalia to *In Parmenidem*.³⁹ Nicholas mentions the same letter in other texts as well.⁴⁰ The image of the king that appears in Plato’s letter is associated with the First Principle in which all things are in it *prioriter*. To this Platonic image Proclus adds Life: the king

contradiction is, but at the same time false[;] when only referred to sayable things, it is divided into true and false” [–Ed.]) (*CT* III 2.2: 153).

33 Cf. Flasch (1998), 445, ff.

34 Cf. Senger (1986), 66, ff.

35 Cf. *DB* (h XI/1 n. 39). See D’Amico (2002).

36 Cf. *DB* (h XI/1, n. 12).

37 Cf. *DB* (h XI/1, n. 13).

38 Cf. marg. cus. 510 in *CT* III 2.2, 17. Cf. the apparatus compiled by H.G. Senger and K. Bormann, and the *adnotationes*, 93–96 (h XI/1).

39 Cf. *In Parm.* VI (Steel 1985, 396, 3–4 Co 1115); marginal note 476 (*CT* III 2.2, 118); marginal note 502 (*CT* III 2.2, 124).

40 Cf. e.g. *Sermo* CLXVIII (h XVIII/o); *Sermo* CCH (h XVIII/o); *DP* (h X/2b n. 24).

is *viva lex*. This addition by Proclus is highlighted by Cusanus, who in this case does distinguish between the Platonic and the Proclean.⁴¹

Of all the Cusan works, it is *De principio* that most strongly emphasizes the harmony between the thought of “Platonists” (Plato, Proclus) and of the Christians. The text is manifestly based on Proclus’ commentary on Plato. The Cusan starting point consists in showing the oneness of the First Principle, for which it is necessary to exhibit its indivisibility and self-sufficiency, what Proclus has named “*authupostatōn*” or self-constituted.⁴² On this point, agreement is established both between Proclus and Christ Himself, and between Parmenides (the character of the eponymous Platonic dialogue) and Scripture, which declares: “*Audi Israel, deus tuus unus est*.”⁴³ Still, we should note that in Cusanus’ assessment there is a certain preference for Dionysius over Proclus, especially regarding the specifically Christian features of his thought, among which the notions of divine will and the Trinity are prominent.

There is yet one further instance of the reception of Platonism in the last stage of Nicholas of Cusa’s life in Rome.⁴⁴ Around 1460, he received directly from Pietro Balbo the complete translation of *De theologia Platonis* by Proclus, which is, at the same time, an interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.⁴⁵ *De non aliud*, in which Cusanus takes into account both Proclus’ *In Parmenidem* and the newly translated *De theologia Platonis*, undoubtedly represents a high point not only of the reception but also of “Cusan Platonism” itself. This work

41 DB (h x1/1 n. 16): “Sic dicit Plato ‘in Epistulis’ apud ‘omnium regem cuncta esse et illius gratia omnia’ eumque ‘causa bonorum omnium.’ ... Non enim absque causa nominat primum principium omnium regem. Omnis enim res publica per regem et ad ipsum ordinata et per ipsum regitur et existit. Quae igitur in re publica reperiuntur distincta, prioriter et coniuncte in ipso sunt ipse et vita, ut addit Proclus.... Lex eius in pellibus scripta est in ipso lex viva, et ita de omnibus, quorum ipse auctor est, et ab ipso omnia habent, quae habent tam esse quam nomen in re publica.” Hopkins (1998) translates: “Hence, Plato says in his *Letters* that all things exist with the King of all and that they all exist for his sake and that he is the Cause of all good things.... And not without reason does he call the First Beginning the King of all. For every state is instituted by, and ordered toward, a king; and by the king the state is governed, and through him it exists. Therefore, those things which are found to be distinct in the state, exist antecedently and unitedly in the king as the king himself and as life itself—just as Proclus adds.... His law, written on parchment, is, in him, a living law—and similarly regarding all things of which he is the author. And from him all things have that which they have in the state—both their being and their [respective] name.”

42 Cf. *DP* (h x/2b n. 2). Cf. *marginalia* n. 546 and n. 547 (*CT* 111 2.2 p. 134). Cf. Beierwaltes (1985), 155–192; Kremer (1987).

43 Deuteronomy 6:4. cf. *DP* (h x/2b n. 6–8).

44 Meuthen (1958).

45 Cf. Portus (ed.) (1618, 1960); Saffrey (1979).

focuses on the thought of Dionysius and Proclus, who said “the same virtually in the same words”.⁴⁶

Although directly inspired by the Areopagite-Proclean henology, this notion of the “*non-aliud* [not-other]”—which expresses the “*idem* [same]”, but negatively—as a term for the absolute, comes to supersede the term “*unum*”. The *unum supersubstantiale* is *unum-ante-unum*; although it is unopposed to multiplicity, yet it expels otherness from itself as a kind of privation.⁴⁷ This concept, which Nicholas had been pursuing from his earliest writings and on through the notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum*,⁴⁸ was ultimately reached by following the path laid down by Plato, Dionysius, and Proclus.⁴⁹ Cusanus attempts to define the oneness or identity present in the multiple as non-otherness. The formula “*non aliud*” presents an “opposite without opposition”: the not-other is not opposed to the other; rather, it is what it is “before” and “in” all otherness. Similarly, in the *De theologia Platonis*, Proclus also presented oppositeness without opposition between the One and the Many, showing how the Multiple participates in the One, as well as how the One always remains unmixed with multiplicity.⁵⁰ In this analysis of the relation between the One and the Many it is key, on Cusanus’ view, that Proclus had stated that the One’s condition of non-multiplicity does not turn it into nothing—what is opposed to the multiple is not nothingness, but rather the non-multiple, indeed, the very cause of multiplicity itself.⁵¹ According to Cusanus, Proclus excellently noted that the One is the “other of the others” (*aliud aliorum*).

In spite of this preference for the formula, “*non-aliud*”, Nicholas recovered the Platonic notion of the One in *De venatione sapientiae*. In this work, “*unitas*” names one of the fields in which wisdom is to be hunted, and Plato is called a “marvelous hunter”.⁵² Plato, Dionysius, and Proclus are again intertwined around a unity that is to be conceived negatively.⁵³ This of course is not the only perspective in Nicholas’s late thought. There are also profound developments that constitute what is known as a metaphysics of possibility.⁵⁴ Although this is not so directly linked to the subject of this chapter, the link between *unum*,

46 Cf. *DNA* (h XIII n. 90).

47 Cf. *DNA* (h XIII n. 11).

48 “[E]t istud est, quod per oppositorum coincidentiam annis multis quaesivi, ut libelli multi, quos de hac speculatione conscripsi, ostendunt” (*DNA*, [h XIII n. 11]).

49 Cf. *DNA* (h XIII n. 90).

50 Cf. *Theologia platonica*, II, 1.

51 Cf. *Theologia platonica*, II, 12.

52 *De ven. sap.* (h XII n. 19–21): “Plato, venator miro modo circumspectus ...”.

53 Cf. *De ven. sap.* (h XII n. 64).

54 Cf. Casarella (1990).

non-aliud, and *posse*—the term Nicholas proposes for the Absolute in his last work, *De apice theoria*—is an interesting path for future research, even in relation to the Platonic sources.

3 Cusanus and his Neo-Platonic Sources

Klibansky's foundational study on the continuity of the Platonic tradition in the Middle Ages points out three currents of reception: Byzantine, Arabic, and Latin.⁵⁵ Nicholas of Cusa was well acquainted with two of these three currents.

In the West, the Platonic tradition was important throughout the Latin Middle Ages, but of course this importance was not due to direct contact with Plato's dialogues. Only parts of the *Timaeus* were available (*Ti.* 17a–53c) in Latin through Calcidius' fourth-century translation, as well as the Latin translations of the *Phaedo* and *Meno* made by Henry Aristippus in the twelfth century. In the second half of the thirteenth century, William of Moerbeke, translating Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*, also provided a translation of a part of this decisive Platonic dialogue. On the other hand, there was also the so-called *Summarium*, discovered at the Vatican in a mid-thirteenth-century manuscript (Cod. Reginensis Lat. 1572). It is a fragment of a survey of Plato's works, separately summarizing the content of each dialogue. Last but not least, the Latin Middle Ages also became acquainted with numerous quotations from ancient translations, such as those of Cicero, Seneca, and Apuleius, or in later reproductions by, e.g., the Latin grammarians, Donatus and Priscian.⁵⁶ In addition to quotations, many Latin authors, like Cicero, Apuleius, Capella, and Macrobius transmitted and freely recreated Platonic doctrines. But Christian authors, too, like Victorinus, Augustine, Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite, Eriugena, and authors of the so-called School of Chartres all combined large parts of their doctrines with those of Platonism.

Now, Nicholas of Cusa's personal contact with Constantinople, gained in the course of the diplomatic responsibilities entrusted to him by Pope Eugene IV, made him both an agent of and a direct witness to the passage of texts between Byzantium and Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century. Among these texts, the Platonic dialogues held a privileged place. Interestingly, we can precisely date the start of this rich exchange. In 1397, the Florentine humanist, Coluccio Salutati, invited the Byzantine Greek, Manuel Chrysoloras, to teach

55 Cf. Klibansky (1939), 13, ff.

56 Gersh (2002), (2013).

Greek in Florence;⁵⁷ some of his Italian pupils, like Leonardo Bruni, would become translators of Plato. Nor should we forget Giovanni Aurispa, who in 1423 brought 238 Greek manuscripts from Byzantium to Venice, including, as he stated himself, the complete Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus, as well as some works of Iamblichus.

However, it was not enough for the texts to be available. In order to be assimilated, they had to be translated into Latin, a task performed throughout the whole fifteenth century according to particular interests. As for the first half of that century, James Hankins offers a very complete analysis of the intellectual and political context, which allows us to understand why some dialogues, such as the *Republic* were translated twice.⁵⁸ The most significant Latin versions of the time are: the two aforementioned translations of the *Republic* (a first approach by Chrysoloras himself and Uberto Decembrio [1402], and a second version by Pier Candido Decembrio [1437–1439]); Leonardo Bruni's translations of the *Phaedo* (1405), the *Gorgias* (1409), a part of the *Phaedrus*, the *Apology* (1424), the *Crito*, some *Letters*, and Alcibiades's discourse in the *Symposium*.⁵⁹ Some decades later, in 1459, at Nicholas's request, the Greek humanist, George of Trebizond, translated the *Parmenides* into Latin.⁶⁰ Trebizond, though a declared anti-Platonist, as he admits in a letter of 1451, was nevertheless so dazzled by Plato's *Laws* that he published a Latin translation thereof in 1451.⁶¹ This version of the *Laws* was harshly criticized by the Platonist Cardinal Bessarion, as was Trebizond's *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platonis* (1458). This latter earned him a very harsh reply from the Cardinal in his *In calumniatorem Platonis*. Despite Nicholas's friendship with Trebizond, it is likely that Giovanni Andrea Bussi, Cusanus' secretary during the last six years of his life (1458–1464), was responsible for revising the Latin version of Bessarion's influential text prior to its publication in 1469.⁶²

In fact, Bessarion played a very important role in this passage of Plato from Byzantium to Italy, and his friendship with Nicholas of Cusa, based on common political interests, would strengthen thanks to a shared philosophical interest in Platonism. In 1437, Nicholas undertook a diplomatic mission to Constantinople to bring back Byzantines to attend the Council of Union between the Eastern and Western Churches. A few months later, in 1438, the Platonist, Gemistus Pletho, and Basilios Bessarion traveled from Constantinople to the Council of

57 Cf. Thomson (1966), 76.

58 Cf. Hankins (1990), Parts I–III.

59 Cf. Garin (1955).

60 Cf. Ruocco (2003).

61 Cf. Monfasani (1976), 102, f.

62 Cf. Monfasani (2011).

Ferrara and Florence. Pletho impressed the humanists with his eloquence and Platonic wisdom and gave a manuscript of the Platonic dialogues to Cosimo de' Medici. His debates with Theodorus Gaza and Gennadius Scholarius—fierce defenders of Aristotelianism—are well known. For his part, Bessarion settled in Italy in 1440, bringing with him his immense library, including annotated manuscripts of Proclus' works, and opened an academy in Rome. There he received and supported other Byzantine scholars and humanists.

It ought to be remarked that all these polemicists were ecclesiastics and, all in all, the fundamental issue of this discussion was which of the two great philosophers, Plato or Aristotle, was closer to Christianity. Some were concerned about their closeness to dogma, others about their differences from authentic *sapientia christiana*. Cusanus belonged to the latter group. His trip to Constantinople allowed him not only to come into contact with the debate, but also to bring back manuscripts such as Proclus' *De theologia Platonis*. He requested the translation of the Proclean work from his friend Ambrose Traversari. Ambrose, translator of the complete work of the Areopagite (1430–1432 and 1436–1437), would undertake the task, though his death in 1439 cut short his labors. Later, the entire work would again be translated by another friend, Pietro Balbo. The importance of these thinkers in the configuration of what we may call “Cusan Platonism” can be neither eluded nor exaggerated.⁶³

The catalog of Nicholas's library, preserved to this day in Bernkastel-Kues, reveals his interests in relation to Plato and the Platonic tradition of late antiquity.⁶⁴ Two codices contain Platonic dialogues: *Codex Cusanus* 177 contains Leonardo Bruni's⁶⁵ version of the *Apology* with a few notes; the *Phaedrus* with plenty of marginal annotations; the *Crito*; the *Meno*; two copies of the *Phaedo*; and the Pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus*. And CC 178 contains the *Republic* in Pier Candido Decembrio's Latin translation.⁶⁶ Many of his manuscripts contain glosses and marginal notes. These are written in a semi-gothic and rather stiff handwriting typical of a German,⁶⁷ and are very useful as keys to Cusanus' reading. In such notes, for example, he indicates similarities between Plato and Cicero.⁶⁸ It is worth noting that, with regard to this tradition, the notes Nicholas wrote in CC 184 (containing Bessarion's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) are no less significant for the reconstruction of the Platonic tradition in this era, since Bessarion, as mentioned, was a convinced Platonist.

63 Cf. Senger (1986), 74, f.

64 Cf. Marx (1905).

65 Here under the name, “Leonardo Aretino”.

66 Cf. Marx (1905), 164–167.

67 Cf. C. Bianca (1993).

68 Cf. Marg. CC 177, f. 29^v; f. 104^v.

Likewise, the codices containing Proclus' texts stand out: *De theologia Platonis Libri VI* (CC 185), *Expositio in Parmenidem Platonis* (CC 186), and *Elementatio theologica* (CC 195).⁶⁹ These are the Latin versions of the works: *In Parmenidem* and *Elementatio*, in the translation of William of Moerbeke, and *De theologia Platonis*, entirely translated by Pietro Balbo. All of Proclus' works contain edited marginal notes.⁷⁰ However, just as Nicholas did not gather or absorb all these works at the same time, so too did he not annotate them all at once. The data regarding Nicholas's reception of the works may provide a sign, except for the copy of the *Elementatio theologica*.⁷¹

Not all the manuscripts that belonged to Cusanus, or at least passed through his hands, are in Bernkastel-Kues. He also owned the present Harley 3261, containing the *Laws*, translated by Trebizond; the *Timaeus*, in the translation of Calcidius,⁷² and the *Parmenides*.⁷³ This can be seen in some marginal notes of his own, e.g., a brief passage of the *Timaeus*, and fragments from *In Parmenidem* and *De theologia Platonis*, contained in a manuscript of the University of Strasbourg⁷⁴ he read in his youth,⁷⁵ and a manuscript of the *Seminario Maggiore* in Bressanone, Italy, containing the *Republic* in the version of Pier Candido Decembrio. As G. Santinello has shown, this manuscript has autograph corrections and annotations by Cusanus. There he repeats Decembrio's own glosses but adds two notes with "typically Cusan" content and interest: one on the parallel between God and Sun; and the other on the number as an instrument for the knowledge of nature.⁷⁶

Cusanus also read the Platonic handbooks by Apuleius. One of the main documents for the history of Platonism and Latin Hermeticism is a manuscript from Brussels⁷⁷ containing *De deo Socratis*, *De Platone et eius dogmate*, *De mundo*, and the Hermetic *Asclepius*. It is conjectured that this manuscript was acquired and annotated by Cusanus in the 1430s and kept among his favorite books until his last years.⁷⁸ He had access to two other codices with works by Apuleius,⁷⁹ although neither of them has marginal notes. Interestingly, Cusanus considered the Hermetic texts to be more ancient than the Platonic

69 Cf. Marx (1905), 172–172; 181.

70 *Cusanus Texte CT 111 (Marginalien)*; see bibliography for details.

71 Cf. Senger's "Untersuchung", *CT 111 2.1*: 17–18.

72 Cod. Harleianus 2652.

73 Cod. 6201, located in the Biblioteca Guarnacci in Volterra, Italy. –Ed.

74 Cod. Argentoratensis 84.

75 Cf. Haubst (1961); Vansteenbergh (1928); Senger (1971).

76 Cf. Santinello (1969).

77 Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1^{er}, 10054–56.

78 Cf. Arfé's introduction to his (2004), 1–2.

79 Bruxellensis 3920–23 and CC 171.

ones but belonging to the same invisible chain of wisdom. Also, Calcidius' famous commentary on the *Timaeus* provided Cusanus an additional access to other Platonic texts.⁸⁰ Let us finally add two more Latin sources of Platonic doctrines: Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae et sententiae philosophorum*, translated by Traversari; and Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparatio evangelica*, translated by Trebizond.⁸¹

4 Cusanus and the German Platonic Tradition

When attempting to reconstruct Christian "Platonism" or "Neo-Platonism" it remains useful to resort to the distinction between Augustinian and Dionysian Neo-Platonism so well drawn by Koch several decades ago.⁸² Unlike Augustine, who bequeathed to the Middle Ages Cicero, Apuleius, and Calcidius' Platonism(s), as well as some of Plotinus and Porphyry's topics, the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, among other Greek sources, transmits to Christendom certain topics from Athenian Neo-Platonism, especially that of Proclus.⁸³ From the ninth century on, Dionysius' Latin version provides a privileged way to this philosophy for Western Christendom.⁸⁴ Likewise, Dionysius' texts oftentimes offer the Latin world a way to the untranslated Plato. For instance, when Dionysius characterizes the first cause as "the Beautiful", he copies almost word for word a passage from the *Symposium*; the same happens with textual formulas from the *Parmenides*. Medieval authors would repeat these words without necessarily knowing their original source.

Nicholas was acquainted with all the medieval Latin versions of the *corpus*, i.e., those of Eriugena and Sarrazin; Thomas Gallus' *Extractio*; and Grosseteste's version. To these he added that of his contemporary Ambrose Traversari, and possibly a *florilegium*.⁸⁵ The contact with the work of Dionysius is early, dating back to his time at the University of Cologne in 1425. There he also discovered the "Albertism" of the age through his colleague Heymeric van de Velde.⁸⁶ Thus, after his first sermon in 1430, his ecclesiologico-political work *De concordantia catholica*, and his first philosophical-theological treatise *De docta ignorantia*,

80 Cf., e.g., *DDI* (h i n. 48).

81 The *Preparatio* is in Cusanus' library (CC 41); the *Vitae* (Cod. Harleianus 1347) is not.

82 Cf. Koch (1956/57).

83 Cf. Jeaneau (1997); Beierwaltes (1997, 1998a).

84 Cf. Gersh (2014a).

85 Cf. Chevalier, et al. (1937–51); Dondaine (1953).

86 Cf. Hoenen (1994).

Nicholas can be decidedly classed among Dionysius' followers.⁸⁷ Later, he would annotate with marginalia the *Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus* by Albertus Magnus, the great German Dominican philosopher at Cologne.⁸⁸ This predilection for the Areopagite was to remain until his last works and would be reinforced by Nicholas's relation with the Italians.⁸⁹ Nicholas was also very well acquainted with other sources of Christian Platonism arising from the reception of Dionysius in the Latin West, as he profusely annotated the First Book of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*⁹⁰ and Honorius Augustodunensis' *Clavis Physicae*.⁹¹

The link between the thought of Dionysius and Proclus was unknown to medieval thinkers, although some had begun to surmise it from the Latin versions of "Plato's *diadochus*".⁹² Nicholas belonged to the latter group, and postulated a continuous line of influence from Plato, through Dionysius, to Proclus. Although in doing so Nicholas distorted historical reality (since Pseudo-Dionysius [5th–6th centuries] lived after Proclus [412–485]), yet he correctly recognized a deep philosophical-theological affinity among these thinkers.

Proclus' thought was carefully read among German Dominicans from the late thirteenth throughout the fourteenth century.⁹³ Proclus found among them a fertile ground prepared beforehand by the importance given to the work of Dionysius and the anonymous *Liber de Causis*, a work on which Albertus Magnus (c. 1200–1280) had commented, considering it a part of the Peripatetic tradition. This latter fact is no minor point: Albertus' work announces a philosophical orientation held by his followers up through Cusanus, in which a theology of Proclean inspiration improves and completes Aristotelian metaphysics.⁹⁴ From this starting point, the thought of Proclus starts on its way

87 Cf. Beierwaltes (1998a).

88 Cf. Baur (1941a).

89 Cf. Senger (2000).

90 Cf. Koch (1963).

91 Cf. Lucentini (1980).

92 I.e., Proclus. –Ed.

93 Cf. Imbach (1978); Sturlese (1984, 1987).

94 Albertus Magnus, *De causis* II, tr. 5, cap. 24, p. 191, ll. 17–23: "In hoc ergo libro ad finem intentionis pervenimus. Ostendimus enim causam primam, et causa[ta]rum secundarum ordinem, et qualiter primum universi esse est principium, et qualiter omnium esse fluit a primo secundum opiniones Peripateticorum: et haec quidem quando adiuncta fuerint undecimo *primae philosophiae*, [tunc primo] opus perfectum est [With this book, we reach our goal. Because we present the first cause and the order of second effects, and how the Principle is the first being of the universe, and how the being of all things flows from the First, according to the opinions of the Peripatetics: and only when all of these are attached to the eleventh book of {Aristotle's} *Metaphysics*, is that {latter} book complete.

through German philosophy. We find explicit mentions in Dietrich of Freiberg (1250–1310) and in Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327) and his disciple Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), who refers to him as “*meister Proculus*”. Nicholas was very well acquainted with the work of Eckhart and even annotated his works.⁹⁵ The highest point of this reception is the massive commentary in Latin on a work by Proclus, written by the Dominican Berthold of Moosburg (c. 1300–1361), perhaps around the time he is supposed to have held the position of *lector principalis* at the *studium generale* in Cologne in 1335.⁹⁶ It is a monumental *expositio* on each of the propositions in the *Elementatio theologica*.⁹⁷ This commentary has been preserved in only two manuscripts.⁹⁸ Recent studies seem to indicate that German Dominicans continued to read Proclus and the *Liber de causis* from the beginning of the fourteenth century up through Nicholas of Cusa.⁹⁹

The importance of Berthold’s *Expositio* is central, for it is a *summa* of Christian Neo-Platonism. Berthold presents a sort of “*catena aurea*” or “Golden Chain” of those who considered themselves Platonists, including not just Proclus, but also a long list of Christian thinkers, among whom the Areopagite stands out. Nicholas mentions this commentary very favorably in his *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* and puts it—together with Dionysius, Marius Victorinus, Eriugena, Honorius Augustodunensis, and David of Dinant—on a list of those who should not be exposed to those who cannot understand them.¹⁰⁰

Some differences have been noted between the Bertholdian and Cusan reception of Proclus. Whereas in the former there is a strong influence of the Arabized Proclus already assimilated in the so-called School of Cologne, giving particular importance to the hierarchical procession and the return to the

{Trans. E. Ludueña}}”. Cf. Haubst (1980); Machetta (2007). (By the “eleventh book”, Albert means what we now know as the *twelfth*, i.e., Book Λ. – Ed.).

95 Cf. Duclow (1991).

96 Cf. Führer and Gersh (2014), 305–307.

97 Berthold von Moosburg (1984).

98 “O” = Oxford, Balliol College Library, Cod. 224 B; and “V” = Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vat. Lat. 2192.

99 Cf. Calma (2012); Retucci (2016); Ludueña (2011).

100 Ap. (h 11 n. 43): “illis debilibus mentis oculis lux intellectualis subtrahatur. Sunt autem illis nequaquam libri sancti Dionysii, Marii Victorini ad Candidum Arrianum, Clavis physicae Theodori, Iohannis Scotigenae Περὶ φύσεως, Tomi David de Dynanto, Commentaria fratris Iohannis de Mossbach in Propositiones Proculi et consimiles libri ostendendi”. Hopkins (1981b): “[Hence all the saints] rightly admonish that] intellectual light be withdrawn from those with weak mental eyes. Holy [Ps.-] Dionysius’ books, Marius Victorinus’ *Ad Candidum Arrianum*, Theodorus’ *Clavis Physicae*, John Scotus Erigena’s *Periphyseos*, David of Dinant’s books, Brother John of Mossbach’s commentaries on the propositions of Proclus, and other such books are not at all to be shown to those [with such eyes]”.

One, the latter, by contrast gives a prominent place to the notion of the One above all oppositions.¹⁰¹

From the first pages of this commentary, the *Expositio*, Berthold opposes two basic paradigms, the Platonic and the Aristotelian, if only to emphasize the necessity of subordinating Aristotle to Plato. For Berthold, the basis of this subordination lies in the priority of what he calls “theological universality” over “logical universality”. In the latter, the fundamental opposition is that of the duplet, “being—not-being”. According to Berthold, the multiple senses of “one” that he finds in the works of the Peripatetics all depend upon, i.e., are subordinate to this duplet. By contrast, for Berthold, the *platonici* subordinate the duplet of “being—not-being” to the One; he sees Dionysius as the paradigmatic “Platonist”, thus putting him in direct relation with Proclean thought.¹⁰²

The unnumbered or unmultipliable (*non plurificabile*) One, to which Berthold also refers as “One by excess of oneness or by superabundance” (*unum secundum unitatis excessum sive secundum superabundantiam*),¹⁰³ reveals the aforementioned priority of the One. In fact, this One is prior to all division and otherness. All that participates in it moves away from its simplicity, whether proceeding by creation or by determination.¹⁰⁴

These distinctions concerning the One attempt to exhibit an instance beyond the mere logical contradictions set out by Aristotle. Berthold recognizes in Proclus the peak of Platonic thought since it was he who could best arrange the philosophy originally conceived by Plato. Among Christians, the same notion can be found in Dionysius the Areopagite, in whom he recognizes the same inspiration.¹⁰⁵ The *sententia peripateticorum* constituting the Aristotelian metaphysics is opposed to the *supersapientialis scientia platonica*, which is superior to all metaphysics and is identified with what Berthold calls “*sapientia nostra*”.

101 Cf. Riccati (1993).

102 Cf. *Expositio*, prop. 1 D.

103 Cf. *Expositio*, prop. 2 E.

104 Cf. *Expositio*, prop. 3 B–C.

105 “Ex contrariorum etiam, quae in mundo sunt, conciliatione ascenditur in notitiam Dei, sicut apparet per Platonem in *Timaeo* ... [Even from contraries existing in the world, one can ascend to knowledge of God by reconciling them, as Plato seems to say in the *Timaeus* {Trans. D'Amico}]” (*Expositio*, 40).

5 Concluding Remarks

The legacy of Cusanus' thought in later German philosophy is rather uneven. It is not possible to speak of a "Cusan School", although some researchers recognize in the thinking of Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) and Johann Eck (1486–1543) the continuation of the Cusan doctrine of the *docta ignorantia* and the *coincidentia oppositorum*, whose echoes would have reached Martin Luther himself (1483–1546). According to Protestant historiography, Cusanus not only offered a Platonic perspective of Christianity but in many senses opened the political-ecclesiological way for the Reformation.¹⁰⁶

Likewise, the general affinities between Platonism and German Idealism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are striking. Here again, the thought of Nicholas of Cusa is highly relevant.¹⁰⁷ For example, the theme of the unity of the opposites returned with great force in Schelling, who received this core notion of Cusan Platonism via Giordano Bruno. Schelling's work *Bruno* presents this notion as one of the keys to his own philosophy of identity or "absolute indifference"—reflections that would prove fundamental for understanding Hegelian dialectic.¹⁰⁸

Also, it is necessary to dedicate a special paragraph to the gravitational force exerted by Nicholas upon German thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially due to the importance granted him by the Marburg School. But even before Cohen and Cassirer dealt with Cusan thought, there were many reasons for such thinkers as Rudolf Eucken or Richard Falckenberg to consider Nicholas in depth. They held that subjectivity differs from individuality and found inspiration in Nicholas's own "*Geisttheorie*". For just this reason they believed that Nicholas of Cusa is the essential link between Plato and Kant.¹⁰⁹

Finally, the most striking proof of interest in a classical thinker is perhaps manifested in the project of compiling a complete edition of his works. This has happened in the case of Cusanus. In an epistolary exchange between Nicolai Hartmann and Heinz Heimsoeth, we read of their intention to plan a critical edition of the Cusan works—which in fact began in the 1930s. Hans-Georg Gadamer, who devoted many pages to our author in *Truth and Method* (1960), participated in the editing and training program of the Cusanus-Institut in Mainz. According to Gadamer, Cusan philosophy produced the "hermeneutical

106 Cf. Meier-Oeser (1989).

107 Cf. Beierwaltes (1972).

108 Cf. Beierwaltes (1980).

109 Cf. Zeyer (2015).

turn” insofar as it is aware that all experience of the world is symbolic and, as such, hermeneutic. He argues that Nicholas of Cusa is the most important figure between Plato and Hegel, in that Cusanus, like those two great philosophers, considers everything real to be the unfolding of a single spiritual order.¹¹⁰

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¹¹⁰ Cf. Gadamer (1975).

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Leibniz: The Last Great Christian Platonist

Jack Davidson

Many of the Platonic doctrines are ... most beautiful.¹



Leibniz (1646–1716) was the last great philosopher in the rich tradition of Christian Platonism that began before Augustine (354–430) and ran through Pseudo-Dionysius (early sixth century), John Scottus Eriugena (c. 800–c. 877), Anselm (1033–1109), Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) and Marsilio Ficino's (1433–1499) Florentine Academy. With the advent of figures like John Locke (1632–1704), David Hume (1711–1776), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), philosophy became both mundane and largely secular. This chapter focuses on the most influential of the 17th-century German Platonists, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

As anyone who knows of the history of Platonism from Plato onward realizes, classifying Leibniz as a Platonist is to place him in the company of philosophers who hold (sometimes wildly) different views, so some specification is necessary. These days, “Platonism” is used by scholars of ancient philosophy to describe what they take to be actual doctrines in the Platonic canon, doctrines Plato developed or continued to hold in the dialogues after the early, Socratic dialogues, e.g., the theory of the Forms.² In contemporary metaphysics, “Platonism” refers to the view that certain abstract truths, like those of mathematics and logic, exist independently of time and space and human thought. Frege, Gödel, and Russell were all Platonists in this sense, as

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- 1 D II 222/L 592. Leibniz citations in the text and notes are by abbreviation keyed to the bibliography. Entries separated by a slash refer to the original and the English translation of that same passage, respectively.
 - 2 This assumes a model of Platonic interpretation according to which the dialogues can, at least for the most part, be divided between different stages or chronologies of compositions based on themes and stylometry, e.g., early, transitional, middle, and late, and that by the middle period, say of the *Republic*, the views expressed are Plato's mature views. Not all scholars accept this model.

was Leibniz, with slight modification. The term, or a close relative, was also used by philosophers or movements who saw Plato as their intellectual ancestor and inspiration. Leibniz is very much a Platonist in this sense. The problem with this use is that thinkers so grouped hold radically heterogeneous views and methods of doing philosophy. Since philosophers and theologians continued systematically to interpret Plato, defend him, and incorporate what they took to be his insights into their own works, present-day historians often use a chronological taxonomy by referring to medieval, Renaissance, early modern, and modern Platonism(s).

“Platonism” is often contrasted with “Neo-Platonism” a term coined in the early nineteenth century by German scholars interested in distinguishing what they took to be a new stage of Platonism developed by Plotinus (204/5–270), a Hellenized Egyptian who spent the last twenty-five years of his life teaching at Rome. Like those before and after him, he believed himself to be interpreting and defending Plato’s own views. By the third century, however, Plotinus had roughly 600 years of Greek and Roman Platonism, or, more accurately, Platonisms, to reflect upon. His engagement and creative modification of this eclectic Platonic tradition resulted in a rationalist metaphysical system that was then subsequently shaped and modified by his student, Porphyry (c. 234–c. 305); the latter’s student, Iamblichus (c. 245–325); and Proclus (412–485), who was instrumental in the transmitting Platonism to the medieval world. It is worth noting that Plotinus mentions Aristotle more than Plato, and in some ways explicates Plato’s metaphysical and theological system in Aristotelian terms. This is not surprising, as many of his predecessors used Aristotelian elements in constructing their interpretations and versions of Platonism. Indeed, the conscious and more often unconscious borrowing between the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions continued to such an extent that thinkers are not infrequently described by scholars as Platonic Aristotelians or Aristotelian Platonists. The case of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) is instructive. It is likely that the only actual Platonic texts he read were fragments of the *Timaeus* embedded in a commentary. He would be almost incomprehensible to a reader unacquainted with Aristotle. At the same time, the influence of Plato and of ancient, Arabic, and medieval Platonists on Aquinas was substantial.

This chapter proceeds as follows: §1 sketches out challenges to studying Leibniz. §2 provides a brief account of his life and intellectual climate. §3 presents some Platonic themes in Leibniz’s thinking. §4 examines Leibniz’s views on the concept of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic conception of the world soul. §5 discusses his views on the Platonic theory of innate ideas, and §6 takes up the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation in Leibniz’s metaphysical system. §7 offers a brief overview of his mature metaphysical system. In

the summary, I make some suggestions as to the relationship between the Neo-Platonic and Platonic elements of Leibniz's mature metaphysics.

1 A "Metaphysical Novel"?

Leibniz has earned his reputation of being one of the most impenetrable of the canonical philosophers; various factors contribute to his inaccessibility. First, unlike most of the other major philosophers of the early modern period, he left no magnum opus like Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, Spinoza' *Ethics*, Malebranche's *Search for Truth*, Hume's *Treatise* or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; this, in turn, means that there is no one work in which Leibniz explains his whole system. Later in life he produced two books, the *Theodicy* of 1710 and his close commentary on Locke's *Essay*, viz., the *New Essays on Human Understanding* of 1703–5, though the latter went unpublished until 1765, long after Leibniz's death. The former is devoted to the problem of evil and issues in philosophical theology, especially with respect to Bayle's skepticism; both were written in a popular style. On most topics, however, one needs to uncover Leibniz's views on a topic by going through his articles written for journals, and then turning to the vast corpus comprising letters, working papers, drafts of letters and other drafts, notes and marginalia, most of which was not intended for publication.

Compounding these challenges is the fact that the *Nachlaß* is enormous. Leibniz writes:

Sometimes so many thoughts occur to me in the morning during an hour in which I am still in bed, that it takes me all morning, and sometimes all day and more, to write them down accurately.³

Had Leibniz had a narrower mind, this might not be so daunting, but as the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment thinker, atheist, and cofounder of the *Encyclopédie* wrote in his Leibniz entry,

Never can a man have read as much, studied as much, meditated more, and written more than Leibniz.... What he has composed on the word, God, nature, and the soul is of the most sublime eloquence. If his ideas

3 B 338.

had been expressed with the colouring of Plato, the philosopher of Leibniz would have ceded nothing to the philosopher of Athens.⁴

Elsewhere, Diderot writes: “When one compares the talents one has with those of a Leibniz, one is tempted to throw away one’s books and go die quietly in the dark of some forgotten corner”.⁵

Leibniz’s inaccessibility is exacerbated by his parsimony with the premises for his often-curious conclusions, e.g., his claims that substances do not interact; that this is the best possible world; that there cannot be two identical grains of sand (or salt, etc.); and that at the bedrock level everything in the universe is the product of minds. It is in the so-called *Monadology* of 1714 that students usually first encounter Leibniz. However, anyone reading it cold will likely agree with Russell’s remark as he prepared to lecture on Leibniz at Cambridge in 1898: “I felt—as many have felt—that the *Monadology* was a kind of fantastic fairy tale, coherent perhaps, but wholly arbitrary”.⁶ Hegel had said much the same, noting that Leibniz’s philosophy seems to amount to “a string of arbitrary assertions, following one upon another without any necessity in their connection, like a metaphysical novel”.⁷ Likewise Leibniz’s willingness in correspondence and in works like the *New Essay* to refer to ontological entities, which we know from other works he does not ultimately accept, requires that the interpreter rely on a reductive scheme not given in the text.

Another avenue to understanding a philosopher is to look at the intellectual influences—sometimes stated and sometimes not, sometimes positive and sometimes not—that inform his philosophy. With Leibniz, we have an embarrassment of riches. Consider the self-description of his philosophical system near the beginning of the *New Essays*:

This system appears to unite Plato with Democritus, Aristotle with Descartes, the Scholastics with the moderns, theology and morality with reason. Apparently, it takes the best from all systems and then advances further than anyone has yet done.⁸

4 Diderot and d’Alembert (1751–72), Vol. ix, 379, quoted at Arthur (2014), 193.

5 Diderot and d’Alembert (1751–72), Vol. iv, 379, quoted at Arthur (2014), 202.

6 Russell (1937), xiii–xiv.

7 Hegel (1844), 408.

8 NE 71–2. The quotation continues: “I find in it something I had hitherto despaired of—an intelligible explanation of the union of body and soul. I find the true principles of things in the substantial unities which this system introduces, and in their harmony which was pre-established by the primary substance.... I now see what Plato had in mind when he took matter to be an imperfect and transitory being; what Aristotle meant by his ‘entelechy’; in

This is a declaration of Leibniz's celebrated irenic eclecticism. Late in life, he reflected upon his philosophical development in a 1714 letter to his long-time correspondent, the distinguished French courtier Nicolas Rémond. He describes his approach to philosophy thus:

Besides always taking care to direct my study toward edification, I have tried to uncover and unite the truth buried and scattered under the opinion of all the different philosophical sects, and I believe I have added something of my own which takes a few steps forward. The circumstances under which my studies proceeded from my earliest youth have given me some facility in this. I discovered Aristotle as a lad, and even the Scholastics did not repel me; even now I do not regret this. But then Plato too, and Plotinus, gave me some satisfaction, not to mention other ancient thinkers whom I have consulted later.... I flatter myself to have penetrated into the harmony of these different realms and to have seen that both sides are right provided that they do not clash with each other....⁹

These passages and others like them help us understand the cast of Leibniz's mind and his conception of how properly to do philosophy. First, he identifies with the eclectic, pacific tradition. According to this tradition, especially strong in the Renaissance and in the seventeenth century, truth is unearthed among the views of apparently opposing traditions, philosophies, and schools. In the Renaissance the philosophies or schools considered were largely those recovered from the ancient world. In the institutional philosophy of the universities, various strands of Scholasticism were among the apparently conflicting views that could be and were reconciled. As we shall see, some of his professors were eclectics. Leibniz, then, believed that each of the main philosophical traditions contained some truth, even when the traditions seem to be incompatible. This drive toward synthesis, toward reconciling apparently conflicting views, is deeply characteristic of Leibniz. He alone among the canonical philosophers of the early modern period found value and truth in the ancient tradition, and

what sense even Democritus could promise another life, as Pliny says he did; how far the sceptics were right in decrying the senses; why Descartes thinks that animals are automata, and why they nevertheless have souls and sense, just as mankind thinks they do. How to make sense of those who put life and perception into everything—e.g., of Cardano, Campanella, and (better than them) of the late Platonist Countess of Conway, and our friend the late M. Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (though otherwise full of meaningless paradoxes), together with his friend, the late Mr. Henry More".

9 G III 606/L 654–5.

forthrightly proclaimed his projects of reconciling the new mechanical philosophy with Scholasticism, and modern philosophy with ancient philosophy. It is only a mild exaggeration to say, as T.S. Eliot did, that “Leibniz’s originality was in direct, not inverse ratio to his erudition”.¹⁰ The enemies of true, synthetic philosophy are the dogmatists and “the sectarian spirit which imposes limits upon itself by spurning others”.¹¹

An obvious question remains: how is the non-sectarian truth seeker supposed to know which of the pre-existing doctrines are true and which false? Obviously, the true doctrines must be internally consistent with each other and with Christianity. In the letter to Rémond, he writes “that most of the sects are right in a good part of what they propose, but not so much in what they deny”.¹² This, by itself, is not very helpful. Nor is the claim in the same letter that “both sides are right provided that they do not clash with each other”. This method only takes us so far.¹³

10 Eliot (1916), 537. Sleight, cites this article (1990), 218, and notes that Eliot never returned to Harvard to defend his doctoral dissertation on Leibniz. This passage is noted with approval by Christia Mercer in (2001), 436. In this book Mercer challenges scholarly orthodoxy by claiming that Leibniz came to his mature doctrines much earlier than had been previously thought. Three of her central claims are that earlier scholars have failed adequately to appreciate his “conciliatory eclecticism”, his early commitment to Scholastic Aristotelianism with respect to substance, and the influence of Christian Platonism in German universities on his metaphysics, especially with respect God and the nature of mind. While most of her book focuses on the early influences—particularly of some of his university teachers—in the initial development of Leibniz’s system in his early works (1669–71), the last section takes up texts from 1671–1679. Most of the texts I consider are from the mid-1680s through 1716, the year of his death. I pay particular attention to the *Discourse on Metaphysics* from 1686, generally taken to be the first text of his mature philosophy.

11 G v 64/L 496.

12 The rest of the paragraph reads: “The formalists, Platonists and Aristotelians, for example, are right in seeking the source of things in final and formal causes. But they are wrong in neglecting efficient and material causes and in inferring from this, as did Henry More in England and certain other Platonists, that there are phenomena which cannot be explained mechanically. The materialists, on the other hand, or those who accept only a mechanical philosophy, are wrong in rejecting metaphysical considerations and trying to explain everything in terms of sense experience”.

13 Look points out another problem (Look 2003, 135). Some of Leibniz’s remarks in these contexts can be interpreted as the claim that all philosophical systems have some truth in them, such that the non-sectarian philosopher needs to find those individual truths in each system. Other remarks can be interpreted as the different claim that all philosophical systems express truth from different perspective, such that the non-sectarian needs to find that foundational truth that all philosophical systems contain. Mercer labels Leibniz’s methodology as involving “*The Metaphysics of Method*” (Mercer 2001, 53) and the “*Rhetoric of Attraction*” (Mercer 2001, 57). Unlike Mercer, I do not see much of an actual

2 Leibniz's Life and Intellectual Context

Leibniz was born in Leipzig in 1646 to an academic and juridical family two years before the end of the Thirty Years' War that devastated the German states.¹⁴ His father, Vice-Chair of the Faculty of Philosophy and Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Leipzig, taught him to read before he was four, but died when he was six. He was not allowed into his father's library for several years until a visiting aristocratic scholar managed to persuade his mother that the heterodox books therein would not turn the boy from the conservative Lutheranism of his family and Leipzig—a Lutheranism bitterly opposed to any reconciliation with Catholicism, or worse, Calvinism, Zwinglianism, and the German Reformed tradition. As it turns out, his mother's concern proved prescient. Later in life, Leibniz described his reaction to the news:

This announcement made me exult greatly, as though I had found a treasure. For I was eager to see the many ancients who had been known to me only by their names—Cicero and Quintilian and Seneca, Pliny, Herodotus, Xenophon, Plato, the *Stories and Writings of Augustine*, and the numerous Christian fathers, both Greek and Latin. I occupied myself with these as my inclination prompted....¹⁵

He also read Archimedes and Cicero, though his reading was not restricted to works from the ancient world, for he read the works of Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589), a premier Renaissance Aristotelian whose works became influential for many German Protestants, and the Jesuits Pedro Fonseca (1528–1599), Antonio Rubio (1548–1615), and the towering Francisco Suárez (1548–1617). In addition to philosophy, he read Luther and Lutherans, Calvin and Calvinists, Roman Catholics, and persecuted groups like the Arminians, dissident Calvinists, and Jansenists, radical Augustinians.

At seven he entered the Nikolaischule, a Latin school with connections to the University of Leipzig, which he entered in 1661. Leipzig was a bulwark for Lutheranism in the Thirty Years' War. Among the philosophically and religiously

philosophical method in Leibniz's remarks on pacific eclecticism, but rather a fundamental attitude of openness towards interacting with the great philosophers of the past, whose work he then synthesized into an imaginative new system of his own. Or rather, systems—since his views changed over time.

14 In addition to Mercer (2001) there are many excellent books on Leibniz's philosophical development. See, for example, Antognazza (2009), Beeley (1996); Kabitz (1901); Moll (1978–1996), and Wilson (1989). Antognazza's bibliography is especially useful.

15 FC 381, translated at Brown (1995), 70.

conservative Lutheran faculty at the university were several professors, including Johann Adam Scherzer (1628–1683) and Jakob Thomasius (1622–1684), who were part of a general eclecticism present in Germany at the time. Thomasius, who became Leibniz's mentor and advisor, was a well-known professor of rhetoric, dialectic, and moral philosophy; he was particularly erudite in the history of philosophy.¹⁶ His eclecticism was constrained and shaped by what he took to be compatible with and illuminated central Lutheran theology. In Thomasius' case, this amounted to a Christian Aristotelianism concerning the notion of substance, intermixed with Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and Augustinian views on God and Creation. In this respect, he was following the tradition of many Christian philosophers before him.¹⁷

After finishing his *Magister Philosophiae* in 1664, Leibniz finished a bachelor's degree in law that emphasized the connection between jurisprudence and philosophy the next year. Transferring to the University of Altdorf, Leibniz quickly submitted and defended a dissertation, which was granted with the highest distinction. Shortly thereafter he was offered a position with the law faculty, which he refused, stating that he was "headed in an entirely different direction". Thereafter, Leibniz, like almost all of his early modern peers, sought out a career in the world rather than the academy.¹⁸ While we remember Leibniz these days as an intellectual *par excellence*—"the last man to know everything"¹⁹—his all-encompassing goal in life was to glorify God, ameliorate suffering, and improve the lives of human beings. Indeed, at one point he wrote: "To contribute to the public good and to the glory of God is the same thing."²⁰

Fortunately, Leibniz soon came to the notice of Baron Johann Christian von Boineburg (1622–1672), a Lutheran convert to Catholicism and well-known diplomat who worked for the archbishop and elector of Mainz, Johann Philipp von Schönborn (1605–1673). Schönborn was a politically powerful man whose

16 The seventeen extant letters between Leibniz and Thomasius can be found in A II i.

17 Indeed, two extremely influential German Lutheran Aristotelians in the century before him were Jacob Schegk (1511–1587) and the great intellectual leader of early Lutheranism, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560). In a series of articles and a book, Mercer sheds light on the philosophical and theological commitments of Leibniz's professors, and argues that their eclecticism greatly influenced the development of his mature philosophy. See also Mercer (2010 and 2012). For more on the eclecticism of his teachers, see Döring (1996), 73–76, 85; and Leinsle (1988), 20–26, 63–87, 139–149. These works are noted in Antognazza (2009), 73.

18 The one exception was Hume, who at several points unsuccessfully applied for academic posts.

19 I borrow this description from my teacher, Robert Sleigh, Jr.

20 A I 18 377.

ambition it was to reconcile Catholicism with Protestantism. Boineburg was able to connect Leibniz with other men of learning, writing an introduction to Henry Oldenburg (c. 1618–1677), the German-born Protestant who would later become the secretary of the British Royal Society. The patronage of these worldly, tolerant, irenic men allowed Leibniz to blossom and throw his energy into the court's religious, philosophical, legal, and diplomatic missions.

One of these was to change the course of Leibniz's life. Worried about the possible consequences of France's expansionist ambitions, Leibniz was sent by Boineburg to Paris to present a plan devised to persuade the Sun King that his military ambitions would be manifested more gloriously if directed at Cairo and Constantinople. The political and military situation had changed by the time of Leibniz's arrival so that the plan was no longer relevant, but the four years Leibniz spent in Paris, from 1672 through 1676 (from age 26 through 30), were the happiest of his life. Paris was the intellectual and scientific center of seventeenth-century Europe, and Leibniz immediately started working on schemes to extend his stay.

In Paris, Leibniz was able to meet with some of the most influential thinkers of his time, including the Jansenist, Antoine Arnauld (1616–1698), with whom he had corresponded before coming to Paris, and the leading Cartesian, the Oratorian priest, Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715), whose popular writings helped make Descartes' writings more acceptable to Christianity. Leibniz also met the mathematicians, Walther von Tschirnhaus (1651–1708) and Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695), the latter of whom brought Leibniz up to speed on contemporary mathematic and scientific developments. Leibniz had worked out the key principles of calculus by 1673 and determined that integration is the inverse of differentiation by 1675. Newton had not yet published his results yet and did not claim the invention of calculus until the publication of his *Optics* in 1704. What followed was an acrimonious dispute that continued even after the death of the main protagonists. The current scholarly consensus is that Isaac Newton (1642–1727) had the fundamentals of calculus by 1666, but that Leibniz came to his ideas independently of Newton.

In the spring of his last year in Paris Leibniz seems to have rediscovered Plato and wrote Latin summaries of the *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*.²¹ His interest in Plato might have been spurred by his friendship with two French skeptics, the *abbé* Simon Foucher (1644–1696), with whom he corresponded for the next 30 years, and the much more famous bishop, Pierre-Daniel Huet

21 Leibniz's text on the *Parmenides* has not survived. He wrote abridged translations of the *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*.

(1630–1721), principal editor of the almost sixty volumes of the Latin classics, *Delphin Classics*. Leibniz and Huet corresponded between 1673 and 1692.

When repeated attempts to find permanent employment in Paris were unsuccessful, he reluctantly accepted a job offer to become the Court Councilor to the Duke of Brunswick in Hannover where he worked for the rest of his life, from the age of 30 until 70, for a succession of Dukes of Hannover. Leibniz's achievements in jurisprudence, philology, geology, historiography, physics, mathematics and philosophy are all the more remarkable in that they were achieved in his spare time, for he made his living as a legal counselor, diplomat, librarian, and historian and apologist for the court. Much of his time was spent as a historian attempting to establish titles and wealth for his employers, the successive Dukes of Brunswick-Lüneburg.

Leibniz never married but was very close to the Electress Sophie and her daughter, Sophie Charlotte, later Queen of Prussia. When his employer, Georg Ludwig, was elevated to the British crown in 1714, becoming George I, Leibniz desperately wanted to join him and the court in England. That request was denied; the reason: Leibniz needed to make more progress on the history of the house. Leibniz died in Hannover as an exile to the court, having gotten no further in his history than the year 1024.

3 Platonic Themes

Leibniz and Plato are both rationalists, in several senses. First, Leibniz, like Plato, holds that reality is ultimately intelligible (at least, in Leibniz's case, to an infinite mind). Reality is ultimately intelligible because there is an answer to all *why*—questions; that is, for any *P*, there is a reason for *P*. This refusal to countenance brute facts is expressed by Leibniz as the Principle of Sufficient Reason (*PSR*), the thesis that for any state of affairs there must be a sufficient reason why it obtains. Since the Platonic Forms in some sense carry their reason in themselves (or ultimately in the Form of the Good), Plato also counts as an explanatory rationalist. In *Monadology* §§31–32, Leibniz states: “Our reasonings are based on two great principles, that of contradiction ... [and] that of sufficient reason”.²² In his second letter to Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), the divine and apologist for Newton, Leibniz puts the former principle as follows: “[A] proposition cannot be true and false at the same time, and that therefore *A* is *A* and cannot be not *A*”.²³

²² G II 612/AG 217.

²³ G VI 355/AG 321.

Leibniz and Plato are also rationalists in that both believe that there are synthetic truths that we know through reason itself (to put it in Kantian terms). Moreover, both hold that certain abstract truths, like those of mathematics and logic, exist independently of time, space, and human thought; indeed, both find the paradigm of truth in mathematics. For Plato, of course, abstract truths have independent existence in the realm of the Forms, at least in the middle dialogues. On this point Leibniz modifies Plato's view, as he must, for on the former's nominalist ontology, abstract ideas demand metaphysical grounding, which is provided by the mind of God. Here Leibniz avails himself of the Christian Platonism flowing from Augustine, the common currency among most medieval philosophers.²⁴

Leibniz endorses other fundamental presuppositions of the Platonic tradition. First, he holds that the paradigm of a substance is a mind or soul, and he repeatedly looks to Plato's views on the unity of the soul, its simplicity, and indestructibility as evidence for the truth of these doctrines. Second, he holds that we know the existence of a soul immediately through our first-person perspective; and third, that the existence of souls is better known than the existence of material objects. Fourth, like Plato, Leibniz maintains that the material world is less than completely real; and fifth, that what is ultimately real is immaterial. This last point, of course, entails that materialism is false. In a letter to Sophia Charlotte of 1702, he writes:

What the ancient Platonists have said is thus quite true and quite worthy of consideration—that the existence of intelligible things, particularly of the I who think[s] and am called mind or soul, is incomparably more certain than the existence of sensible things and that it would thus not be impossible, speaking with metaphysical rigor, that there should exist at bottom only intelligible substances, of which sensible things would be the appearances.²⁵

Another significant point of agreement with Plato is the conviction that complete explanations of the world, and minds, finite and infinite, must be teleological rather than mechanical. Leibniz was particularly taken with the *Phaedo*-passage (96b–99c), in which Socrates describes his excitement and subsequent disenchantment on first encountering a book by Anaxagoras that promised to explain the natural world. Leibniz translated this passage into French and, in a marginal note, wrote that he wanted it to be inserted into §20

24 See Grua's groundbreaking (1953) and in particular, 262–67.

25 G 6 502/L 549; see also (G VI 494) and (G IV 502).

of the important and deeply Platonic *Discourse of Metaphysics* of 1686: “The passage from Plato’s *Phaedo* where Socrates ridicules Anaxagoras, who introduces mind but does not make use of it, is to be inserted”.²⁶ Leibniz explains his highly unusual step of including a long selection from another philosopher because the “passage agrees marvelously with my opinions on this point” and “seems to be directly expressly against our overly materialistic philosophers”. It will also “give an incentive to some of us to share in many of the other beautiful and solid thoughts which can be found in the writings of this famous author”.²⁷

While DM §20 itself is only three sentences long, the intended insertion, the translated text from the *Phaedo*, is five paragraphs long.²⁸ It is no wonder Leibniz greatly prized this passage, given that he could have written parts of it

26 AG 53. Leibniz inserted the same passage in a piece against two groups whom he calls “naturalists” (G VII 332–336/AG 283–4).

27 AG 53.

28 I quote the Martin and Brown translation of Leibniz’s translation of the *Phaedo*-passage in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* [MB 63–64; cf. AG 283–284]:

“One day”, he said, “I heard someone read a book of Anaxagoras, where there were these words ‘that an Intelligent Being was the cause of all things, and that He arranged and adorned them’. I was extremely pleased with that, for I thought that if the world was the result of an Intelligence, everything would have been made in the most perfect way possible. That is why I thought that he who wanted to explain why things came to be, perished or subsisted had to search for what suited the perfection of each....

“In view of all this, I rejoiced to have found a master able to teach the reason of things: whether, for example, the earth was round or flat, and why it was best that way rather than otherwise ... Moreover, I expected that when he said that the earth was or was not the centre of the universe, he would explain to me why that was the most suitable. And when he said the same of the sun, the moon, the stars and their motions ... And finally, after showing what was suitable to each thing individually, he would show me what was best in general.

“Full of this hope, I took and skimmed through the books of Anaxagoras with great eagerness, but I [sic] was far from my expectation, for I was surprised to see that he made no use of this governing Intelligence”, set out in advance, “that he spoke no more of the adornment and perfection of things, and introduced some rather implausible ethereal matters.

“In this, he was rather like the man who said that Socrates did things intelligently, but when he came to explaining in particular the causes of his actions, thereupon said that he was sitting here because he had a body composed of bone, flesh and nerves, that the bones were tensed or relaxed, and that was why the body was flexible and I was sitting. Or if he wanted to explain the present speech, he had recourse to the air, to vocal and aural organs and like things, while forgetting the true causes, that is that the Athenians thought it better to condemn than to acquit me, and for my part thought it better to sit here than to take flight. For, by my faith, these nerves and these bones would long since be with the Boeotians and Megarians, if I had not found it more just and honest for me suffer the penalty the fatherland wants to impose on me than live elsewhere a wanderer in exile. That is why it is unreasonable to call these bones and nerves and their motions causes.

himself. Here we read, first, that the reason or cause of the world is a perfect Intelligence, which entails, for Plato and Leibniz that the world is “made in the most perfect way possible”. This entails Leibniz’s notorious thesis that this is the best possible world. After all, if God is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, and there is a best possible world, and God decides to create (in truth, to actualize) a world, the result must be the best of all possible worlds. For if there is a best possible world, an omniscient God would know about it, an omnipotent God could bring it into being, and an omnibenevolent God must, in accordance with his perfect goodness, actualize it.²⁹ Leibniz thought this implication was both obvious and required by orthodoxy, and so defended the (to us seriously implausible) metaphysical claim that this is the best of all possible worlds. In DM §6 Leibniz writes that “[t]he most perfect world ... is ... the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in in phenomena ...”. He thus embraces a version of the Great Chain of Being, according to which the greatest possible collection and harmony of beings and their perfections constitute the goodness or perfection of worlds.³⁰ Leibniz never tires of defending his deeply abstract sense of metaphysical perfection or goodness, according to which this world is best because it has the simplest laws with the richest phenomena. Because goodness is understood in this technical, metaphysical way—for one cannot perceive the supreme excellence of the world through our senses—Voltaire’s caricature of Leibniz’ notion in *Candide* misses the mark.

Another common commitment Leibniz locates in the *Phaedo* passage is the idea that the universe is shot through with *telos*, and that the world is ultimately explicable only in terms of the purposeful activities of souls, or in his technical terminology, “monads”. Another way to put this is that Leibniz agrees

“It is true that whoever said that I could not do all this without bones and nerves would be right, but that the true cause is something else ... and that is no more than a condition without which the cause could not be the cause....

“People who say no more than, for example, that the motions of the bodies surrounding the earth support the earth where it is, forget that the divine power arranges everything in the finest way, and do not understand that it is the good and the beautiful that join, form, and preserve the world ...”.

29 There is considerable scholarly literature about whether God’s actualization of this world is necessary. One of Leibniz’ replies was that God’s actualization of the best of all possible worlds was morally, but not metaphysically or logically, necessary.

30 Conflicts or incompatibilities between different kinds of perfection are inevitable in the best possible world, which lead to imperfections like pain, suffering, and evil. These too are necessary components of the best possible world, such that a world lacking, say the First World War—and everything that only follows from that vast event—is a worse world.

with the claim in the *Phaedo* that the *ultimate* and *sufficient* explanation of any state of affairs will never terminate in something material. This is the point of Plato's claim that the ultimate cause, or *aitia*, of Socrates' choice not to escape can never be sufficiently explained merely in virtue of facts about his nerves, muscles, or any part of his body.³¹ In Aristotelian terms, the ultimate reason for Socrates' decision can only involve a purposive final cause.

Another significant point of agreement with the *Phaedo* passage is that the final cause of Socrates' refusal to escape is that that action seems *best* to him. Leibniz reads Plato as making the same kind of claim, since if the world were made by *Nous*, "everything would have been made in the most perfect way possible". Leibniz puts this principle, which like the *PSR*, plays a key role in his system, thus: "God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking".³²

Leibniz and Plato also share the belief that philosophy progresses by attempting to solve various unresolved problems. Should it succeed, then that very fact is at least a *prima facie* reason for thinking that the metaphysics that incorporates such solutions is true. In Plato, for example, the Theory of Forms solves deep problems in reference and predication, which solutions are therefore among the reasons Plato gives for the truth of the theory.

Last, Leibniz shares Plato's conviction that a philosopher has an obligation to promote the good, both individually and collectively.³³ Both were actively engaged in politics in the real world—Plato at the court of Dionysius II and Leibniz in Hannover (and elsewhere)—both engaged in social and political issues in their writings, and both believed that government should be ruled by the wise.³⁴ Both ground their ethical and political views in their metaphysics.³⁵

31 The Latin "*causa*" translates the Greek "*aitia*", and is broader than "cause" in English, as it may also connote "reason" or "explanation".

32 DM §1.

33 "All things are connected and have to be directed to the same aim, which is the glory of God and the advancement of the public good by means of useful works and beautiful discoveries" (trans. Antognazza 2009, vi).

34 In a letter to Thomas Burnett (1656–1729), Leibniz claims: "If several men found themselves in a single ship on the open sea, it would not be in the least conformable either to reason or nature, that those who understand nothing of sea-going claim to be pilots; such that, following natural reason, government belongs to the wisest" (PW 192).

35 For an outstanding study of the Platonism in Leibniz's ethical and political philosophy, see Riley (1996). Brown (1995, 1998) and Schrecker (1951) also offer insightful treatments of Leibniz's Platonism.

4 The World Soul

The doctrine of the world soul is strong strand in certain strains of Neo-Platonism. The conception of the Platonic (and Neo-Platonic) notion(s) of the *anima mundi* has its roots in the *Timaeus*:

The universe resembles more closely than anything else that Living Thing of which all other living things are parts, both individually and by kinds. For that Living Thing comprehends within itself all intelligible living things, just as our world is made up of us and all the other visible creatures. Since the god wanted nothing more than to make the world like the best of intelligible things, complete in every way, he made it a single visible living thing, which contains within itself all the living things whose nature it is to share its kind.³⁶

There is much that is obscure about this text. Minimally, however, it seems to imply the following: that the world soul is as perfect as possible; moves harmoniously by its internal power; has an intelligence and reason (being a soul); understands and individuates what is in it; and includes corporeal entities, although they are ontologically subordinate to the intellectual and immaterial.³⁷ However we might understand the world soul in terms of Plato's complete cosmology, this conception captured the imagination of many ancient, medieval, and Renaissance thinkers, including some of the early modern Kabbalists and Cambridge Platonists with whom Leibniz was in contact. Some of these interpretations resulted in striking and sophisticated systems, the archetype of which was constructed by Plotinus.

The doctrine of the world soul was one answer to the question of how the divine is related to the mundane. This is a question to which Leibniz devoted considerable energy: how, at the ontological level, is God was related to the universe? While this might seem like a great non-question to a modern audience, it was a central issue in medieval and early modern philosophy. There were four competing theories about the relationship between God and the world.

The first alternative is deism, according to which God completes his causal contributions to the world with his initial creation. While deism makes an explication of human freedom considerably easier than its orthodox

³⁶ *Ti.* 30c7–31a2, trans. Zeyl.

³⁷ *Ti.* 30b–31; 35a1–7.

competitors, its attenuated sense of the world's dependence on God rendered it a non-starter for most medieval and early modern philosophers.

The second is occasionalism, according to which God is not only the first cause of all that exists or obtains in the world, but also is the only cause of all that exists or obtains in the world. According to the theory, none of the relations between physical objects—bricks and glass windows, for example—are genuinely causal. Rather, a brick hitting a window is the occasion on which God causes the glass in the window to shatter. The attraction of the theory is that it satisfies, in spades, the doctrine of the total dependence of creatures on God. Likewise, it solves the notorious Cartesian mind-body interaction problem by denying any real causal interaction. Given Leibniz's commitment to real causation, he rejected occasionalism.³⁸

The third is the doctrine of God's general concurrence, according to which created substances have genuine causal powers, although in order for secondary causes to act, God must cooperate or concur to bring about the action in question. While God's causal contribution is a necessary condition for any creaturely causation, His general concurrence is not what determines which effect in fact results. The medievals offered the following kind of analogy. The sun, God in the analogy, shines on a barley plant, a secondary cause, which produces barley, the effect. While the sun is necessary for the barley, it is up to the plant to produce barley and not wheat or rice. The advantage of the theory of concurrence is obvious: it provides the conceptual space for free will and hence our responsibility for sin, while affirming our dependence on a morally perfect God. Not only is the entire mundane realm dependent on his original creation, but without God's continued preservation at every moment, the whole of creation would cease to exist. This was the dominant theory of philosophers from the Middle Ages through the early modern period.

The fourth is pantheism (or the world soul, in some versions), according to which the world is identical with God—*Deus, sive Natura* (God, or Nature)—in Spinoza's famous words.³⁹ Because in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God freely creates *ex nihilo* a world that He transcends, orthodox thinkers in these traditions rejected pantheism.

38 Malebranche was not the originator of occasionalism; for example, many read Al-Ghazālī's (c. 1056–1111) *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* as endorsing occasionalism. Its fatal flaw, as anyone acquainted with Malebranche's theory of free choice will attest, is that it makes the difficult problem of exonerating God from human sin impossible. Both Ibn Rushd (Averroës) (1126–1198) and Aquinas rejected occasionalism.

39 A version of the world soul doctrine that claims that God is the world without being identical to it would not be a version of pantheism, but rather a version of panentheism.

In some notes on transubstantiation from the late 1660s, Leibniz comes close to this fourth theory.⁴⁰ He writes:

Something is substance when taken together with a concurrent mind; something taken apart from concurrent mind is accident. Substance is union with mind. Thus, the substance of the human body is union with the human mind, and the substance of bodies which lack reason is union with the universal mind, or God. The idea is the union of God with creature.⁴¹

Leibniz sometimes writes out the consequences of various views in notes without being committed to those views. Whatever the view's status in this case, it was rejected in favor of conceiving of mental principles internal to corporeal bodies, a "direct ancestor of Leibniz's future *Monadology*".⁴²

Leibniz takes up the concept of the world soul at various points throughout his life. In one of his few journal articles, "On Nature Itself" (1698), he considers the conception of an *anima universi* that generates all material alteration, arguing that such a being is superfluous and hence without warrant, given that all activity of created substances is given to them by God at Creation. However, Leibniz's mature comments on the concept of the *âme du monde* (the soul of the world) are not uniformly hostile, as is evident in a work written for Queen Sophie Charlotte, "Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit" (1702). Unlike the unqualified rejection of the world soul in other works, including in the *Theodicy* and the correspondence with Clarke, Leibniz's treatment here is less polemical and more tolerant.⁴³ He begins by distinguishing three different conceptions of "*l'Esprit Universel*" the first of which is specified in the first paragraph:

Some discerning people have believed and still believe today, that there is only one single spirit, which is universal and animates the whole universe and all of its parts, each according to its structure and the organs which it finds there, just as the same wind current causes different organ pipes to give off different sounds. Thus, they also hold that when an animal has sound organs, this spirit produces the effect of a particular soul in it but

40 Some scholars hold that Leibniz not only came close but actually embraced pantheism or monism for a period.

41 A IV 1, 533/L 116.

42 Antognazza (2009), 106. See also Garber (1985), 27–130.

43 See T §§8–9, and Letters 2 §12, 4 §33, and 5 §86 in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence.

that when the organs are corrupted, this particular soul reduces to nothing, or returns, so to speak to the ocean of the universal spirit.⁴⁴

This conception of the universal spirit is identified with a principle that animates and unifies the universe and all individual souls in it. The second conception has its roots in certain interpretations of the Philosopher:

Aristotle has seemed to some to have had an opinion approaching this, which was later revived by Averroës, a celebrated Arabian philosopher. He believed that there is an *intellectus agens*, or active understanding, in us and also an *intellectus patiens*, or a passive understanding, and the former, coming from without, is eternal and universal for all, while the passive understanding, being particular for each, disappears at man's death.⁴⁵

Here Leibniz is referring to the notorious passage in *de Anima* III.5, where Aristotle introduces the concept of the active mind or intellect—*nous poiētikos*—whose essence is actuality. It is separate, unmixed, alone, immortal and eternal. This short chapter is historically perhaps the most obscure and controversial in the whole Aristotelian canon, having generated intense debate in the ancient and medieval world among pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers alike. The problem in terms of *de Anima* itself is that earlier in the work, Aristotle developed his hylomorphic theory according to which a *psychē* is not the kind of thing that could even possibly survive without a body.

The third conception Leibniz locates in “Spinoza, who recognizes only one single substance, is not far from the doctrine of a single universal spirit, and even the Neo-Cartesians, who hold that only God acts, affirms it, seemingly unawares”.⁴⁶ This identification with Spinoza's monism is not surprising, but the reference to “Neo-Cartesians”—occasionalists like Malebranche—requires further explanation. “Principles of Nature and Grace: Based on Reason”, an important text from 1714, begins by stating that “A Substance is a being capable of Action”.⁴⁷ Leibniz's thought here seems to be that since activity is an essential property of all substances—divine and created—and occasionalism denies the activity of created souls, they cease to be substances and become properties of the divine.

44 G VI 529/L 554.

45 G VI 529–30/L 554.

46 G VI 30/L 554.

47 G VI 598/AG 207.

Unlike the rejection in other texts, Leibniz here sees something positive in the conception of the universal spirit, properly understood:

In itself the doctrine of a universal spirit is good, for all who teach it recognize in fact the existence of divinity, whether they believe this universal spirit is supreme—in which case they hold that it is God—or whether they believe, like the Cabalists, that God created it. The latter is also opinion of the Englishman Henry More and other newer philosophers, particularly of certain chemists who believe that there is a universal *Archeus* or world-soul; some of them have maintained that this is the spirit of the Lord moving over the waters, of which the beginning of Genesis speaks.⁴⁸

Here Leibniz suggests that this conception of the universal spirit can be beneficial for some, by cultivating the right kind of attitude toward divine power and Providence. However, if the conception degenerates into a model of a universal soul that denies the existence of individual souls (or alternatively maintains their extinction at death), it is no longer benign and must be rejected.

5 Innate Ideas

Leibniz's epistemological commitments are broadly Platonic. Innate ideas are central to his metaphysics, since some of the most fundamental concepts—that of God, substance, self, and causation—are only known innately. After noting that his differences with Locke range over some matters of importance, the first topic he mentions concerns the origin of our ideas:

There is the question whether the soul in itself is completely blank like a writing tablet on which nothing has as yet been written—a *tabula rasa*—as Aristotle and the author of the *Essay* maintain, and whether everything which is inscribed there comes solely from the senses and experience; or whether the soul inherently contains the sources of various notions and doctrines, which external objects merely rouse up on suitable occasions, as I believe, as do Plato and even the Schoolmen⁴⁹

48 G VI 530–1/L 555.

49 NE 48.

In DM §26 and the NE, Leibniz refers enthusiastically to *Meno* 80d–86c, the famous passage known as “Meno’s Paradox”. After noting Plato’s Doctrine of Recollection, Leibniz writes:

... our soul always has in it the quality of representing to itself any nature or form whatsoever, when the occasion to think of it presents itself.... This agrees with my principles, for nothing ever enters into our mind naturally from the outside; and we have a bad habit of thinking of our soul as if it received certain species as messengers and as if it has doors and windows.⁵⁰

This follows from Leibniz’s denial of the possibility of causal interaction between created substances, for, strictly speaking, all objects of consciousness are innate for Leibniz, since it is impossible that ideas could come from experience (in the normal sense of that term). However, here as elsewhere, he adopts the conventional way of speaking and restricts himself to truths usually considered be known *a priori*, just as “Copernicans quite justifiably join other men in talking about the movement of the sun”.⁵¹ Like Plato and others in the rationalist tradition, Leibniz contrasts truths of fact, derived through experience, from necessary truths, derived through reason.⁵²

What comes next is Leibniz’s critical analysis of Plato’s version of innate ideas.

This is what Plato so excellently recognized when he proposed his doctrine of reminiscence, a very solid doctrine, provided that it is taken rightly and purged of the error of preexistence and provided that we do not imagine that at some earlier time the soul must already have known and thought distinctly what it learns and thinks now. Plato also strengthened his view by way of a fine experiment, introducing a little boy....⁵³

Leibniz highlights two aspects of Plato’s theory of innate ideas that need correction. First, it presupposes previous existence or incarnations; second,

50 DM §26. The most famous statement of this is in the so-called *Monadology*, where Leibniz writes that “monads have no windows through which something can enter or leave” (M §7).

51 NE 74.

52 NE 77.

53 DM §26. Leibniz does Plato one better by mentioning a completely unschooled Swedish boy who “could do complex calculations on the spot, in his head, without having learning the standard methods of calculation or even to read and write” (NE 78).

it presupposes that every truth one comes to know must have been actually or explicitly known previously. Leibniz finds Plato's theory uneconomical, in that it requires both the preexistence of souls and a theory of knowledge that unnecessarily depends on an implausible model of knowledge as retrieval of an actually known truth. Leibniz issues the following dilemma to those who subscribe to the Doctrine of Recollection.⁵⁴ First, he notes that since, on Plato's account,

an item of acquired knowledge can be hidden there by memory ... why could not nature also hide there an item of unacquired knowledge? Cannot—and should not—a substance like our soul have various properties and states which could not all be thought about straight away or all at once? The Platonists thought that all our knowledge is recollection, and thus that the truths which the soul brought with it when the man was born—the ones called innate—must be the remains of an earlier explicit knowledge.⁵⁵

Plato has a choice. Either “we must go to infinity and make souls eternal in which case these items would indeed be innate, because they would never have begun in the soul”; or we can have a created soul that has (some of) its ideas innately. While the first case is intelligible and possible, the infinite regress of souls leaves innate ideas unexplained and hence is a violation of the *PSR*. Since knowledge is innate in either case, Leibniz argues that Plato should drop both the implausible claim that previous actual knowledge is the cause of knowledge of necessary truths, and the theory of the multiplicity of souls.

With respect to both issues, Leibniz believes that God creates souls, and that a dispositional theory of the acquisition of innate ideas is both more economical and plausible than Plato's. Despite these differences, we should not lose track of what Leibniz and Plato agree on, namely that any knowledge of a determinate necessary truth presupposes a special potential to know that determinate truth for which knowledge from ones' experiential environment is never sufficient. In developing his version of nativism, Leibniz gives his well-known example of a block of marble in which the statue of Hercules is already outlined by the veins to guide the sculptor's creation.

54 Here and elsewhere Leibniz follows Ockham' (purported) lead and doesn't postulate entities beyond necessity, which for him entails metaphysical nominalism and ontological minimalism.

55 NE 78.

I have used the analogy of a veined block of marble, as opposed to an entirely homogeneous block of marble, or to a blank tablet—what the philosophers call a *tabula rasa*. For if the soul were like such a blank tablet then truths would be in us as the shape of Hercules is in a piece of marble when the marble is entirely neutral as to whether it assumes this shape or some other. However, if there were veins in the block that marked out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes, then that block would be more determined to that shape and Hercules would be innate in it, even though labour would be required to expose the veins and to polish them into clarity, removing everything that prevents their being seen. This is how ideas and truths are innate in us—as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, and not as actions; although these potentialities are always accompanied by certain actions, often insensible ones, which correspond to them.⁵⁶

Leibniz argues against the Aristotelian/Lockean view that there is nothing in the understanding that was not first in the senses by arguing that experience only justifies knowledge of contingent truths.

[N]ecessary truths, such as we find in pure mathematics and particularly in arithmetic and geometry, must have principles whose proof does not depend on instances nor, consequently, on the testimony of the senses, even though without the senses it would never occur to us to think of them.⁵⁷

While the *PSR* justifies empirical truths, the Principle of Non-Contradiction justifies necessary truths, since their opposite is self-contradictory.

6 Emanation

As noted earlier, it is often difficult to draw a line between Platonic and Neo-Platonic themes and commitments, in thinkers of late classical, medieval, Renaissance, and early modern philosophy and theology. Up to this point, however, the theses examined in connection with Leibniz have a provenance in actual Platonic texts, whether Leibniz realized it or not.

⁵⁶ NE 52.

⁵⁷ NE 50.

The theory of emanation, however emerges in late antiquity in the philosophy of Plotinus.⁵⁸ Leibniz was fond of the imagery of emanation as is evident in the following passages, all from major texts:

And God alone (from whom all individuals *emanate continually* and who sees the universe not only as they see it but also entirely differently from all of them) is the cause of this correspondence of their phenomena and makes that which is particular to one of them public to all of them....⁵⁹

For one sees clearly that all other substances depend on God, in the same way as *thoughts emanate from our substance*, that God is all in all, and that he is intimately united with all creatures, in proportion to their perfection....⁶⁰

Thus, God alone is the primitive unity or the first [*originaire*] simple substance; all created or derivative monads are *products*, and are generated, so to speak, by *continual fulgurations of the divinity from moment to moment*....⁶¹

Emanation is a central doctrine of many versions of Neo-Platonism, and in the passages above, Leibniz appears to wholeheartedly endorse that theory of the origin of the world. It would be both exciting and require a significant revision to the accepted views of Leibniz if it turned out that he was an emanationist in the tradition of Plotinus and Ficino. Addressing this question requires an examination of different versions of emanationism. Pagan versions of emanationism in late antiquity held the following. (1) The One is ontologically prior to what is material.⁶² (2) The One is unitary, perfect, and absolutely self-sufficient. (3) The universe does not have a beginning (or end) in time. (4) The universe necessarily flows (or diffuses) from the One. (5) The product of these overflowings owe their reality to the preceding intermediary, which itself gained its reality from the preceding intermediary, and so on, downwards.⁶³ (6) Given the necessary outflowing of the One, the One is immanent in the world.⁶⁴

58 The *locus classicus* is Plotinus's *Ennead* v.1.6.

59 DM §14 (emphasis mine).

60 DM §32 (emphasis mine).

61 M §47 (emphasis mine).

62 The priority here is conceptual and not temporal. "The One" is sometimes called "the First", "the First Reality", or the "the First Principle".

63 If we start at the bottom with materials objects and move up the ontological chain, the causal explanations terminate in the One, which is *causa sui*, as well as independent and necessary.

64 Some emanationists denied (6).

(7) Emanated beings do not mirror or represent the One, given that the One is unitary (and hence without distinction) perfect, and self-sufficient.

If we replaced “the One” with “God” and asked Leibniz to comment on the emanation theory adumbrated in (1)-(7), his first response would be to affirm (1) and (2). He would deny (3) because according to Christian doctrine God *created* the world *ex nihilo* in time (or at the beginning of time), and (4) because creation was a free and not *necessary* action of the divine will. He would deny (5) because God’s creation of the world was *direct* and not mediated. Leibniz at times, especially early on, seems to flirt with pantheism. However, his settled view, expressed in many places, is the orthodox Christian view that God is distinct from the world He created, sustains, and transcends, all of which entail a categorical denial of (6). Because Leibniz holds that we are made in God’s image, and that souls do in some sense mirror or represent God and the world, (6) would also be denied.

Over a millennium and a half of commentary and modification of Neo-Platonist theories of emanative causality separate Leibniz from Plotinus. In late antiquity, Neo-Platonic ideas and vocabulary were increasingly adapted into Christianity through Augustine’s philosophy and theology.⁶⁵ These ideas were transmitted to the Latin West through the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and works like the *Liber de Causis* and the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, an Arabic translation of large parts of Plotinus’s *Enneads*, both of which were for a time believed to have been written by Aristotle. Forms of Neo-Platonism were also reintroduced in the Latin West in an unmediated form, primarily through the complete translations of Plato and Plotinus by the gifted Hellenist Ficino in 1484, complete with introductions and commentary.⁶⁶ Since there were various and competing forms of Neo-Platonism in the seventeenth-century England and Europe, the question is what form (or forms) Leibniz is endorsing in texts like the above-quoted passages.

It is clear that he is much taken with the language and imagery of emanation, partly because it was one of the ways he expressed his deep conviction that God’s ideas bring into being created substances, much as our minds bring into being thoughts. The language and imagery of emanation also expresses dramatically his commitment to the theory of general concurrence, according to which God preserves the world and contributes to creaturely activity.⁶⁷

65 Neo-Platonism quickly entered some strains of Judaism, and the same happened later for some strains of Islam.

66 See also D’Amico’s chapter above.

67 For two careful studies of these and related issues see Wilson (1990), 165–173, and Fouke (1994).

Leibniz's use of emanation is rooted in a Christian theory of emanative creation and causation developed by Aquinas and others, according to which divine perfections emanate into created substances by which they are both preserved in being and given causal efficacy. This theory of concurrentism is a Neo-Platonist element in the Aristotelian Scholastic tradition of Aquinas and Suárez—an orthodox version of Christian philosophy and theology—and not of the Neo-Platonism of Ficino and other Renaissance thinkers.⁶⁸

7 The System in Brief

Up to now we have examined specific Platonic assumptions, theories, or themes in Leibniz's system.⁶⁹ It is time to consider his metaphysical system as a whole. The details of Leibniz mature metaphysics are complicated and technical, and therefore well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the core of that minimalist system—the so-called *Monadology*—may be sketched as follows.

Reality is made up of soul-like substances called monads. Every monad is simple, indestructible (save by God) and absolutely self-sufficient, a “*per se* unity”. Monads came into being with the creation of the universe and will exist until the end of the universe (with the previous proviso). This self-sufficiency extends to the causal powers of created substances, for as we noted, there is no causal interaction between created monads. They have, as Leibniz puts it, “no windows”. Because on Leibniz's view any substance must be an agent, it follows that, once created, every state of that monad is a consequence of its internal nature, which Leibniz calls an *entelechy* or internal principle of force and activity. Every monad's series of states is “spontaneous”, depending only on itself (and God) for generating future states. The nature of every substance is absolutely complete—it contains the complete or defining concept of that particular monad, i.e., all the predicates intrinsic to its identity.⁷⁰ The causal

68 This is the conclusion of Fouke (1994), 184 and Murray (2003 and 2005) as well. For a contrasting view see Mercer (2001), Part 3, *et passim*.

69 This assumes that in his philosophical maturity Leibniz had a metaphysical system. Some specialists have challenged this. See Wilson (1999), 372–388, *et passim*, for an extended scholarly challenge to that assumption.

70 A consequence of this is that all properties of a particular monad—take Julius Caesar—are essential to him, i.e., should he fail to cross the Rubicon, he would not be Julius Caesar but some other possible monad. Like Quine, Leibniz found the claim that an entity has some properties contingently and others necessarily a non-starter. This doctrine is sometimes called “super-essentialism” in the literature. Sleight (1990) challenges the standard conception of Leibniz as a super-essentialist.

isolation of every monad means that every monad is like “a world apart”, acting as if only God and it existed.

Leibniz calls the states of monads “perceptions”, and the drive to go from one perception to another, “appetition”. He divides monads into three broad classes, ontologically ranked by the relative distinctness of their perceptions and degrees of perfection. At the bottom are what he calls “bare monads”, whose perceptions are all unconscious and whose appetite is “blind”. This is the level of material objects such as mountains, rocks, and desks. Leibniz reserves the term, “soul”, for the two higher classes of monads whose perceptions are relatively distinct. Animal souls have rudimentary memory, such that they can reason somewhat inductively based on experience and habit. This is the level of animals like worms, lizards, and cats. At the top of this chain of being are rational souls or “spirits”, who are self-conscious, have memories, and can implement plans regarding their future. Rational souls also have knowledge of necessary truths and understand metaphysical concepts like those of God, cause, and substance. While spirits are conscious, most of their perception lies below the conscious threshold. Rational souls are also ethical beings because they know the principles of justice and the nature of goodness. This is the level of humans and angels, who possess the most perfection of any created beings. In fact, they, too, are

images of the divinity itself, or of the author of nature, capable of knowing the system of the universe, and imitating something of it through their schematic representations ... of it, each being like a little divinity on its own.⁷¹

The doctrine that humans are created in God’s image is found in Genesis and was standard fare in the Scholastic works that Leibniz admired.⁷² What Leibniz does more than any other canonical philosopher in my ken, however, is develop a theory of human agency and freedom predicated on that doctrine.⁷³

The idea of the complete concept or definition of a substance and its representations come together in an important text called “Primary Truths”:

Every individual substance contains in its perfect notion the entire universe and everything that exists in it, past, present, and future.... Indeed, all individual created substances are different expressions of the same universe

⁷¹ M §8.

⁷² See Genesis 1:26–7, 5:1–3, and 9:5–6.

⁷³ For a discussion and argument for this claim see Davidson (1998), 395–412.

and different expressions of the same universal cause, namely God. But the expressions vary in perfection, just as different representations or drawings of the same town from different points of view do.⁷⁴

Leibniz's mature ontology is extremely abstract and spare. Like Plato and especially Aristotle, Leibniz is a problem-solving philosopher, and the fecundity of the system lies in the fact that it solves all kinds of seemingly intractable problems in seventeenth-century philosophy: how modern science is related to philosophy; the nature of causality; the nature of matter; the mind-body problem; the relationship of God to created nature; the problem of evil; and how we have knowledge of necessary truths, e.g., of mathematics and logic.⁷⁵

Following Augustine and other Christian Platonists, Leibniz places all essences—ideas of all possible beings—within the mind of God. All such essences have always existed in God's mind. While dependent on God's existence *qua* possibles, their particular natures are independent of the divine will. These eternal essences are not cognized individually but in terms of their relations to other possible essences and are partitioned into compossible possible worlds. Since every essence reflects every other essence in that possible world, no essence is in more than one possible world. This means every essence is microcosm of its possible world, and hence expresses all other possible essences in that possible world. Just as God has no control over the essences of individual possible things, he has no control over the contents of possible worlds. Leibniz sometimes claims that all possible essences "strive" for existence in accordance with their degree of perfection, such that every possible world is maximal.⁷⁶ The best possible world, the actual one as it turns out, is a "unity in multiplicity" and so combines order and variety. It contains the maximal happiness of rational minds, minds that express their world and the perfection of their creator in terms of knowledge of necessary truths

74 Emphasis in the text; A VI 4, 1646/AG 32–33.

75 Judged from our perspective today his system seems radically unmotivated and improbable. However, when viewed from within the context of seventeenth-century alternatives, Leibniz's *Monadology* has a great deal of explanatory power.

76 See G 7 289/AG 150. Specialists disagree over how to interpret these passages. I take the "striving of the possibles" passages to be metaphorical language for the claim that this world, having more harmony and perfection than any other, is intrinsically the best possible world, rather than it having this status solely by divine fiat, as Descartes and other voluntarists insist. Leibniz finds voluntarism not only false but pernicious and rarely misses the opportunity to argue against it.

and the nature of justice.⁷⁷ Leibniz sketches this in a letter of 1671 to the law professor Magnus Wedderkopf:

What, therefore, is the ultimate reason for the divine will? The divine intellect.... Since God is the most perfect mind, however, it is impossible for him not to be affected by the most perfect harmony, and thus to be necessitated to do the best by the very ideality of things.⁷⁸

8 Platonist or Neo-Platonist?

Unlike the other canonical modern philosophers in the seventeenth century, Leibniz held the ancients in high esteem, encouraged translation of them into modern languages, and often used their authority as evidence for the truth of various parts of his metaphysical system. Like Augustine, he found Plato “deeper” than Aristotle, and notes that the Church Fathers have always preferred Plato to Aristotle.⁷⁹ In a letter of 1707, Leibniz writes of Plato that “[n]o ancient philosopher comes closer to Christianity”, adding that nonetheless “we justly censure those who think Plato is everywhere reconcilable with Christ”.⁸⁰

In his maturity Leibniz admired Plato over other philosophers and complained that Plato, as well as other ancients, deserved better translators. He distinguished Plato from the “Pseudo-” or “later Platonists” like Plotinus, Ficino, and Henry More (1614–1687) who, he claimed, corrupted and distorted aspects of true Platonism. As Leibniz grew older he emphasized his Platonism more and the Aristotelian parts of his system less, and increasingly stressed the differences between Plato and his later followers, the latter of whom he often denigrated as obscure.⁸¹

77 “Now unity in plurality is nothing but harmony [*Übereinstimmung*], and since any particular being agrees with one rather than another being, there flows from this harmony the order from which beauty arises, and beauty awakens love ... Thus we see that happiness, pleasure, love, perfection, being, power, freedom, harmony, order, and beauty are all tied to each other, a truth which is rightly seen by few”. (G II 606/L 426).

78 A II 1, 117/L 146. Leibniz came to think that this way of putting things was incompatible with divine and human freedom, and later wrote on his copy of the letter, “I later corrected this; for it is one thing for sins to happen infallibly, another for them to happen necessarily”.

79 DM §§27 and 28.

80 D II 222/L 592.

81 In a journal article from 1694 he notes that “The later Platonists lapsed into uttering omens” (G IV 468/L 432).

In addition to finding inspiration in Plato, he sometimes writes as if his own system is the culmination of true Platonism:

I find it natural that you have enjoyed some of my thoughts after having penetrated into Plato's, an author who meant much to me and who deserves to be systematized. I believe that I can carry out the demonstrations of truths which he merely advanced.⁸²

Leibniz is certainly a Platonist in the sense that he sees Plato as an intellectual ancestor and acknowledges that they shared many central philosophical doctrines. Yet he is also well aware that he is no Platonist *tout court*. As he puts it: "If someone were to reduce Plato to a system, he would render a great service to mankind, and it would then be clear that my own views approach his somewhat".⁸³ The "somewhat" matters. In his own metaphysics Leibniz synthesizes Platonic elements along with Neo-Platonic elements, like the view that all of reality is animate and that every substance expresses or mirrors or represents the universe and God from a particular point of view—and so is a microcosm of the entire universe.⁸⁴

In an extravagant passage where Leibniz claims to reconcile elements of the Pythagoreans, Platonists, Parmenides, Plotinus, the Cabalists, hermetic philosophers, Aristotle, Scholastics, Democritus, and the moderns, he explains that

all of these are found united as if in a single perspective center from which the object, which is obscured when considered from any other approach, reveals its regularity and the correspondence of its parts.⁸⁵

What is this "single perspective center" that unifies and harmonizes the seemingly discordant ideas and doctrines of the major philosophical traditions? Not surprisingly, it is Leibniz's own system.

We may roughly distinguish Renaissance philosophy from the contemporary late medieval philosophy with which it overlaps by its interest in ancient figures, in particular Plato; its meticulous and scholarly treatment

82 G III 605/L 654.

83 G III 637/L 659.

84 The concepts of expressing, mirroring, and representing are closely linked, and are technical terms in his system. In the correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz explains, "one thing expresses another (in my terminology) when there exists a constant and fixed relationship between what can be said of one and of the other" (G II 113/M 144). Mates gives the example "of an algebraic equation and the circle it characterizes" (Mates 1986, 38).

85 G IV 524/L 496.

of ancient texts; its interest in rhetoric; and its devaluation of logic. By this measure, Leibniz is a Renaissance philosopher in the first two but not in the last two senses.⁸⁶ Indeed, his thought is of interest to many contemporary philosophers precisely because of its logical and conceptual depth and rigor. And far from dismissing logic, Leibniz original and deep work would have placed him as one of the foremost logicians in history had it been published less than one hundred and fifty years after it was written. Leibniz also denounced the mysticism, magical medicine, and astrology of Renaissance philosophers like Ficino.

In the introduction of her fine book, Wilson characterizes her analysis of Leibniz:

He emerges as perhaps more of a Platonist, more of a disappointed Anglophile, more Spinoza-haunted than the literature has made him out.... Plotinus is perhaps his closest philosophical relative, both in the fineness of his analysis and in his vision of the hidden and multiple perfections of the world. Leibniz was fascinated by the idea of God, but his theology was, from the perspective of Augustinian Christianity, dubious.⁸⁷

I agree that Leibniz is more of a Platonist than has been thought and that he is in some ways a Neo-Platonist. With respect to the question of what *kind* of Neo-Platonist he is, the contrast with Aquinas is instructive. The latter is a Neo-Aristotelian in the sense that he made a self-conscious choice to synthesize Aristotelianism (and to a lesser degree Augustinianism) with Christianity. Leibniz's Neo-Platonism is not of a piece with Thomas's Neo-Aristotelianism, in that, while Leibniz has great admiration for Plato, he never self-consciously undertakes to synthesize Platonism or Neo-Platonism to the level of detail and depth that Aquinas does with Aristotle. Of course, Leibniz's philosophical training and intellectual environment were so infused with the Christian Neo-Platonism of the German universities that he probably never fully recognized the influence Neo-Platonism had on his thought. While it is abundantly clear that Leibniz is influenced by, liked and used Neo-Platonic ideas and terms, his philosophy is never able to accept at the basic metaphysical level certain distinctive Neo-Platonic commitments—emanation and the *anima mundi*, for example—as understood by Ficino and other Renaissance philosophers. He is too much a (relatively) orthodox Christian and modern philosopher for

86 While Leibniz pushed for a more scholarly investigation of ancient texts, he himself was no historian of philosophy.

87 Wilson (1989), 4.

that. Leibniz represents himself as truer to Plato than to the self-proclaimed Platonists. While very much his own philosopher, I'm inclined to take him at his word.

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The Infinitesimal Calculus of the Soul: Moses Mendelssohn's *Phädon*

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1 Introduction

In the revised third dialogue of Mendelssohn's early work *Philosophische Gespräche*,¹ the interlocutor Kallisthen makes the following declaration: "Leibniz and Newton! I cannot pronounce these names without, as that student of Plato in his time did, thanking providence that it let me be born after them".² Both by bringing together the names of Leibniz and Newton, and from the context, Mendelssohn intends for us to understand that it is the invention of the infinitesimal calculus that especially inspires Kallisthen's declaration of gratitude to providence.³ The particular problem that the third dialogue

¹ *Philosophical Dialogues*, 1755; revised, 1761.

² Mendelssohn (1761), 120. In 1761, Mendelssohn republished his *Philosophische Gespräche* in a collection he entitled *Philosophische Schriften*. The text is largely unchanged except for a significantly expanded third dialogue and the title of the whole text, which Mendelssohn shortened to *Gespräche (Dialogues)*. Translations from and references to Mendelssohn's philosophical essays that I will discuss in this chapter (apart from the *Phädon*) will be to Dahlstrom's English edition, hereafter *PW*. After the reference to the page in *PW*, I will provide a reference to volume and page in the standard German edition of Mendelssohn's works, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, hereafter *JubA* (see Bibliography for details). The quotation from the *Gespräche* is found at *JubA* 1: 365.

³ The infinitesimal calculus (*calculus infinitesimalis*) had been invented independently by Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz. For a full discussion of the development of the calculus from Newton and Leibniz to the middle of the eighteenth century, see González-Velasco (2011), 230–367. While there was considerable debate about how to interpret the nature of the "infinitesimal" in Mendelssohn's day, the theoretical foundations of the infinitesimal calculus were not in doubt. Mendelssohn would certainly have been familiar with Christian Wolff's introduction to infinitesimal calculus, *Dissertatio Algebraica de Algorithmo Infinitesimali Differentiali* (Leipzig, 1704). In his December 1760 *Literaturbrief* for the journal *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, Mendelssohn discusses the more recent work of the mathematician Leonhard Euler, *Institutiones calculi differentialis* (Euler [1755]). In his review, Mendelssohn translates Euler's discussion of Newton and Leibniz as the two discoverers of the infinitesimal calculus. Then Mendelssohn adds his own praise for the achievement of Newton and Leibniz, "each of whom has in his own sphere infinitely extended the realm of human insight" (*JubA* 5.1: 308). Hans Lausch points out that as early as 1757 Mendelssohn

addresses is whether, if the universe is infinite, it can also be spoken of as one single entity. If it cannot be described as a single entity, then God could not have chosen it from among all possible worlds as the best, the Leibnizian doctrine that Kallisthen is trying to defend in the third dialogue. Kallisthen says:

I well know that in the opinion of some philosophers it is utterly impossible for the progression into infinity to be completely comprehended, precisely because the essence of such a series consists in endlessly progressing. Hence, they say, the mathematically infinite is a magnitude whose boundary one does not determine.

PW 117; JubA 1: 362

Kallisthen goes on to explain that Leibniz had argued against this mathematical interpretation of infinity. Leibniz had shown that an infinite series could be “completely comprehended” and that its “boundary” could be mathematically determined. Kallisthen states that for Leibniz “we find the infinite everywhere in nature” (*PW 117; JubA 1: 363*). According to Leibniz, this infinite universe, despite its infinite duration in time, can be measured by God’s intellect in the same way that mathematicians can measure (using the infinitesimal calculus) the infinite progression of a series toward its boundary or limit. God, specifically, can measure the grade of perfection of this infinite universe and thereby compare it to every other possible universe. Kallisthen concludes, in agreement with Leibniz, that this universe must possess the highest grade of perfection, otherwise God in his perfect benevolence would not have chosen to bring it into being. Thus, Mendelssohn’s early work, the *Dialogues*, defends Leibniz’s thesis that “this world is the best of all possible worlds” precisely on the grounds that an infinite universe is measurable as one single entity with a determinate grade of perfection. Mendelssohn thus shows that the infinitesimal calculus undergirds one of the central pillars of Leibniz’s philosophy. But this is not for Mendelssohn the end of the usefulness of the infinitesimal calculus in philosophy.

In this essay I will address Mendelssohn’s use of the infinitesimal calculus in his discussion of the nature of the human soul (*Seele*). I will argue that Mendelssohn’s appropriation of Plato and Platonism can best be understood through the lens of his application of the infinitesimal calculus to the question

showed his knowledge of differential calculus in a brief note entitled *Mathematisches* (*JubA 2: 9ff*); cf. Lausch (2000), 119–135, esp. 129–32 for a discussion of Mendelssohn’s knowledge of the infinitesimal calculus. For a discussion of Mendelssohn’s mathematical interests more generally, Visser (2011), 83–104.

of the “vocation of the human being” (*die Bestimmung des Menschen*) that is perhaps the central concern of all of Mendelssohn’s philosophical writings.⁴ Although I will touch on a number of Mendelssohn’s works, my particular focus in this essay on Mendelssohn’s reception of Plato will be his *Phädon* (1766), the work that established Mendelssohn as his generation’s foremost exponent of the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophical school.⁵ I will argue that the metaphysical underpinnings of the infinitesimal calculus allow Mendelssohn to break with what he feels is Plato’s overly sharp division between the realm of changeable sensible particulars and the immutable realm of Ideas in the *Phaedo*.

In turning to the infinitesimal calculus as a method for closing the gap between the sensible and the intelligible realms, Mendelssohn rejects the *Phaedo*’s two-world ontology, but he does not entirely reject Platonism; on the contrary, he actually appeals to Plato himself as his guide. Mendelssohn was familiar with Plato’s *Philebus* where the “mixture” (*to meikton*) of limit (*peras*) and the unlimited (*apeiron*) is said to characterize the realm of change. In *Über die Empfindungen* (*On the Sentiments*, 1755),⁶ Mendelssohn appropriates the *Philebus*’ definition of pleasure and pain as the restoration and dissolution, respectively, of the proper harmony of the organism, its balanced mixture of the limited and the unlimited. Mendelssohn’s fundamental claim in *On the Sentiments* is that the soul’s essential striving is to unify (bring limit to) ever-greater manifolds. The unification of manifolds results from the soul’s essential activity, namely, representing the world. “The essence of the soul is the power of representing the world to itself” (*PW* 20; *JubA* 1: 248). In effect, the power of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*) is what conjoins limit with the unlimited, *peras* with *to apeiron*.

To put this in the terms of Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics, the power of representation is the condition of possibility of the application of the infinitesimal calculus to the sensible world. Mendelssohn admits that our power of representation sometimes fails to grasp the unity within a manifold, and he offers the example of a dance whose “various movements and lines, indicated

4 For a full discussion of the question of the “vocation of the human being” in Mendelssohn, see Pollok (2010), 31–78. *Bestimmung* is usually translated as *vocation* in the context of this eighteenth-century discussion since it refers to not merely the determining nature of the human being, but also her moral duty—her calling or vocation—to realize this nature.

5 I will refer to Plato’s dialogue with its traditional English rendering as “*Phaedo*”. I will refer to Mendelssohn’s dialogue as “*Phädon*”, its German title. All translations from Mendelssohn’s *Phädon* and Plato’s *Phaedo* are mine throughout.

6 For a discussion of why *Empfindungen* is best translated as “sentiments”, see Daniel Dahlstrom’s “Note on Text and Translation” in *PW*, xxxvii–xxxviii. Dahlstrom points out that the term in Mendelssohn carries emotive and cognitive connotations that render it equivalent to the eighteenth-century use of “sentiments” in English philosophical literature.

on the floor, cannot be effortlessly untangled from one another" (*PW* 22; *JubA* 1: 251). Until we are able to find the overarching tendency toward some pattern or order in a jumble of curves, we cannot bring our power of representation to bear on the manifold.

Seen from a sufficient distance, or over a long enough period of time, our power of representation may be able to grasp, for example, that a dance is approximating a complex intertwining of figure eights imitating the petals of a flower. Our power of representation in this instance does nothing different from what it does in grasping how the slope of a simple curved line approaches a tangent as a limit at a given point: it unifies the manifold points on a curve when it is able to discern how the curve's changing shape is measurable at any given point.

This power of representation, the power underlying the use of the infinitesimal calculus to measure the change in the slope of a curve, is also what guarantees the soul's unending progress toward its own perfection: the soul's most fundamental desire is to increase in power, and, Mendelssohn insists, as a good Leibnizian, the soul's power is nothing other than its power of representation. The soul will always increase in power so long as there is no external hindrance that limits its power (such as the spatial or temporal reach of the body's sense organs). The conception of the soul as a continuously progressing power of unifying ever-greater manifolds is the guiding principle of Mendelssohn's Leibniz-inspired Platonism.⁷

Mendelssohn's Leibnizian Platonism can be seen quite clearly in his interpretation of the *Symposium's* story of the birth of Eros from Plenty (*Poros*) and Poverty (*Penia*). This interpretation is offered as part of Mendelssohn's note to the fifth letter of *On the Sentiments*,⁸ which speaks of an "earthly Venus" that is the sensuous beauty whose enjoyment arises from grasping "the harmony of a multiplicity of things or features" (*PW* 24; *JubA* 1: 252). It distinguishes the "power of representing" at work in the perception of the harmony of the sensible multiplicity, from that which is able to grasp the "common final purpose" that this harmony serves both for the object itself and for the "whole world" (*PW* 24; *JubA* 1: 252). The yearning for the non-sensuous intuitive knowledge captured in the representation of the whole universe is directed toward the "heavenly Venus". In the note to this letter, Mendelssohn first explains the

7 The subject of Leibniz's own debt to Plato and Platonism is the subject of Mercer (2014). Interestingly, Mercer points out that Leibniz's Platonism is reflected precisely in his concept of the divine mind as constituting the unity of the world's multiplicity.

8 Mendelssohn represents himself as the "editor" of the letters between Theocles and Euphranor that constitute the text of *On the Sentiments*.

source of the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly Venus, namely *Symposium* 180d, which Mendelssohn quotes in Greek.

Then he adds that Plato's dialogue includes "another fable of love, which can be given an even more philosophical interpretation" (*PW* 77; *JubA* 1: 311). This is the "fable" told by Diotima about the birth of Eros from Plenty and Poverty. Mendelssohn reads this tale as an allegory of the soul's yearning to bring harmonious unity to a discordant multiplicity. "If, under Poverty, we understand the strivings of our power of representing, and under Plenty the beautiful or complete manifold, then it can quite well be explained why Love came from their embrace" (*PW* 77; *JubA* 1: 311). In effect, the loving soul with its representational power acts like a mathematician who, through the use of the infinitesimal calculus, brings measure to an infinitely changing manifold. And God in His perfection unifies the infinite manifold of the universe itself: "Everything in nature aims at *one* purpose, everything is grounded in it, everything is complete" (*PW* 24; *JubA* 1: 253). Mendelssohn's appropriation of Plato in both the fifth letter of *On the Sentiments* and the note attached to it reveals his general strategy of emphasizing the continuity between the realm of changeable particulars and eternal Ideas. This continuity reflects the grades of perfection in the activity of the soul as a power of representation with a continuously expanding reach.

As I have said, my essay will focus on the "infinitesimal calculus of the soul" developed in Mendelssohn's reworking in his *Phädon* of Plato's proofs for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. Although, as we have seen, there are several significant references to Plato in Mendelssohn's first forays into philosophy, it is especially in his *Phädon* that Mendelssohn reads Plato through Leibniz.⁹ I will argue that Mendelssohn's infinitesimal calculus of the soul is essential to his reading of Plato in two ways: first, as I have mentioned, it allows him to overcome the *Phaedo*'s sharply drawn dualism of composite sensible

9 For the sake of completeness, I might add that Mendelssohn discusses Plato in one of his earliest pieces, "*Pope ein Metaphysiker!*" (1755), co-authored with G.E. Lessing, and republished in *JubA* 2: 43–80. He argues with Bishop Warburton's claim the Alexander Pope's version of the thesis that ours is the best of all possible worlds derives from Plato rather than Leibniz. Mendelssohn points out that Leibniz himself may have been influenced by Plato, and that Pope "could very well be a Leibnizian even while being a Platonist" (*JubA* 2: 73). What this passage demonstrates is that Mendelssohn's earliest interest was in finding the commonality between Plato and Leibniz, despite their obvious differences. My argument is that this commonality is found in the mathematics of bringing limit to the unlimited, which is the function of the representational power of the soul. We shall see that this activity is also essential to the soul's participating with God in perfecting the moral order of the universe. Mendelssohn will break with Plato (and Leibniz) in claiming that the soul has the infinite task (*Bestimmung*) of perfecting itself and thereby the universe as a whole.

particulars and unitary Ideas; and, second, it allows Mendelssohn to dispense with Plato's mythic appendix to the *Phaedo* concerning the rewards and punishments in the afterlife. In place of the myth, Mendelssohn's Socrates offers a philosophical demonstration that the upper boundary (the asymptote, one might say) of the soul's infinite and continuously ascending progress in the afterlife is perfect blessedness. In this demonstration, Mendelssohn will use the infinitesimal calculus of the soul *against* Plato. He will reject Plato's view of the justice of the afterlife's system of reward and punishment. In place of the cycle of life, afterlife, and rebirth, he will offer a version of the soul's progressive achievement of blessedness.¹⁰ And rather than dividing off the philosopher's soul for a unique postmortem destiny (the eternal intellection of the Forms), Mendelssohn will argue that *all* (human) souls have one and the same upward trajectory toward blessedness.

In the next section, I offer a brief introduction to the Leibnizian-Wolffian background of Mendelssohn's infinitesimal calculus of the soul. To understand Mendelssohn's appropriation of Plato, it is necessary to appreciate the broad lineaments of how Leibniz himself reworks Plato and of how Christian Wolff reworks Leibniz. After offering this broad-stroke analysis of Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics as a reworking of Plato, I turn in Section 3 to the first and second proofs for the immortality of the soul in the *Phädon*. Last, in Section 4 I offer an analysis of the third proof for the soul's immortality, i.e., the proof in which the infinitesimal calculus of the soul is given its fullest exposition. It is this third proof that serves as Mendelssohn's replacement for Plato's final myth in the *Phaedo*.

2 The Background to the *Phädon*'s Leibnizian Platonism

In his revised edition of *Philosophical Dialogues*, Mendelssohn, as we have seen, argues that Newton and Leibniz allow us to understand how the universe as an infinite series (of temporal events) can be assigned a determinate measure. Mendelssohn (in the persona of Kallisthen) thanks providence for having been born in an age after Newton and Leibniz. In this early work, Mendelssohn seems most concerned with using the infinitesimal calculus to defend the Leibnizian principle that this world is the best of all possible worlds. Then, in his prizewinning essay of 1763, "Abhandlung über die Evidenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften" ("On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences ["On Evidence"]"),

10 For what remains one of most balanced discussions of Plato on the afterlife, see Annas (1982).

Mendelssohn extends the application of the infinitesimal calculus to the soul. We may most appropriately begin our discussion of Leibniz's relation to Plato by examining Mendelssohn's application of the infinitesimal calculus to the soul in "On Evidence". This text will lead us back to Christian Wolff who, in turn, will take us back to Leibniz. The red thread that we will follow backwards to Leibniz is the idea that the soul is the active power of unifying a manifold. We shall see that this conception of the soul derives from Leibniz's reinterpretation of Plato's theory of Ideas.

In "On Evidence", Mendelssohn argues that the moral "quality" of the soul may be measured mathematically as an "unextended magnitude" whose limit or boundary is "a proficiency at fulfilling one's duties perfectly" (*PW* 263; *JubA* 2: 280). Similarly, the epistemic "quality" of the soul is likewise mathematically measurable in the degree of perfection of its power to represent the interconnection of all its ideas in their fullest clarity, a point Mendelssohn first broached in *On the Sentiments*, as noted above. The possibility of using the infinitesimal calculus to measure the moral quality of the soul was first advanced by Christian Wolff (1679–1754), Leibniz's most important disciple. At the conclusion of his short introduction to the infinitesimal calculus, *Dissertatio Algebraica de Algorithmo Infinitesimali Differentiali* (1705), Wolff states that

it is not only with regard to natural bodies and their forces that the calculus of differentials can find its employment, but it can also be extended to everything that expands or diminishes, in other words, everything that the mind is able to divide into gradations.

He adds a little further on: "Many are persuaded that pure mathematics, and especially differential calculus, should even be admitted in the realm of morals".¹¹

Mendelssohn's confidence in "On Evidence" that moral theory is amenable to mathematical treatment is clearly inspired by Wolff's concluding remarks in the *Dissertatio Algebraica*. Mendelssohn claims that one day the mathematical principles that apply to measuring an extensive magnitude ("the distinct

11 "Neque verum putandum, circa solum motum ... corporum naturalium eorumque vires haerere calculum differentialem, sed ad omnia quae augere minuivi, immo mente saltem dividi possunt, se extendit.... Equidem e moralibus exulare debere ut mathesin puram omnem, sic imprimis calculum differentialem, multi sibi persuadent". Wolff, *Dissertatio Algebraica*, 23–4. Translation mine.

knowledge of its limits”) will also be applied to unextended magnitudes like “the value of things,... their possibility, actuality, perfection, and beauty,... the goods of moral actions” (*PW* 261; *JubA* 2: 280). He adds: “It is scarcely necessary to recall how little of this important theory has as yet been discovered” (*PW* 261; *JubA* 2: 281). To lay the theoretical foundations of a calculus of moral goods—the infinitesimal calculus of the constants and variables of the human soul—seems to be the recurrent leitmotif of Mendelssohn’s philosophizing.

The reason that the soul is amenable to mathematical analysis is not only that it is a magnitude, that is, that it is a power varying in intensity although not in spatial extension. In “On Evidence”, Mendelssohn claims that the soul has an innate capacity to engage in mathematics. It is both the natural *object* as well as the *subject* of mathematical calculation. He refers to Socrates in Plato’s *Meno*, as well as to certain “oriental wise men” (the doctrine is part of the Kabbalah) who put forth the notion that all truths are present in the soul at birth in a confused or tangled state. “In the sensuous impression of extension, for example, lies the entire sum total of geometrical truths which inferences simply illuminate more” (*PW* 259; *JubA* 2: 274). As the soul matures and its representational power increases, the range and clarity of the truths that the soul comprehends also increases. Although the soul is constantly active, striving to expand its power, the altering conditions of its moral and epistemic qualities may be viewed as a unitary whole defined by a single function, namely, to approach the most perfect magnitude of these qualities as they are found in God.

Not only is the soul, therefore, like a mathematical curve approaching a limit or boundary—its very activity is that of *doing the work of the infinitesimal calculus*, that is, bringing determinate order and unity to (*integrating*, we might simply say) its initially confused welter of representations. Indeed, as Mendelssohn explains in *On the Sentiments*, the work of the infinitesimal calculus that the soul performs produces the greatest pleasure, as it conceives of greater and greater unities in nature from “the lifeless stone” to the “worm”, and from the earth to all the heavenly bodies. At last, the soul will “swing over to the universal proportion of all these parts to the immeasurable whole”. At exactly the point when this grand infinitesimal calculus of the increasing grades of unity reaches the “throne of the divinity” as its upper bound, the soul is seized by a “heavenly rapture” (*PW* 16; *JubA* 1: 245).

We have noted how Mendelssohn appeals to Plato’s story of the birth of Eros to Plenty and Poverty in the *Symposium* as an allegory of the soul’s deep yearning to bring unity (Plenty) to an otherwise disjointed or discordant multiplicity (Poverty). Mendelssohn’s interpretation of the Platonic story, as I have

previously noted, reflects Mendelssohn's reading of Plato through Leibniz. It was Leibniz who first showed the way to connect Plato's theory of Ideas with the soul's power of unifying manifolds through its representations (i.e., ideas). Rather than emphasizing the ontological divide between the Ideas and the many sensible particulars, Leibniz argued that the Platonic Ideas as essences *conceived* within the divine mind also *acted* as substantial powers that bring unity to a sensible manifold. "The suggestion", as Christia Mercer explains, "is that when the Supreme Being acts to produce the Idea qua substantial form it somehow combines the Idea qua conceived essence with a principle of activity".¹² As Leibniz reinterprets Plato, God translates the Idea from transcendent essence into a substantial form or *soul* (*psychē*). The unifying power of the substantial form is realized through its representational activity in the midst of an infinitely divisible multiplicity. This unifying power is what makes it possible to measure infinitely divisible magnitudes as approaching a limit. Leibniz's conception of the soul as an *active* Platonic Idea bringing unity to a multiplicity is foundational for Mendelssohn's entire philosophy, but most especially for his *Phädon*.

Ernst Cassirer's study of Leibniz remains today the most carefully argued analysis of how the infinitesimal calculus lies behind Leibniz's reworking of Plato's metaphysical dualism. The infinitesimal calculus made it possible to encompass the whole realm of becoming within a framework of mathematical rationality. Indeed, as Cassirer says, "change itself [*die Veränderung*] becomes a positive methodological foundation and even necessary presupposition for the concept of reality". With this re-evaluation of the realm of change, "ancient idealism's one-sided exclusion of becoming [*das Werden*] was overcome".¹³ Cassirer locates the beginning of the turn away from Platonic metaphysics with Descartes and his creation of analytic geometry. Although Descartes shared "Plato's estimation of geometry as the rational foundation of idealism", he showed the way for the infinitesimal calculus by basing geometry on the concept of change. It was Descartes, Cassirer explains, who first recognized that the problem of finding the tangent line to a curve was the "the most important and most universal in geometry" (*Leibniz' System*: 14). Descartes recognized that the tangent at a point could be viewed as the limit of the secant lines connecting that point to a series of ever-closer points along the line. Cassirer draws out the revolutionary significance of this insight for philosophy:

¹² Mercer (2001), 231.

¹³ Cassirer (1902), 185; translations throughout are mine.

The tangent is not grasped at once in its fixed and determined state as an unmoving and isolated figure but rather as a limit case that the concept of a changing series postulates. The individual “being” [*Sein*] is not conceived of in itself but as a member of a continuous process that can be intellectually apprehended.

Leibniz' System: 14

Descartes' insight not only made it possible to solve the problem of the tangent, it also “prepared in a more general way a new approach to the conditions of our knowledge in general” (*Leibniz' System: 14*).

It was Newton and Leibniz who gave systematic form to Descartes' proposed solution to the tangent problem. Although Newton conceived of his infinitesimal calculus as a tool for measuring the continuous changes in a moving body, Leibniz imbued calculus with a metaphysical import, as a way to measure the continuous gradations of change between monads of different grades of complexity. It is Leibniz's concept of the continuous gradations of monadic perfection that lies behind Mendelssohn's infinitesimal calculus of the soul. We therefore need to take a moment to understand how Leibniz's monadology is connected intimately with the infinitesimal calculus. My summary largely follows the exposition of Leibniz's system offered by Cassirer.

The best-known characterization of the monad is that it is “windowless”. A monad is an unextended point of fixed intensity of being, where “being” is understood to be the force that unifies the infinite number of monads that each monad contains within itself. The force of being unifies the monadic manifold by representing the manifold as a single idea. Each monad is, then, a graded intensity of representation power, and may be ordered on a graded continuum of representational intensities. The temporal process of change taking place throughout the universe is the conjoined unfolding of each monad's power from its least to its greatest intensity. At the highest levels of representational power (viz., in “dominant” animal and human monads called “souls”), the monad can hold within itself a representation of its past and an intimation of its future.

At these higher levels, the representational power of the monad also includes elements that appear external to itself, the so-called “material appearances” that constitute the organic body of which the monad is the unifying force and also the material world outside the body. Matter itself is an expression of the force or intensity of the monad or, better, the aggregate of monads that are unified under a “dominant” monad. Although monads are windowless, their representational power stands in a relation of “pre-established harmony” to other such powers and reflects (without actually being directly linked to)

these other powers through what Leibniz calls *petites perceptions* or “minute perceptions”.

While it is true that no monad directly affects any other, monads of sufficient complexity (such as those of animal and human souls) can form a representation of continuous movement or change over time. The human soul (the dominant monad of the human body) can grasp this change as a unity and even give it mathematical precision through the use of the infinitesimal calculus. Leibniz thus not only conceives of the human soul as being, like all monads, a power that is able to unify an infinite manifold, but also as itself having a clear and distinct conception of the infinite. Thus, Leibniz goes far beyond Descartes’ purely negative characterization of the human soul in relation to the infinite.

For Descartes, the human soul is marked by its *inability* to have a distinct representation of the infinite. He argues that infinity, as regards the soul’s representational power, must remain purely “indefinite”, that is, something exceeding its power to comprehend. As a finite *res cogitans*, the human soul has an “idea of the infinite” but no direct relationship with the infinite. Crucially, the soul’s idea of the infinite for Descartes *comes from outside the soul*. With Leibniz and the infinitesimal calculus it becomes possible to imagine how the human soul might *immanently represent the infinite*. Just as a parabolic curve can change its direction at every point (measured as the slope of the tangent line) as it infinitely approaches a limit, so a finite human soul can occupy a place within a hierarchy of representations whose limit is the infinite representation of the universe within the mind of God. The infinite, for Leibniz, is not *outside* the representational power of the soul (monad); it is the immanent law of the soul’s relationship with the world and with God. Cassirer succinctly defines Leibniz’s infinitesimal calculus as the method for discovering the “immanent lawfulness within the appearance of movement itself” (*Leibniz’ System*: 64). For Leibniz, each human soul has an immanent law governing the actualization of its power.

The implication for the human soul is that its grade of perfection in the universe is eternally predetermined. Each human soul can make no improvement beyond its pre-established highest grade of representational power (and therefore in its relationship to the infinite whole of which it is a part). According to his *Monadology*, each created substance or monad represents a certain perfection or *entelechy*.¹⁴ Each human soul will unfold its power within the larger “curve” of representational (monadic) power intensities. This curve, the temporal progression of the universe as a whole, is the unfolding of a “function”

14 Leibniz (1989), 643–653; see esp. par. 18, p. 644.

that God, the creator of this world, chose out of an infinite number of possible functions (possible worlds). Possessing all perfections, including perfect goodness and benevolence, God chooses from among all possible worlds the one that is best, that is, the one that optimizes the overall grade of perfection of the whole. Some scholars have argued that Leibniz holds open the possibility that the universe is infinitely progressing in perfection, but even if this were in fact implied by certain passages, it is nowhere clearly and definitively articulated.¹⁵ As we will see, Mendelssohn's philosophical optimism makes the infinite progress in perfection a central tenet of his concept of the soul.

Mendelssohn's metaphysics, as I have said, draws its essential inspiration from Leibniz. His particular version of Leibnizian philosophy, however, is, as I have also mentioned, that of Christian Wolff. We saw earlier that Mendelssohn probably learned about the principles of the infinitesimal calculus from Wolff's early *Dissertatio Algebraica* (1705). It is in the conclusion of that book that Wolff lays out what will become the fundamental goal of Mendelssohn's early philosophical efforts, namely, the fusion of the infinitesimal calculus with moral theory. Wolff's great innovation in relation to Leibniz's monadology is to offer the possibility of real interaction among the constituent elements of the universe. As regards the human soul, Wolff argued that each soul was engaged in a dynamic relationship with the world. After quoting Wolff's definition of the soul in his *Rational Psychology* ("The essence of the soul consists in the *force* of representing the world by virtue of the soul's ability to sense ... and by its corresponding body's situation in the world"), Matt Hettche goes on to explain:

Several aspects of this definition deserve comment. First, similarly to Leibniz, Wolff believes the principal function of the soul is found in its power to "represent" (i.e., form thoughts about things). The mind/soul represents its surroundings, for example, insofar as a series of coordinated

15 For a discussion of Leibniz's lack of clarity about the progressive nature of the universe's perfection, see Poma (2013), 158–160. Mendelssohn himself opposed Pope's way of stating the thesis that our world is the best of all possible worlds precisely because it was based on the claim that every single grade of perfection was included in the universe at every moment of its existence, and that every object existed within a narrow band defining its kind's grade of perfection within the whole. He claims that Leibniz nowhere asserts that the universe at each moment is a completely full expression of all the possible grades of perfection. Mendelssohn, however, knew his Leibniz too well to assert that he unambiguously held to the thesis of the progressive perfection of the universe, a thesis that he, Mendelssohn, would defend (since human souls, as the only self-perfecting parts of the universe, have an immortal destiny of progressive perfection). For Mendelssohn's critique of Pope's conception of the completeness of the universe's grades of perfection, see *Pope ein Metaphysiker!*, *JubA* 2: 62–3.

perceptions form the basis of one's conscious experience. The alterations that occur in the mind, according to Wolff, depend on the condition of one's sensory organs as well as the situation or place that one finds one's self in the world. In contrast to Leibniz, who maintains that the human soul is self-contained (or windowless), Wolff believes that the power to represent is a function of the soul and the way the soul is able to interact with its reality.¹⁶

Following upon Wolff's doctrine of the interactive nature of the soul's representational power, we might say that for Mendelssohn the infinitesimal calculus of the soul *perfects itself and the world by unifying manifolds wherever it confronts them*. The idea that the soul is an active agent of the perfection of the world by means of its unifying power (its power to both *find* and *create* the goal and measure of an infinitely varying manifold) is central to Mendelssohn's inheritance of Wolff's revision of Leibniz's metaphysics. And it is also central to his appropriation of Plato.

3 The *Phädon* and its First and Second Proofs

In 1766 Mendelssohn wrote to his friend Thomas Abbt about a new work he was about to publish, a defense of the immortality of the soul.¹⁷ He says he has chosen "a pagan" as spokesperson in order not to have to involve himself with "revelation". He also admits that he has run the risk of making Socrates sound like a "Leibnizian". He defends himself on the ground that Plato himself had transformed Socrates into a Pythagorean, and

who knows, perhaps Socrates has gained something back of what he lost with Plato. For you can't imagine what miserable metaphysics [*elende Metaphysik*] the son of Ariston foists upon him.

JubA 12.1: 118

In his Preface to the new work, *Phädon or on the Immortality of the Soul*, Mendelssohn admits that he has attempted to render Plato's proofs more in conformity with the "taste of our times" (*JubA* 3.1: 8).

He also says that the Pythagorean attack on the nature of the body cannot pass muster any longer, "with our better concepts of the worth of the created

¹⁶ Hettche (2018).

¹⁷ Mendelssohn, *JubA* 12.1: 117–119.

world" (*JubA* 3.1: 8). Mendelssohn will have none of the *Phaedo*'s denigration of the body as the prison-house of the soul. He even translates "prisoners" as "sentinels" ("*Schildwache*", *JubA* 3.1: 46), thus comparing the soul to a soldier on guard duty rather than to a guarded prisoner. In the 1769 "*Anhang zur dritten Auflage*" ("Appendix to the third Edition") of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn writes that Plato "had turned his teacher into a Pythagorean sage and allowed him to be initiated into the darkest secrets of the sect" (*JubA* 3.1: 149).¹⁸ The "miserable metaphysics" that Plato puts in Socrates' mouth is that of a Pythagorean mystagogue, for whom everything bodily is loathsome and corrupt.

Clearly, such a radical disparagement of the corporeal world was incompatible with the notion that our universe was chosen by God as the "best of all possible worlds". As I explained earlier, the claim that this world is the best of all possible worlds, according to Mendelssohn, entirely depends upon the ability to render change (*Veränderung*) intelligible and measurable through the infinitesimal calculus. While Mendelssohn will strip away the aspect of Plato's Pythagoreanism that has to do with the body as a prison, in which the soul pays the penalty of its sins in an earlier incarnation, he will nevertheless place in Socrates' mouth the Pythagorean metaphysics of the limit and the unlimited that Plato develops in the *Philebus*.¹⁹ To be sure, this metaphysics is not based upon the infinitesimal calculus, but it may be assimilated to a Leibnizian conception of the soul as the active force unifying a manifold through its representations. And this conception is the basis of all of Socrates' proofs in Mendelssohn's *Phädon*.

In a word, we may say that Mendelssohn turns Plato's Socrates, a body-hating Pythagorean mystagogue, into a world-affirming Leibnizian. Mendelssohn thereby frees Socrates from the "miserable metaphysics" that Plato foists upon him in the *Phaedo*. Mendelssohn's distancing of Socrates from Pythagorean "secrets" also frees Socrates as much as possible from the realm of revelation ("*Offenbarung*"). To be sure, Plato does say that the doctrine of the limited and the unlimited was "hurled down from the gods to man" (*Philebus*, 16b4). As commentators have long noted, the person at whom the gods "hurled" their doctrine was Pythagoras. But Mendelssohn wants nothing to do with Pythagoras the mystagogue. The mathematics of the limit and the unlimited able to render the world of change intelligible was not the work of gods, but of men. Far from being an initiate of an esoteric cult around a divinely inspired Pythagoras, Socrates is a strictly modern Pythagorean, initiated, far ahead of his time, to be sure, into the (open) secrets of the infinitesimal calculus.

18 For the fusion of Orphic mystery beliefs and Pythagoreanism, see Bordoy (2013).

19 For a discussion of the Pythagoreanism of Plato's *Philebus*, see Huffman (2001).

Mendelssohn's first dialogue ("*Erstes Gespräch*") in the *Phädon*, rendering the argument of the *Phaedo* up to the objections of Simmias and Cebes at *Ph.* 84c1, lays out the foundation of the infinitesimal calculus of the soul. The discussion of change in the first dialogue matches the discussion of change from *Phaedo* 70b5–73a5, where Socrates speaks about the coming-to-be of one state out of its opposite, thus demonstrating that life and death are alternating conditions of the soul, and that the soul never slips fully into non-existence. Mendelssohn's *Phädon*, by contrast, stresses the continuity of the change, not its movement from one opposite to another. It is because of this continuity that the underlying subject of change cannot simply vanish into nothingness. "It seems to me", Socrates says, "that everything that is changeable [*alles Veränderliche*], cannot remain unchanged at any moment" (*JubA* 3.1: 63).

Mendelssohn here makes use of the "law of continuity", as developed by his slightly older contemporary, Ruggero Giuseppe Boscovich (1711–1787). Mendelssohn explains his reliance upon Boscovich's law of continuity (*Gesetz der Stetigkeit*) in his 1769 Appendix to *Phädon*.²⁰ This law states: "each quantity, in experiencing a transition from one magnitude into another, must pass through all the intermediary quantities of the same sort".²¹ Without the principle of continuity, there would be no need for the infinitesimal calculus, no need to find the slope of the tangent at a point on the curve as the limit of two changing magnitudes (the change in the y-axis and the change in the x-axis). The curve would simply be reducible to a series of straight lines, altering their slope in a stepwise rather than continuous fashion. Boscovich himself explains that the infinitesimal calculus is required precisely because a function between two reciprocally varying magnitudes is plotted as a continuous curve and not as a series of straight lines. Linear ("finite") algebra is best suited to representing straight-line functions, but infinitesimal calculus must be used to calculate functions describing the complex relationship between changing magnitudes.

Although algebra has the advantage over geometry when it comes to representing the relationship [*nexus*] between quantities that vary by a certain number [e.g., where one is twice as large as the other: $y=2x$], geometry has the advantage over algebra when it comes to those many

20 *JubA* 3.1: 148. For a discussion of Mendelssohn's earlier review of Boscovich's work in the *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend* (June through September, 1759), see Pollok's "Anmerkung" to Mendelssohn (2013), 277–8. Mendelssohn's review of Boscovich's *Theoria philosophiae naturalis; reducta ad unicam legem virium in natura existentium* is found in *JubA* 5.1: 57–90. See also the "Anmerkungen" to this review by Lausch in *JubA* 5.3b, 601, ff.

21 Boscovich (1763), par. 32, p. 13, quoted at Abramovic (2009). On Boscovich's place in the history of mathematics and science, see Fernandes (2013) and Lausch (2004).

relationships that obtain not between the quantities themselves, but that define a certain ratio between their mutual change towards greater or lesser quantities, which is the case with transcendental curves [i.e., Leibniz's name for curves displaying oscillation patterns like sine waves], where finite algebra does not apply but where, rather, the infinitesimal calculus is required.²²

When Mendelssohn has Socrates claim that all change is continuous, he is establishing the foundation of his argument that the soul, as the active force that unifies a manifold, changes continuously *but never ceases to change*. Like a “transcendental curve”, the soul may oscillate but it never simply veers off in a discontinuous break with its defining equation. We may put it this way: one can easily imagine an oscillating curve where the difference between the peak and the trough grows smaller and smaller—but *it cannot become zero*. This is how, on Mendelssohn's view, Socrates proves that the soul never is reduced to nothingness.

The *Phädon*'s first dialogue on the immortality of the soul establishes the principle of continuity in relation to all change. As I said, this principle will be used in relation to the concept of the soul as the active power that unifies a manifold. The same principle, of course, can apply to corporeal change (and was designed to apply to such changes as changes in the velocity of a moving object). Clearly, the continuity of such corporeal changes does not demonstrate that a corporeal object cannot cease to exist. But Socrates does insist that no object, corporeal or immaterial, simply *vanishes in an instant*. The organic body, for example, certainly ceases to live and decays, but it does not simply disappear. Similarly, the soul can never vanish into nothingness. But, perhaps like an ever-diminishing oscillating curve, might it not lose so much of its power as to be indistinguishable from sheer nothingness? “We therefore need to examine whether the inner powers of the soul are able to decrease continuously in the same way that the parts of its corporeal body dissolve”, Mendelssohn's Socrates says.²³ Continuous change may never abruptly end, but it certainly can come infinitely close to ending.

The problem that Socrates confronts in the first dialogue, then, is defining the nature of the soul's power in such a way that the continuous diminution of its active power becomes less likely than its continuous expansion. To the extent that the soul's power is related only to the body, it remains an open possibility, indeed a likelihood, that as the body's continuous change moves in

²² Boscovich (1754), par. 107, p. 47. Translation mine.

²³ *JubA* 3.1: 71.

the direction of dissolution into smaller and smaller elements (which are reabsorbed into larger structures, to be sure, but never regain their former identity), so the soul's power might grow infinitely weaker over the course of its immortal existence.

But the soul's power, Socrates will argue, is not merely its capacity of forming concepts that unify the sensory manifold presented to it through its body. Let us recall that Mendelssohn inherits a concept of soul from Leibniz (and Wolff) that is the reworking of Plato's theory of Ideas as *active forces*. Plato's theory of Ideas is not merely a way of accounting for the unity of a multiplicity of particulars. The Ideas also serve as objects of the philosopher's epistemic striving. That is, they are the goal of the rational mind's (*phronēsis* in the *Phaedo*) quest for knowledge (*epistēmē*). In the *Phaedo* and elsewhere, Plato argues that the rational mind's quest for knowledge may lie dormant until the mind confronts the inadequacy of sensible particulars, and of the opinions that most men consider to be true about those particulars.

Plato makes it clear in the *Phaedo* (and, of course, in the *Republic*) that the quest for knowledge is inextricably tied to the quest for the Good. The Ideas are not merely the objects of an impersonal or abstract knowing; intellection of the Ideas satisfies the soul's authentic desire in a way that no corporeal object can. The soul of the philosopher is not merely in possession of the truth, it is also eminently happy. If we recall that the Leibnizian-Wolffian reworking of the theory of Ideas made the soul a sort of *active Idea*, we now need to combine this with the Platonic doctrine that the Ideas are the object of the soul's authentic (philosophic) desire for happiness. More specifically, to understand Mendelssohn's concept of the soul we need to connect the concept of the soul with Plato's description of the Idea of the Beautiful in the *Symposium* as the incitement of the soul's quest for knowledge.

I earlier mentioned Mendelssohn's argument in *On the Sentiments* that the soul's authentic desire was to know "completeness and perfection", whose highest form is the moral order of the universe. There, he distinguished between the "earthly Venus" that is the beauty of the sensuous manifold, and the "heavenly Venus" that is the "final purpose" binding all things together in an "authentic perfection" (*PW* 24). The soul as an active power of unifying manifolds finds its highest bodily expression in the experience of the beauty of nature and art. This aspect of the soul's power can diminish over time, since it is related to the body's capacity, waning with age, for sensation.

But insofar as the soul desires to know the interlocking relations of the moral and spiritual order and purposiveness of the universe, the soul's power does not need to diminish over time. If the soul itself is the active power that unifies manifolds, it is also the active power that creates the beauty of the

harmonious order of a sensuous manifold. And insofar as the soul seeks to know the moral order of the universe (the “heavenly Venus”), it also actively realizes this moral order in its own growing perfection. The soul therefore desires its own greater moral perfection insofar as it desires to know the moral order of the universe. Directed at purely moral and epistemic perfection, this active power of the soul functions independently of the body’s sensory input.

In *On the Sentiments* Mendelssohn makes the soul’s self-perfection within the whole the highest goal of the soul’s active power. To strengthen its power in this life and to do so forever in the next life is the soul’s authentic purpose. Mendelssohn therefore derides anyone who would seek to justify suicide as, under any circumstances, a rational choice of the soul: “Can an entity that has been created maintain: ‘My existence proves to be an imperfection for the whole?’ By what means has the shortsighted individual arrived at this knowledge of what is best for *the whole*?” (PW 60).

In the first dialogue of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn follows nearly the same argumentative path as the one he first laid out in *On the Sentiments*. He argues that the active power of the soul to unify manifolds is most perfectly expressed when the soul seeks to comprehend the moral order of the whole universe. In the *Phädon*’s first dialogue, as we have seen, Mendelssohn first argues that the soul’s active power can never disappear entirely. However, so long as the soul’s power is linked to the sensuous manifolds presented to it through the body, it is conceivable that the soul’s power may diminish infinitely as it approaches but never reaches the value of zero. Therefore, Mendelssohn has Socrates conjoin the power of unifying manifolds (which is directed toward the input of the senses) with the soul’s will to perfect itself within the moral order of the universe. Socrates argues that the soul forms concepts that unify manifolds because its *will* is directed toward its happiness. Forming concepts is what satisfies the soul’s desire:

When the soul thinks, the concepts within it necessarily are always changing place with other concepts, and some of these it must want to have and others it must not want to have, in other words, it must have a *will*. And if it has a will, where else can this will be directed except towards the highest grade of well-being, happiness?²⁴

The active power of the soul is expressed in its capacity to unify manifolds through concepts, but this in turn is nothing other than the expression of the soul’s will to achieve happiness.

24 *JubA* 3.1: 75; emphasis Mendelssohn’s.

In *Morning Hours* (1785), Mendelssohn will argue, “all cognition right from the start is accompanied with a sort of approbation”.²⁵ Just as Socrates describes different concepts as being differently related to the will (as more or less pleasant), so in *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn explains, “the mind can derive more pleasure from a certain concept or find itself more pleasantly occupied with it than another” (*Morning Hours* 54; *JubA* 123). The will associated with the pleasure of a concept is what Mendelssohn calls “the faculty of approbation” (*Billigungsvermögen*). This faculty and the cognitive faculty are “expressions of one and the same power of the mind, but are distinct in regard to the goal toward which they strive” (*Morning Hours* 55; *JubA* 124). While the cognitive faculty strives for true concepts and therefore “seeks to refashion the human being in accordance with the nature of things”, the faculty of approbation seeks to actualize what the will approves, and therefore “seeks to refashion things in accordance with the nature of the human” (*Morning Hours* 55; *JubA* 126). This makes it clear that the soul, insofar as it is driven by its will to have concepts that are both true and pleasant, seeks both to perfect its own power and also to perfect the world as a whole. To the extent that the soul is driven by this will, its power will not be constantly diminishing as the aging body’s capacity for sensation (the source of the sensory manifold) ebbs. Quite the contrary, the power of the soul will constantly increase, as the soul learns that its happiness resides in the perfection of its moral will, the “faculty of approbation” as the *Morning Hours* calls it, its capacity to create ever-greater perfection within itself and the universe.

The philosophic soul in Plato’s *Phaedo* is characterized in the early part of the dialogue as seeking only *katharsis* from the pleasures of the body, and “to dwell as far as is possible now and in the future by itself alone released as it were from the chains of the body” (67c5–d2).²⁶ Mendelssohn, as I have said, judges Plato’s Socrates to have been made the mouthpiece of a world-denigrating Pythagoreanism. In place of this, Mendelssohn at the end of *Phädon*’s first dialogue will offer a very different vision of the aspiration and hope of the self-perfecting soul.

Whoever during his life upon the earth exercises care for his soul, whoever engages himself here in the practice of wisdom, virtue, and the perception of true beauty, that person has the greatest hope of continuing this

25 *Morning Hours*, 54; *JubA* 3.2: 123. Henceforth, translations will be taken from *Last Works*, with page reference to the English translation followed by page reference to the *JubA* edition.

26 Translation mine here and in what follows.

practice after his death and thereby to bring himself closer rung by rung to the most sublime primary Being [*Urwesen*] that is the source of all wisdom, the epitome of all perfections, and pre-eminently Beauty itself".²⁷

We might say, returning to the Platonic theme of beauty as the inciting cause of the soul's desire for knowledge, that rather than infinitely approximating the zero level of active power, the soul that strives in its moral self-perfection to draw near to Beauty will continue infinitely in the direction of greater power. And in so doing, it will create greater perfection within the universe as a whole. Although there will be oscillations within the course of the soul's existence, there will never be a complete disappearance of its power. At every moment, the soul has sufficient power to direct its will toward the limit point that is the unifying principle of the whole, the "epitome of all perfections,... Beauty itself". At every moment of its existence, the soul can, if it actualizes its will for perfection, point the slope of its curve toward the increase of perfection and away from the diminishment of perfection: the infinitesimal calculus of the self-perfecting soul. The *Symposium's* ladder of the beautiful is now a continuous curve approaching ever closer to the infinite source of all wisdom, the most perfect unifying vision of the manifold relations of the world, the "most sublime primary Being", in a word, *God*.

Let me reiterate the difference between Mendelssohn's conception of the soul and that of Plato, as we have so far explicated it, in relation to the first dialogue in the *Phädon*. There, in Socrates' final remarks about the soul climbing rung after rung in self-perfecting practices toward "Beauty itself", we find Mendelssohn's rendering of the *Phaedo's* description of philosophical souls as "lovers of intellection" [*erastai ... phronēseōs*, 66e3] and "practicers of dying" [*apothnēskein melētōsi*, 67e5], a description revisited and amplified from *Phaedo* 82e–83c, a passage once again stressing the need for the philosophical soul to separate itself as much as possible from the body. As I mentioned earlier, Mendelssohn distances himself from the language of initiation and the denigration of the body that pervades these sections of the *Phaedo*. He never has Socrates argue for the need for the soul to separate radically itself from the body. Rather, in the first dialogue of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn stresses the *continuity* of the soul's activity in this life and in the next, the upward swing that at any moment allows the soul to participate in the moral perfection of the whole universe through its every activity.

Before turning to the *Phädon's* second dialogue, let us briefly consider the proof for the soul's immortality offered in the first dialogue. As I mentioned,

²⁷ *JubA* 3.1: 76.

Mendelssohn's first dialogue essentially corresponds to the material in the *Phaedo* up to 84c, where Simmias and Cebes introduce their challenges to Socrates' explanation of why, if the philosopher's desire for *phronēsis* and *katharsis* is any indication of the nature of the soul, the soul must be immortal. Simmias and Cebes seek to know more precisely what the fundamental nature of the soul is, independently of what the desire of the philosopher might tell us about it. They seem to want to know about the soul, whether or not it is a *philosopher's* soul. Their challenges seem to open a new front entirely in the argument. In Mendelssohn's uptake of their arguments, however, Simmias and Cebes directly confront the basis of the earlier argument for the immortality of the soul, namely, the idea that the soul is the active power of unifying manifolds and that this power can never simply vanish. The argument in Mendelssohn's first dialogue, as I have explained, is based on Boscovich's law of continuity. The introduction of this law is central to Mendelssohn's entire project of offering an infinitesimal calculus of the soul. It also fundamentally changes how Mendelssohn can appropriate the arguments of Plato's *Phaedo* for the immortality of the soul that are based on the comparison of the change of life to death with similar changes from one state to its opposite.

On the surface it seems that Boscovich's law—viz., that a change from one state to another requires that an infinitely divisible series of intermediate states be traversed (nature makes no leaps)—could be compared to the *Phaedo's* idea that all change is between opposite states, forever alternating from one pole to another (*Ph.* 70d7–72e2). However, neither this account of change nor the later more complex account in the *Phaedo* about the alternating presence and absence of a Form (*eidos*) or Idea (*idea*) in a composite physical object (103b–107a) bears any real relationship to Boscovich's law of continuity. Plato offers a theory of change that rejects any immanent lawfulness within the changing particular. In the first account of alternating change, he merely describes constant oscillation between opposed states as the necessary nature of change, if things are not going to end up in one unendingly identical condition. He makes no effort to explain the cause of this oscillation. In the later account Plato appeals to the Forms or Ideas [*ideai*] that *instantaneously* depart from a thing upon the approach of the opposite Form or Idea. This, as I say, in no way resembles Mendelssohn's account of change based upon the law of continuity. Nor is the relationship between the Form and the changing particular anything like the one that Mendelssohn would describe as the relationship between a representation and the sensory manifold which it unifies.

The fundamental difference between Plato and Mendelssohn, when it comes to explaining change in a composite physical particular, is that Plato's Form or Idea does not serve actively to *unify* a manifold of changing states,

nor does it unify the composite parts of the physical particular. In its relation with a changing particular the Idea seems to operate according to an on-off switch, inhering in it for a certain time and then ceasing to do so. To be sure, Plato does assert that the soul, as the entity that “brings” (*epipherei*, *Ph.* 105d10) the Idea of Life to the composite organic body, can never receive that which brings the opposite of Life, namely, Death (*Ph.* 106, ff.). But this again is quite different from Mendelssohn’s view that the active power of the soul can never entirely vanish. For Plato, the Idea of Life that is inseparably linked to the soul admits of no variation, no more-and-less, in its relation with the body to which it brings life: when the soul departs the body, the Idea of Death enters. For Mendelssohn, by contrast, the soul is an active power whose magnitude varies continuously. Furthermore, the soul’s active power of representation is responsible for transforming an infinitely divisible process of change within the composite physical body it inhabits into a unified whole. For precisely this reason, it is exposed more directly to the challenges of Simmias and Cebes, to which I now turn.

The second dialogue of the *Phädon* opens with questions from Simmias and Cebes. Simmias raises a concern about the nature of the unifying or harmony-causing power of the soul, asking if it can exist apart from that to which it brings unity and harmony. Cebes asks Socrates to offer further justification for his confidence that the soul’s active power will not diminish in the infinity of time but will rather grow in strength. He asks Socrates:

If I have understood you correctly, you expect a better life after death, a greater enlightenment of your understanding, nobler and more sublime movements of your heart, than ever befell any mortal upon this earth. Upon what do you ground these flattering hopes?

JubA 3.1: 84

These two challenges do correspond in general terms to those posed by Simmias and Cebes in Plato’s *Phaedo*.

Indeed, as just noted, they seem even more appropriate in Mendelssohn’s text than they do in Plato’s. In Plato’s *Phaedo*, when Simmias and Cebes raise their objections to Socrates, it is as if they had entirely forgotten their enthusiastic consent to Socrates’ peroration about the deepest aspiration of the philosopher for purification from everything bodily so that his soul might contemplate the eternal and bodiless forms. It is hard to see how Simmias could both agree with Socrates’ initial description of the philosopher’s soul and its “practice of death” and still worry that the soul might be nothing more than the harmonious tuning of the body. Nor is it easy to see how Cebes could

imagine that the philosopher's body-disdaining soul might be nothing more than a sort of cloak, growing shabbier and shabbier with use as it is passed from one owner to another. But Mendelssohn's account of the soul as the power of representing or unifying a manifold seems almost perfectly suited to be the target of the criticism raised by Simmias about the possibility of a harmony outlasting that of which it is the harmony. Simmias asks: how can the soul exist if it is no longer unifying a sensory manifold? For his part, Cebes worries about the possibility that the power of the soul might be constantly diminishing. Cebes grants that he was moved by Socrates' description of the soul's infinite approach to the "epitome of all perfections" in the afterlife, but he wants Socrates to support this optimistic vision with an argument that carries more than merely "a high grade of probability".²⁸ Cebes even wonders if the soul's afterlife existence might be neither in the direction of the constant diminishment of its powers nor in the direction of their expansion, but a flat-line infinity of unconscious sleep. Thus, the second dialogue of Mendelssohn's *Phädon* seems to offer more motivated challenges to Socrates in the persons of Simmias and Cebes than those raised by the same characters in Plato's *Phaedo*.

The response to Simmias allows Mendelssohn to explain in greater detail the soul's nature as a thinking substance. The soul's activity is indeed one of unifying or harmonizing disparate sensory inputs, but so long as this is an activity of *thinking* it cannot be reduced to any material constituents of the body. Indeed, the thinking activity of the soul unifies the body's parts without itself being composed of parts.

Order, regularity, harmony, pattern, in sum, all relationships that require a bringing together and conjoining of the parts of a manifold are the effects of the power of thinking. Without the addition of a thinking being, without putting the parts of a manifold together and holding them in their distinct relations, the most orderly structures would be mere heaps of sand, and the voice of the nightingale would be no more harmonious than the groans of a night owl. Indeed, without the effective power [of a thinking being] there would be no whole in nature made up of many parts with their own independent being, since although these parts may have their own separate existence, they must be held in mutual relatedness, compared, and considered in their connection if they are to form a whole.²⁹

²⁸ *JubA* 3.1: 84.

²⁹ *JubA* 3.1: 92.

Without a thinking being, nature would be nothing more than a collection of things lying beside one another in a purely mechanical way, and it would not consist of wholes with properties more than the sum of the properties of the parts. Without a thinking being to unify the points of extended space and time or to distinguish movement from rest, or distinguish one colored surface from another, space and time and movement and rest would simply dissolve into chaos:

What in the wide space of physical objects is strewn about [*zerstreut ist*], draws itself together as if into a point where a whole is formed, and in the moment of the now the past that no longer is, is brought into relation with the future that will be. I acknowledge neither extension nor color nor rest nor motion nor space nor time, but only an inward effective essence [*innerlich wirksames Wesen*] that imagines, binds together, divides apart, compares, and selects extension and color, rest and movement, space and time, and operates upon them with a thousand other activities of which it is capable, although it itself has not the least in common with extension and movement.

JubA 3.1: 98

This is a pretty strong claim, one that significantly anticipates Kant: space and time have ordered relations only in virtue of a thinking being. But this claim perhaps makes sense if we recall that the claims made on behalf of the power of the soul as a thinking being are drawn (via Leibniz and Wolff) from claims that Plato makes for the Ideas in the “second sailing” described in the *Phaedo* (99d1), namely, that apart from the Ideas no object in the mutable physical world would have a purchase on any stable property.

Having explained the full extent of the soul's power as a thinking being, Mendelssohn's Socrates goes on to argue that the soul's power to unify a manifold is not itself derived from the parts of any manifold. The power of thinking certainly cannot be derived from non-thinking parts, but neither is it composed of thinking parts with their own independent existence. The soul unifies its own disparate thoughts, feelings, and desires, none of which is an independently thinking being. The soul is *simple* substance, i.e., an unextended (or *intensive*) magnitude. At every moment, it possesses a certain grade or magnitude of perfection but this magnitude is also a continuously changing. In other words, the soul is like a moving point with a trajectory defined by the tangent line at each point: a point that both unifies its past and draws itself into relation with a future goal. It is a moving point that performs the infinitesimal calculus upon itself as it follows a curve that oscillates between

the discordant pleasures of the body and the harmonious joys of the moral virtues. The soul as a thinking being unifies manifolds, yet as an unextended intensive magnitude it is not dependent upon any manifold for its existence. It is a simple harmonizing power and not in any way like the harmony of a complexly structured physical object that will disappear if the object's parts are rearranged or decomposed. This is Socrates' response to Simmias. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates denies that Simmias' comparison of the soul to a harmony has any value whatsoever, but in the *Phädon* Mendelssohn's Socrates acknowledges that harmony is the essential product of the soul's activity, although the soul itself is not a harmony of parts.

And what of Cebes' worries that the soul might be infinitely approaching the zero grade of perfection? What reason can Socrates offer for his hope that in the infinite time of the afterlife he will only ever be progressing in his perfection? The answer to this question opens Mendelssohn's third and final dialogue. This final section of the *Phädon* argues that the justice of God is what provides the individual with complete confidence that he will enjoy ever-greater perfection, ever-greater happiness in the afterlife. As I have said, this third dialogue replaces the myth at the conclusion of the *Phaedo*.

4 The Third Dialogue of the *Phädon*

In Plato's *Phaedo*, Cebes makes two interventions. The first comes at *Ph.* 70a, immediately after Socrates has justified to Simmias the philosopher's expectation of only achieving the object of his love, namely, *phronēsis*, in the afterlife. Cebes now worries that the soul might simply "be dispersed like breath or smoke" when it leaves the body. Socrates offers a number of arguments that the change from life to death could not leave the soul in a state liable to destruction. We have discussed one of these arguments, namely, that the nature of change is constant alternation from one state to its opposite. Mendelssohn's first dialogue and its appeal to the law of continuity corresponds to this argument, although it radically differs from it in its approach to the explanation of change.

Another response Socrates advances in the *Phaedo* to respond to Cebes' first intervention has to do with the proof from recollection (*anamnēsis*), namely, that the soul's ability to predicate properties of particulars cannot possibly be derived from its sensory experience of these particulars, since the properties they display fall short of what the soul knows about these properties. From what sensible particulars would the soul ever be able to derive the idea of equality, seeing that "stones and pieces of wood sometimes, while remaining

exactly the same, sometimes appear to be equal in one respect and not equal in another respect"? (*Ph.* 74b8–9) Having thus demonstrated the pre-existence of the soul, Socrates then argues that the objects of the soul's pre-existing intellection are kindred in nature to the soul—unparted and unchanging—and that therefore the soul is not of such a nature as to dissolve after it leaves the body. Rather, there is every reason to believe that the nature of the soul is such that it answers precisely to the philosopher's love of *phronēsis*, and that the soul will in fact achieve its longed-for knowledge of the unchanging Forms as they were once beheld before it entered the physical body it now inhabits.

Mendelssohn makes no use of the argument from recollection, although as I have mentioned earlier he does refer to it (in the form it appears in the *Meno*) in "On Evidence". He has no use for this argument because it comes with the metaphysical baggage of the theory of Ideas, which he has absorbed into his own theory of the soul: for him, the soul is the *active Idea*, the unifier of manifolds. But Mendelssohn does need to respond to Simmias' challenge about the nature of the soul as a harmony, and he does so in the second dialogue of the *Phädon*. Thus, we are left with Cebes' challenge about the slow weakening of the soul's power and final dissolution, which Mendelssohn transforms into a challenge about whether or not the soul's afterlife will be an infinite diminution towards zero of its powers; or a flatline state of no consciousness at all; or a steady growth in power.

Now Plato's Socrates answers Cebes' second intervention by explaining how properties inhere in physical particulars in virtue of their participation in Ideas. This in turn leads to the argument that there is an Idea of Life that the soul necessarily "brings" to the body, and that the entity which *essentially* brings one Idea can never "accept" (*endechetai*) the opposite Idea: the soul as bringer of the Idea of Life cannot accept the Idea of Death (*thanatos*); hence the soul is un-dying (*athanatos*). Mendelssohn's concept of the soul as an active power of unifying manifolds bears some relation to this account of the soul as bringer of the Idea of Life. But the concept of the soul as an active power is so central to Mendelssohn (as to Leibniz and Wolff) that it underlies his entire argument. He will use it to dispel Cebes' fears about the fate of soul in the afterlife, by offering him a vision of the ever-progressing moral and epistemic magnitude of the soul's power.

In the third dialogue of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn's Socrates wants to assure his comrades that the afterlife promises nothing inconsistent with the will of a benevolent and just God. The heart of his argument is that the immortal soul will be granted an eternally increasing share in blessedness. Even if, as is no doubt likely in most cases, the soul becomes pained at its awareness of how far its inherent powers have been diminished rather than increased during its

lifetime, the soul may hope that this pain will be replaced by a growing awareness of the upward path that awaits it, a path of increasing happiness free from any admixture of pain. In effect, the *Phädon*'s argument democratizes the final myth of Plato's *Phaedo*: for Mendelssohn, all souls will achieve what, on Plato's account, only the select few can even hope for.

In the third dialogue of the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn claims that all souls "constitute a single species" whose properties "are not essentially different, they only rise above one another gradually in grades [of perfection] in a continuous series" (*JubA* 3.1: 105). In the myth of the *Phaedo*, however, Plato seems to insist on a sharp bifurcation of human souls into the class of truly virtuous souls of the philosophers, and all the rest. For Mendelssohn, each soul is placed by God on a path leading to greater perfection, although no soul is exactly equivalent to another in its grade of perfection. Plato seems to think, however, that the difference between the philosopher's soul and the soul of all other humans is not a matter of degree, but of kind. His argument against the idea that the soul is a harmony precisely rests on the *reductio ad absurdum* claim that, since there is no "more or less" in calling something harmonious (it is or it isn't), then "in accordance with this reasoning [that the soul is a harmony] all souls of all living beings would be similarly good, if indeed it is the case that souls are by nature similar in being this very thing, a soul" (94a7–10). What Plato is here claiming to be absurd, that souls insofar as they are souls, are similar and similarly good, is the very point that Mendelssohn's Socrates is at pains to make in the third dialogue of the *Phädon*.

There are at least two reasons why Mendelssohn does not agree with Plato. First, he does not believe that the soul "participates in evil more than virtue" (*Ph.* 93e7) under any circumstances, since evil for Mendelssohn is only a lesser good in comparison with a greater good. That is, the soul always does what is *good*, although it may not do what is *best*. For Plato in the *Phaedo*, on the other hand, the soul can corrupt itself with what is truly other than its nature, the body, thereby becoming *less a soul than another soul*. But for Mendelssohn, the soul is not opposed to the body: it is the active power by which the body is organized into a living whole. The second and perhaps more significant reason that Mendelssohn does not agree with Plato about distinct soul types is that it would be contrary to God's justice if any human soul were unable to share in the eternally ascending curve of all souls toward perfection. This is the central claim of the third dialogue of the *Phädon*, and in some ways the most radical of the entire work. It is here that Mendelssohn departs not only from Plato's Socrates, but also from almost all previous Christian, Jewish, and Islamic theologians: *God's justice is incompatible with the eternal suffering of any soul.*

Mendelssohn's central tenet in the third dialogue is that God created a universe with beings capable of self-perfecting activity. The universe is always in the best possible condition it can be *at that time*, but nonetheless it is not as good as it will become. God's creation is *a moral order that is constantly increasing in perfection, and the immortal human soul is responsible for this increase*. The vocation of the human being both in this life and the next is the same: to add to the world's perfection.

There has never been such a thoughtless fool who did not possess some trace of reason, nor has there been a tyrant in whose bosom there did not glimmer some spark of love for humanity. We all inherit the same perfectibilities, and the difference between us consists only in the *more* and the *less*. My friends, I assert that we all of us are perfectible since even the man who has completely forsaken God can never succeed in overturning his fundamental vocation. He may strive against God, he may oppose Him with all his stubborn will, yet even this opposition will have some inborn drive at its root that is originally good and that has been corrupted through improper use. Such a mistaken use makes the human being imperfect and miserable: it is only the exercise of his originally good drive, as it were against his will and no thanks to him, that he fulfills the final goal of his existence. In this way, my friends, it is true to say that no man has ever lived within the beneficial fellowship of his neighbors who has not left the face of the earth more perfect than he entered it.

JubA 3.1: 106

This fundamental optimism about the worth of every individual and of the entire created world is something that Mendelssohn cannot find in Plato's *Phaedo*. It is part and parcel of his Leibnizian inheritance, but, as I had occasion to say in an earlier section of this essay, Mendelssohn's conception of the infinitely progressive destiny of the soul goes much farther than Leibniz ever (explicitly) allowed himself to go.

Mendelssohn in the third dialogue of the *Phädon* breaks with both Plato and Leibniz when he has Socrates declare:

Through the imitation of God, one is able to approach continuously His perfections; in this approach consists the happiness of our souls, but the path to these perfections is endless and can never for all eternity be turned away from its goal. And this is why the progressive striving of

human life knows no limits. Every single human desire, in and for itself, has a goal that reaches out to infinity.

JubA 3.1: 113

One might think that such infinitude of striving would only be a recipe for infinite dissatisfaction, and in fact Mendelssohn almost admits as much: "Our desire for knowledge is insatiable, our quest for honor is insatiable, indeed, our base greed for gold torments and unsettles us without ever being able to be satisfied" (*JubA 3.1: 113*). But the difference between our epistemic and moral strivings, on the one hand, and our "base" strivings, on the other, is simply this: epistemic and moral strivings are eternally nourished ("the wonderful works of the infinite contain enough stuff and nourishment to sustain us for eternity", *JubA 3.1: 114*). But base strivings, for as long as we live in these mortal bodies, are never satisfactorily nourished. But even the latter have the drive to the good at their root.

Although only rational beings are driven by the infinite striving for perfection, this striving is not an anomaly within the order of the universe: "We can say that this immeasurable world structure has been created so that there might be rational beings who progress from rung to rung, increasing continuously in perfection, and who in this increase find their happiness" (*JubA 3.1: 114*). Mendelssohn makes it very clear that when he says that rational beings increase continuously in perfection, he means that *every single rational being will progress eternally in perfection*. And this progress means that no rational being will suffer eternally:

Just as in the physical world there is disorder among its constituent parts, storms, blizzards, earthquakes, floods, and plague, but all these things are resolved into perfections within the immeasurable whole, so also in the moral world in which the society-loving human finds himself jostled by others, temporary defects are turned into eternal perfections, long-lasting suffering is transformed into unending blessedness, and a brief period of testing leads to enduring contentment.

JubA 3.2: 122

Mendelssohn's Socrates concludes his long disquisition about the eternal progress in perfection of each soul by alluding to the *Phaedo's* final myth:

Whether the souls of the godless will need to suffer heat or cold, hunger or thirst, whether they will be plunged in the Acherusian morass or the dank Tartarus or the fires of the Pyriphlegethon and there spend some time until they have been purified, or whether the blessed will dwell in

an upper earth of pure gold and glistening jewels and breathe the purest air of heaven ... all of this I know nothing about.

JubA 3.1: 124

Mendelssohn believes that no poetic myth can or should replace the fundamental assurance, established through rational argument, that the human soul is not only immortal but also destined for infinitely progressing perfection and happiness.

5 Conclusion

Plato's defense of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*, despite its apparent renunciation of the realm of the body as both changeful and deceitful, is deeply political. Written as a representation of the death of Socrates, it poses an indictment of the city that condemned him to death. It raises the question of the destiny of the city in the absence of its "most just" citizen. So the question of immortality for Plato is obviously tied not merely to the question of the immortality of the individual soul, but also to the significance of that immortality for the political sphere in this world. The story of the soul's afterlife that brings the *Phaedo* to its conclusion is perhaps meant to speak not only to those who mourned Socrates' death but also to those who might be moved by the powerful imagery of myth. Among Plato's dialogues where the immortality of the soul is given similar mythic elaborations—the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*—the theme of the city's justice is paramount. Even the *Meno* seems to bring the immortality of the soul into relation with justice, viz., with the question of how to teach virtue (and not mathematics) that is the core concern of the dialogue.

The political framework for the question of the immortality of the soul is also quite apparent in Mendelssohn's text. Perhaps the strongest point of resemblance between Mendelssohn's *Phädon* and Plato's *Phaedo* lies precisely in their shared concern with the twin dangers confronting the city: superstitious fear of rational critique of religious pieties, on the one hand; and the cynical pleasure in tearing down these same pieties, on the other hand. The arguments for the immortality of the soul are advanced by Mendelssohn within the context of his overarching *Bildung* project, namely, to provide secure philosophical foundations for a religiously tolerant culture open to the pursuit of rational critique wherever it may lead.³⁰ Mendelssohn intended for

30 See my "Introduction to the Translation", in Mendelssohn, *Last Writings* (2012).

his *Phädon* to contribute to the reconstruction of German culture along the lines of an ideal Athens.

This is how Mendelssohn's intentions were perceived, I would argue, by his contemporaries. When he gains the appellation, "Socrates of Berlin", it is not only a reflection of his physiognomic and philosophical resemblance to Socrates, but also a reflection of the aspiration of the Enlightenment's proponents within Germany to feel that they were citizens of a *new and better* Athens.³¹ Unlike the sophistically trained demagogues who instigated the trial of Socrates, the admirers of Mendelssohn were not purveyors of enlightenment merely to promote their own power. Nor would they scorn this Jewish outsider for bringing "a new god" into the city. Thus, many of Mendelssohn's Christian contemporaries who rallied under the banner of *Aufklärung* became eager admirers of their own Socrates redivivus, Moses Mendelssohn, and the Socrates he presented to them in his rewriting of Plato's *Phaedo*.

But the embrace of their Jewish Socrates was sorely tested when Mendelssohn wished to broaden this embrace to encompass all the Jews of Prussia and the other German states. In his *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn, as Peter Fenves has convincingly argued, renders the Jewish people as a whole into the world's Socrates. They are charged by God to refute other nations' pretensions to dogmatic knowledge about God, and in their own lives they embody a "living script" of conversational sociality.³² Such claims for the Jewish people as the divinely appointed embodiment of Socrates went farther than even Mendelssohn's Enlightenment defenders were willing to go. The history of the backlash against Mendelssohn's defense of the Jewish people's historic role as the gadfly of the nations has been told elsewhere and is beyond the scope of this essay.³³

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31 For an insightful discussion of the reception of Mendelssohn as the Socrates of Berlin, see Leonard (2012), 25–64.

32 Fenves (2001), 92–5.

33 Cf., e.g., Rosenstock (2010) and Gottlieb (2011).

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Kant and Plato: An Introduction

Manfred Baum

Kant¹ took his first position in print on Plato's theory of ἰδέαι² in his dissertation,³ *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*⁴ of 1770. Already for Jakob Brucker,⁵ whose presentation of Plato in his history of philosophy is based on Alcinous's systematic sketch in his *Handbook* (the *Didaskalikos*), the doctrine of ἰδέαι was *caput et cardō*, the very essence of the Platonic philosophy, as he says, appealing to Atticus.⁶ Although the title of Kant's *Dissertation* with its mention of two worlds doubtless refers to the history of Platonism, yet Kant never attributed the two-world doctrine to Plato himself, neither in the *Dissertation*, nor in his later work. This is all the more remarkable, since Kant's main source, Brucker (who was aware of the doctrine's origin in Philo of Alexandria's text, *De opificio mundi*) nonetheless attributed it to Plato. Brucker first cites (in Latin translation) a passage from Plato's own interpretation of his Sun Analogy (*Rep.* 517bc):

1 Chapter translated by Alan Kim.

2 As explained in the Introduction to this volume, the general policy is to translate Plato's terms, εἶδος (*eidos*) and ἰδέα (*idea*), by "Form", as is standard in Anglophone scholarship. In this chapter, however, an exception has to be made, due to Kant's own explicit connection between his term, "*Idee*", and Plato's "ἰδέα". Were the latter translated as "Form", this connection would be obscured, and much of Kant's interpretation and appropriation of ἰδέα as *Idee* rendered unintelligible. Thus Plato's "Form" will always be rendered in the Greek (ἰδέα; plural, ἰδέαι), and Kant's "*Idee*" will always be translated as "Idea". –Tr.

3 Kant's *Dissertation* was written in Latin. Manfred Baum's German original of this chapter quotes from the facing page Latin-German translation by Klaus Reich (Meiner, 1958). Although the *Dissertation* has also been translated into English several times, my policy in translating extracts for this chapter has been to consult both the Latin text and Reich's German translation, so as to reproduce Baum's article with maximal fidelity. Thus, the citations will mention first the paragraph (§) number of Kant's original, and the page number(s) on which appear any relevant terms in Reich's German, as quoted by Baum. –Ed.

4 Transliteration policy: Latin and Greek words used as technical philosophical terms will be transliterated showing long vowels; but common phrases or titles of works in Greek or Latin usually printed without such marks will not have long vowels indicated. –Tr.

5 *HCP*: 695, *HPDI*: 113.

6 *ap.* Eusebius, *praep. Evang.* xv, 13.

In the intelligible realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source [the Sun] in the visible realm [Brucker: *in locō visibīlī*], and that in the intelligible realm [Brucker: *in ipsō vērō intelligibīlī*] it controls and provides truth and understanding....⁷

Brucker comments: “Here one sees the *mundus sēnsibilis* and the [*mundus*] *intelligibilis* opposed to each other, both being derived from the highest cause, which [Plato] regards as the author [*Urheber*] of all good things, which in the visible world not only grounds the light, but also the light’s author, the sun, [but which] in the *mundus intelligibilis* is not only in itself the author of [the] Truth, but also brought forth its [sc. the Truth’s] cause, Spirit, as an intelligible sun, as it were.”⁸

Brucker expresses himself more clearly in his history of the theory of ideas, in which we also find an identification of Plato’s idea of the Good with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*:

According to Plato, that greatest Craftsman brought forth from himself forms and shapes, granting them their own existence, an existence independent and self-same, such that when he generated the sensible things, he looked at [*intuērētur*] them, just as painters look at a true picture [*expressam imāginem*], in order to create a copy of it. And in accordance with the form [*speciem*] of this world of the Understanding [*mundi intelligibilis*], that highest artist created the sensible world [*mundum sēnsibilem*], shaping the pre-existing raw matter [...], just as an architect erects a building out of wood and stone in accordance with the archetype [*exemplar*] that he [first] formed by his mind [*mente*] and [then] copied [*dēpinxit*] [or at least drew with maximal likeness].⁹

This attempted interpretation of Plato’s theory of ἰδέαι and its cosmological application, cobbled together from Plato’s *Timaeus*, Philo’s *De opificio mundi*, and Alcinous’s *Didaskalikos*, is, despite all of its distortions, suited for marking off Kant’s own two-world distinction from that of Wolff and Baumgarten.

7 Translated from Schleiermacher’s German rendering in Baum’s original; English translations here are by Grube (rev. Reeve), in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997) with slight modifications.

8 HCP: 694.

9 HPDI: §IV, 36, f., cf. §V, 53, f.

In Section II of the *Dissertation*, Kant deals with the difference between sensible things (*sēnsibilia*) and intelligible objects (*intelligibilia*), a difference presupposed by the distinction of two cognitive faculties within the human subject. He writes: “Sensibility [*sensualitās*] is the receptivity [*receptivitās*] of a subject, by which it is possible that its representational condition [*Vorstellungszustand*] gets affected [*afficiātur*] in a particular manner by the presence of some object.”¹⁰ Here Kant does not yet distinguish the Understanding and Reason as he later does in the first *Critique*: “The Understanding or Reason [*intelligentia, rationalitās*] is the faculty [*facultās*] of a subject in virtue of which it is able to represent [*vorzustellen*] whatever cannot fall into its senses.”¹¹ This characterization of the Understanding as a non-sensible faculty of cognition is, for the time being, sufficient for the distinction of two kinds of objects:

The object of sensation is the “sensible thing [*Sinnending; sēnsibile*]”; but that which contains nothing other than what must be cognized through the Understanding is the “intelligible object [*Verstandeswesen; intelligibile*]”. The ancient schools called the former “phenomenon” and the latter, “noumenon”. Cognition [*Erkenntnis; cognitio*], insofar as it is subject to the laws of sensibility, is [called] sensible [*sēnsitīva*], whereas the [cognition] of the Understanding is called “Understanding-cognition” or “rational [cognition]” [*{cognitio} intellectuālis s{ive} ratiōnālis*].¹²

The historian of philosophy may be unsatisfied with Kant’s equation of the distinction between *sēnsibilia* and *intelligibilia*, on the one hand, and that between phenomena and noumena, on the other hand, as well as with his vague reference to “the ancient schools”. Nevertheless, Kant, for his part, saw Plato’s philosophy in this tradition and included himself in it. “The sensible cognitions [*sēnsitīve cōgitāta*] are merely the representations [*Vorstellungen*] of things as they appear [*utī appārent*]; but the Understanding’s cognitions [*intellectuālia*] are representations of things just as they are [*sicutī sunt*].”¹³

It is with reference to Plato that we can also understand Kant’s new conception of metaphysics and moral philosophy, as well as his critique of

¹⁰ *Diss.* §3; Reich (1958), 19.

¹¹ *Diss.* §3; Reich (1958), 19.

¹² *Diss.* §3; Reich (1958), 19.

¹³ *Diss.* §4; Reich (1958), 19.

Wolff. Metaphysics is now for him “the organon of all intellectual cognitions [*Erkenntnisse*],”¹⁴ including “those basic moral concepts [*conceptūs mōrālēs*] ...

that are not known through experience but rather through the pure Understanding itself [*per ipsum intellēctum pūrum*]. I fear, however, that the renowned Wolff—by means of this difference between sensible [*sēnsitīva*] and Intellectual [*sic*] cognitions [*intellectuālīa*], which for him is no more than a logical difference—has, to the great detriment of philosophy, perhaps consigned to utter oblivion that famous ancient discussion concerning the nature of *phenomena* and *noumena*.¹⁵

This also pertains to Wolff and Baumgarten’s incorrect interpretation of the *mundus sēnsibilis* and the *mundus intelligibilis*. In Wolff’s *Theologia Naturalis*, we read:

I call this existent universe the *mundum sēnsibilem*, insofar as it is considered under the form [*formā*] in which it falls into [*incurrit*] the senses; or, if you will, this *mundus* as it appears to us [*quālis nōbīs appāret*] is called the “*mundus sēnsibilis*”. By contrast, however, I use the name “*mundus intelligibilis*” for this very same universe [*idem hoc ūniversum*] insofar as it is considered under the form through which it is taken as clearly represented via [*vī*] the Understanding; or again, if you will, the *mundus intelligibilis* is this *mundus* as it is in truth [*quālis rēvērā est*].¹⁶

Wolff’s key distinction here is between two aspects of one and the same real world (*idem hoc ūniversum*) that are merely regarded under two different “forms”, namely how it occurs to the senses (*quā sēnsus incurrit*)—i.e., how it appears to us—on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how it is clearly represented through the power of the Understanding (*quā dīstīntē vī intellectus repraesentātum*), that is, how it the world *truly* is. Parallel to the distinction between senses and Understanding a second difference consequently results between the respective worlds:

The *mundus intelligibilis* is an aggregate of simple substances [*aggregātum substantiārū simplicium*].... But the *mundus sēnsibilis* is the totality of phenomena [*complexus phaenomenōrū*] that come forth

14 Diss. §7; Reich (1958), 27.

15 Diss. §7; Reich (1958), 27.

16 TN: Part I, §202.

[*prōmānantium*] from the simple things that are their [sc. the phenomena's] source.¹⁷

From this it follows that the sensible world, also called the *mundus adspectabilis* (visible world), is composed of bodies as its parts.¹⁸ This means that the visible, bodily world (*anschaulbare Körperwelt*) is a kind of aggregate of simple substances, which, however, is only a world of appearances (*phaenomenōrum*), since a sensible object is only confusedly represented (*confūsē percipitur*). By contrast, the world of the Understanding is the true world.¹⁹ Wolff accordingly says that an idea of the intelligible world exists in God, whereas we only have an idea of the *sensible* world—which two ideas, nonetheless, are but different ideas of one and the same world. This corresponds to what Baumgarten—who follows Leibniz more closely than does Wolff—says in his *Metaphysica* concerning the two worlds:

God represents to himself all possible worlds in a maximally distinct way—including, therefore, this [actual] world, as well. The world, insofar as it is represented sensibly, is the sensible world [*mundus sēnsibilis* {*adspectabilis*}]; and insofar as it is known distinctly, it is the world of the Understanding [*mundus intelligibilis*]. God cognizes this [actual] world of the Understanding in the most distinct way. Hence, he most distinctly cognizes all the monads of this world, all the souls within it.²⁰

In the seventh edition of the *Metaphysica* of 1779, "*mundus sēnsibilis*" is translated as "the world as a theatrical play of sensibility [*ein Schauspiel der Sinnlichkeit*]", and "*mundus intelligibilis*" as "the world as an object of the Understanding."²¹ Here, too, it is of decisive importance that the referent of the twice-used "as" in both cases is the actual world (as with Wolff).

Now according to Kant, Wolff has rendered unrecognizable the strict dichotomy (championed by Plato and Kant) between sensibility and the Understanding as two generically distinct wellsprings of human cognition, and between their respective, mutually opposed objects, by treating them as no more than differing degrees of one and the same cognitive power along a spectrum of confusion and distinctness. For Kant, by contrast, metaphysics,

17 TN: §203.

18 TN: §203.

19 TN: §203.

20 *Metaph.* §879.

21 *Metaph.* §879.

following the *radical* separation of the Understanding from sensibility, is “the philosophy that contains the first principles of the pure use of the Understanding”, which means that it has “no empirical principles.”²² In other words, metaphysics deals solely with what Kant says the ancients called “*noumena*”.

Thus, a new conception of metaphysics as *philosophia pūra* emerges for the Kant of 1770,²³ one that appeals to Plato and at the same time determines a new relation to moral philosophy. In this metaphysics,

the general principles of the pure Understanding ... are led out towards ... some paradigm [*exemplar aliquod*] that can only be represented through the pure Understanding, and that is the common standard for all else with respect to its realities [*quoad reālītātēs*, its positive determinations]—which [standard] is perfection as *noumenon* [*perfectiō noumenon*].²⁴

In this new concept of the *perfectiō noumenon* Kant combines Descartes, Leibniz, and Wolff’s *ēns perfectissimum* with Plato’s ἰδέα, as he, Kant, interprets the latter. Kant’s understanding of “ἰδέα” may be deduced from his discussion of the “cognitions of the Understanding in the strict sense [*intellectuālīa strictē {dicta}*] ... in which the use of the Understanding is real [*realis*],”²⁵ i.e., in which the Understanding generates its own concepts of objects and relations of objects from out of itself, concepts that are not abstracted from sensible representations—in short, the concepts he calls concepts of the Understanding and concepts of Reason.

Hence intellectual representation abstracts from every sensible representation [*sēnsitīvō*], although intellectual representation is not abstracted from sensible representations; thus [intellectual representation] may more correctly be called *abstracting* [*abstrahēns*] rather than *abstract* [i.e., *abstracted*, *abstractus*]. It is therefore more advisable to call intellectual representations pure ideas [*ideās pūrās*], and call merely empirically given concepts “abstract representations.”²⁶

²² *Diss.* §8; Reich, 27.

²³ *Diss.* §23; Reich, 75.

²⁴ *Diss.* §9; Reich (1958), 29.

²⁵ *Diss.* §6; Reich (1958), 25.

²⁶ *Diss.* §6; Reich 25.

Of course, Kant's pure Ideas are not Plato's ἰδέαι, but rather pure concepts of human Understanding and human Reason.

In other words, Kant's *perfectiō noumenon* is an object conceived by the Understanding's pure Idea, which is to be construed as a "paradigm" (*exemplar*, corresponding to the Platonic *paradeigma* [παράδειγμα]). It provides the common standard of perfection for measuring all other generically similar but less real and less perfect things, insofar as they may be considered imperfect copies (*Abbilder*) of this paradigm (*Urbild*). Kant's use of this *perfectiō noumenon* as a principle of theoretical and pure practical philosophy originates with him, in that we can already see delineated Kant's later conception of a metaphysics of nature as a counterpart of a metaphysics of morals. The *perfectiō noumenon* "exists in a double sense, viz., both theoretical and practical,"²⁷ and Kant remarks in a footnote that we consider something theoretically "when we only attend to what a being [*ēns*; *Wesen*] is; but [consider something] practically when we deliberate over what, by virtue of freedom, it ought to be."²⁸ Accordingly, the *perfectiō noumenon* in its theoretical sense is "the highest being [*ēns summum*], God", and in its practical sense, "moral perfection [*perfectiō mōrālis*]."²⁹ God and (in the case of humans) virtue are thus the perfect entities conceived by the pure Understanding, which respectively function in a metaphysics, conceived as pure cognition of the Understanding, as the common standard (*Maß*) both of what is and of what—through free action (*freies Handeln*)—ought to be.

With respect to moral philosophy, Kant is clearly aware that he is calling for a radical, new direction, even with respect to his own ethics of the 1760s.

Moral philosophy ..., insofar as it provides the first principles of judgment [*principia dīūdicandī*], is cognized only through the pure Understanding and itself belongs to pure philosophy [i.e., to metaphysics]. And those who forcibly drag their criteria back to a feeling of pleasure and aversion [*sēnsus voluptātis et taediū*] are justly blamed—e.g., Epicurus, as well as some moderns who, at a certain distance, have followed him, like Shaftesbury and his followers.³⁰

Upon this rejection of philosophical empiricism in moral philosophy, insofar as it deals with the *principia dīūdicandī* of free human actions, and upon

27 *Diss.* §9; Reich, 29.

28 *Diss.* §9; Reich, 29.

29 *Diss.* §9; Reich, 29.

30 *Diss.* §9; Reich, 29.

the relegation of these principles to metaphysics conceived as a science of the pure Understanding, Kant appeals to Plato as a witness for such a metaphysically grounded ethics. The concept of a *maximum perfectiōnis* that Kant lays down here as a foundation originates in a Kantian interpretation of the Baumgartnerian version of Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics.

This maximum of perfection is a topic Baumgarten treats under “*Prima matheseos intensorum principia*” (*Metaph.*, Section VI).³¹ Here he applies concepts of intensive magnitudes, of different degrees, and of a minimum and a maximum, to the basic qualitative concepts of ontology, including to *perfectiō*, which is defined as the harmony or “*cōnsēnsus*” of many things which, taken together, form a sufficient reason for some one (thing).³² Thus “*perfectiō maxima*” is determined as “the maximal harmony of the most and the greatest [number of things] into a unity,”³³ where “*maximum*” means that “*quō māius impossibile est*.”³⁴ This purely formal concept of maximal perfection, which for Baumgarten refers only to the harmony of the manifold contained in a single thing, is transformed by Kant into a measuring-rod for the measure of quantities of reality differing by degrees. In Kant, the perfection of these things does not consist in the formal harmony of their respective manifolds (as for Baumgarten), but in the positive determinations of these things themselves, which they *can* possess in accordance with their concept, but in fact *do* possess only partially. Kant writes: “For every genus of things of variable magnitude, the maximum is the common standard and the principle of cognition.”³⁵ The determination of the degree of the perfection of things that have this generic perfection in common, then, occurs by comparison against a maximum of this perfection, measured against which the greater or lesser degree of respective perfection is determined as the greater or lesser part of an underlying whole. All this presupposes that all such perfections are smaller than the perfection of the maximum, and hence can only be cognized as greater or lesser delimitations of this maximum, i.e., as fractions thereof.

Today we call the maximum of perfection [*maximum perfectiōnis*] an ‘ideal’; Plato called it an ‘*idea*’ [e.g., his *idea* of the republic], and this is the principle of all things contained under the universal concept of any kind

31 Baumgarten, *Metaph.*, §§165–190, cf. §249.

32 *Metaph.*, §94.

33 *Metaph.*, §185: “... *plūrimōrum maximōrum maximus consensus ad ūnum*” (trans. AK).

34 *Metaph.*, §161.

35 *Diss.* §9.

of perfection, since the lower degrees are considered to be determinable by the delimitation of the maximum.³⁶

Finally, Kant protects himself against a possible misconstruction of his claim that God is merely an ideal, i.e., merely a mental thing with no real existence, like the ideal orator of Cicero's *Orator* (7–10).³⁷ God is only an ideal in that He is the principle of cognizing the perfection of finite things—something that does not exclude his real existence as the cause of the world (*Weltursache*):

Just as God, as the ideal of perfection [*ideāle perfectiōnis*], is the principle of cognition [*principium cognōscendī*], so too is [He] at the same time, as actually existing, the generative ground [*principium fiendī*] of all perfection in general.³⁸

This passage, which no longer appeals to Plato, makes clear that Kant equates the ideal of perfection with the maximum of perfection.

For the Kant of the 1770s, the first principles of moral evaluation of human actions are concepts of the pure Understanding or, for that matter, of pure reason. For Kant, then, moral philosophy requires a purely rational foundation (*Grundlegung*) on Plato's model. Even as late as 1776/78, Kant makes a note in his copy of Baumgarten's *Initia philosophiae practicae primae*: "Plato: morality out of the Idea [*Idee*], not in accordance with inclinations or experiences [*Erfahrungen*]."³⁹ It is on this basis that Kant, following Cicero, sharply rejects Epicurus, considering him to be Plato's antipode and the inspiration of the moral-sense theory of Shaftesbury and his followers. According to Kant, these latter locate the principle of moral evaluation in feelings of desire and aversion, among which they include the so-called moral sense. But for Kant, the true standard of theoretical and practical evaluation [*Beurteilung*] is rather the maximum of a perfection that is only thinkable through the pure Understanding, and that is viewed as something through the delimitation of which lower degrees of perfection can both be generated and measured. For the practical use of reason, Kant insists that such an ideal of perfection designates only that which ought to become actualized through free action (*durch freies Handeln*). This is especially true for the Platonic *Republic*, which in

36 Diss. §9; Reich, 31.

37 Cicero's *Orator* has only one book, to the chapters of which these numbers refer; not to be confused with Cicero's *De Oratore*.

38 Diss. §10.

39 Kant (1934), 177: Refl. 6842.

Meier's *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (*Extract from the Doctrine of Reason*)—a text Kant used in his logic lectures—served as a paradigm of idle dreams. There, Meier urged the student to “connect his studies

with everyday experience, with his engagement in respectable society, and with the use of objects of scholarly contemplation—so that he won't live like just some educated worm, nibbling school-dust and dreaming up Platonic republics.⁴⁰

Kant will recur to this type of anti-Platonism in the first *Critique*. But the fact that he here interprets Plato's *idea* as a mere “Ideal” that has no real existence *per se*, shows that Kant is very well aware of the difference between what “nowadays [*nunc temporis*]”⁴¹ is called an “ideal” and what the term, “ἰδέα”, meant for Plato.

This is shown by the second passage in the *Dissertation*, in which Kant refers to Plato and his theory of ἰδέα. In connection with the distinction of human sensible intuition—be it pure or empirical—and a “divine intuition [*dīvīnus intuitus*]”⁴² Kant writes that the latter is “the ground, not the effect [*prīncipium, nōn principiātum*] of objects”, and, since it is independent, it is also original intuition (*archetypus intuitus*), and therefore completely intellectual (*perfectē intellectuālis*).⁴³ He then says that this divine intuition is just what “Plato called ‘idea’ [*die Idee*]”.⁴⁴ Thus, Kant assumes that Plato's ἰδέα have their place in the divine mind, and that they are simultaneously both God's intellectual and productive intuition. Kant's interpretation of the Platonic ἰδέα as Ideal thus presupposes that Kant himself could not accept what he, Kant, took to be the historically correct understanding of the Platonic ἰδέα. Nevertheless, the ἰδέα, understood as pure Ideal, did meet with Kant's approval, since it can serve moral philosophy as a two-fold paradigm: first, like Kant's own “Idea” (*Idee*), it is a product of the pure Understanding and not of empirical origin; second, it serves as the norm of moral evaluation, and as the goal of free human activity, which the latter ought to approach, even if it cannot be reached.

Kant's use of the Platonic theory of ἰδέα is not without predecessors in his own time. In 1704, the Kiel theologian and philosopher, Georg Pasch, published a philosophical disputation, *De Fictis Rebuspublicis*, dealing with a set

⁴⁰ Meier (1752), 155.

⁴¹ *Diss.*, §9.

⁴² *Diss.*, §25.

⁴³ *Diss.*, §10.

⁴⁴ *Diss.*, §25.

of utopian polities, including Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and d'Allais's *History of the Sevarambes*. Pasch defended these fictional polities, since they deal with human society in the state of nature in which human beings lived before the Fall, whereas the current juridical condition of society under positive laws corresponds to humanity's postlapsarian phase. "Now, we want to claim that the state of nature is perfect [*statum nātūrālem esse perfectum*] and obeys the highest moral good, which consists in the sum-total of all virtues; and that, by contrast, the juridical state is not perfect [*minus perfectum esse*]⁴⁵—for who today lives without misdeed [*sine crimine*]"⁴⁶ Pasch now borrows a Platonic distinction:

The aforementioned state of nature falls under the Understanding [*cadit sub intellēctum*], whereas the juridical state falls under the senses [*sub sēnsū*].... But now you may ask: what is the good of these observations if no society can ever attain to the perfection of that Idea [*ad huius Ideae perfectiōnem*]? I answer: it is enough that we are able to use this Idea [*ex tālī ideā*] to estimate the degrees of perfection of things [*aestimāre gradus perfectiōnum in rebus*] existing outside of mind [*mente*], with which something approaches that Idea more or less closely [*accēdit aliquid ad illam ideam*], and in accordance with which it is to be judged to be more or less perfect [*magis aut minus perfectum cēsendum sit*].⁴⁶

This, he claims, is also the view put forward in Plato's *Republic*,

in the tenth Book of which, the Idea of a perfect republic is presented [*repraesentātur Idea perfectae Reipublicae*]. But human beings will only live in accordance with its constitution when a state exists that is inhabited solely by sages. Hence Plato himself calls it the state of our wishes [*politeia kat' euchēn*]⁴⁷ and a state that exists in thoughts.⁴⁸

Thus, according to Pasch, Plato's *Republic* deals with a non-existent ideal polity which allows us to determine the degree of perfection of existing states, and which human beings ought to approximate in conducting their lives.⁴⁹

45 Pasch (1704), 8.

46 Pasch (1704), 8, f.

47 Pasch here intends what Plato writes at 540d2, but instead of quoting him literally, uses Aristotle's term (*Pol.* 1295a29).

48 Pasch (1704), 14.

49 Cf. Pasch (1704), 10, f.

Thus, although the concept of perfection in morality and politics, as well as its defense through appeal to Plato's theory of ἰδέαι, was thinkable long before Wolff and Kant, yet it was really first through Wolff that it became a central concept of metaphysics and morals. In the second part of his *The Rational Concepts* [Gedanken] of God, etc., in which he explains and elaborates on his "German metaphysics,"⁵⁰ Wolff explains his concern with the "important doctrine of perfection"⁵¹ in ontology by reference to its use in natural theology, for which he appeals to Descartes:

All say after *Cartesius*: God is the most perfect being. We say of each particular property of God that it is the most perfect [sc. property].⁵²

Commensurate with the concept of God as *ēns perfectissimum*, He possesses the "most perfect Understanding [and] Will, the most perfect Power [*Macht*]", etc.⁵³ Following Descartes again, Wolff was concerned with a distinct [*deutlichen*] concept of the "difference of the most perfect [on the one hand], and the imperfect [on the other hand], which latter is in our soul".⁵⁴ For this reason, he thought it was necessary "to investigate in general what perfection in general is, where its gradations and degrees originate, and for which reasons one must evaluate it."⁵⁵ In this way, he held himself to have shown "what is lacking in our properties, so that they do not attain to the highest degree necessary for maximal perfection."⁵⁶ The *maximum perfectiōnis* of the divine properties thus serves as a standard for the determinate cognition of human properties in their imperfection, i.e., in the difference between their degree of perfection with respect to the highest degree of perfection of the properties belonging to the *ēns perfectissimum*.

Wolff sees his contribution to the doctrine of perfection also in this, that he has newly justified a proposition of the Scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals:

Already in Scholastic philosophy one used to say: *omne ēns est perfectum sive bonum*—every thing is perfect or good, that is to say, perfect of its

⁵⁰ Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵¹ Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵² Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵³ Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵⁴ Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵⁵ Wolff (1740), 93 (§45).

⁵⁶ Wolff (1740), 94.

kind. And whoever investigates this according to my reasoning, will be able to understand and prove [sc. that statement].⁵⁷

Moreover, this ontological insight has universal application:

It is therefore possible, on the basis of the reasons [*Gründen*] confirmed by me, to determine [*urtheilen*] of works of nature and art—indeed, of everything real that occurs in them [i.e., in these works] the degree of perfection that they have attained, and how, in respect of this perfection, things of one and the same genus or species are superior to each other.⁵⁸

But it is not only in theoretical philosophy that the concept of perfection is of fundamental importance; it is also indispensable to practical philosophy:

Just as in all things, be they natural or artificial, a perfection is possible that may be reached within its kind, so too we find such a perfection in human actions and in whatever flows from such actions.⁵⁹

To support this statement, Wolff appeals to his ethics and its “law of nature”,⁶⁰ which states: “Do that which makes you and your state more perfect; and do not to that which makes you and your condition less perfect.”⁶¹ Wolff comments in the second part of his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott*:

Now since the human being has a freedom to *determine* his actions, I have accordingly shown in my *Ethics* and my *Politics* that the human being must—in virtue of natural obligation [*Verbindlichkeit*]*—determine* his actions in such a way that maximal perfection is attained both in his [the agent’s] own state, and to the extent that depends on him, [also] in the state of all other human beings, indeed, in his entire conduct.⁶²

Against the possible Pietist objection that instead of speaking of perfection to “us poor pathetic people who are nothing”, he should “rather preach to us of *imperfection*”, Wolff asks:

57 Wolff (1740), 96.

58 Wolff (1740), 96.

59 Wolff (1740), 98.

60 Wolff (1733), 15 (§17).

61 Wolff (1733), 16 (§19).

62 Wolff (1740), 98 (§45).

Where do I speak of perfection? Only there, where I speak of obligation [*Verbindlichkeit*], but not where I describe how human beings actually are. When I speak of how human beings *ought* to be, I am guiding them towards the perfection of their actions and of their development [*Wandels*] as toward something after which they should strive as much as they can [*soviel an Ihnen ist*].⁶³

Then Wolff refers to the agreement of his own doctrine with that of Christ: "I teach nothing in my philosophy but what Christ says in these words: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'⁶⁴".⁶⁵ As to his Pietist opponents' demand that he take into consideration human imperfection, Wolff replies:

I find no better way to come to know the imperfection of man's action and inaction [*Thun und Lassen*] than for me to show him the perfection that is demanded by the law of nature.... Can it happen in any other way than that man sees from the law what he ought to do, or discovers in himself that he has done otherwise than he ought to have done?⁶⁶

Finally, in support of his thesis that the "doctrine of perfection" may serve "to present entire sciences in a thorough fashion", Wolff appeals to an "example from the *Politics*" that only seems to contradict his thesis.

In general, one blames Plato for allegedly having presented community [*das gemeine Wesen*; i.e., the polity] in such perfection as cannot arise among human beings, and therefore uses the terms, "*ideās Platonicās [sic]*", "Platonic dreams", or even "Platonic whims [*Grillen*]" when someone has such high thoughts about something that one could never realize them to such a degree of perfection. Some may perhaps include [under such "dreams"] that politics [*Politick*] wherein one lays down as a foundation for a community [*gemeinen Wesen*] its most perfect form.⁶⁷

63 Wolff (1740), 99 (§45).

64 Matthew 5:48 (KJV).

65 Wolff (1740), 99 (§45).

66 Wolff (1740), 100 (§45).

67 Wolff (1740), 104 (§46).

Wolff thus espouses a politics that lays down the Platonic Idea of a republic as a foundation for human action in society, demarcating its end [*Zweck*] by its *maximum perfectionis*. To be sure, it is true that

human beings misuse their freedom for evil ends, and that the total elimination of such misuse is impossible. But nothing more follows from this fact than that one never attains the perfection of community to the degree to which it [sc. that perfection] is possible. It does not follow, however, that one should not [therefore] have to concern oneself with [reaching] that degree.⁶⁸

Although the maximal degree of a republic's perfection is thus not realizable, yet this *maximum perfectionis* can still determine the political action of the statesman. "For a wise ruler [*kluger Regent*] must constantly have it before his eyes [sc. the highest possible degree of perfection of a republic], and as far as he can, and to give every forethought and care to how one might come as close as possible to it as can ever be practically achieved".⁶⁹ Although Wolff does not here use the word, "Ideal", it is undeniable that what a "wise ruler" must always have in view is exactly what Kant later would call the "Ideal" of a republic, which he took to be the correct interpretation of the Platonic "*idea reipublicae*".⁷⁰

In the section of the first *Critique* called "The Ideas in General,"⁷¹ Kant provides a "preliminary introduction"⁷² to his own doctrine of Ideas, viz., the "System of the Transcendental Ideas),⁷³ in which he deals with Plato's "expression, 'idea', and its meaning."⁷⁴ It is now that, unlike in the *Dissertation*, Kant differentiates between Understanding and Reason. Plato, he alleges, took an "Idea [sc. ἰδέα]" to be "something that not only is never borrowed from the senses, but which even far transcends the concepts of the Understanding with which Aristotle concerned himself [i.e., the categories—Tr.], in that we never encounter anything in experience that is congruent with it".⁷⁵ Thus, according to Kant, a Platonic ἰδέα is a concept that has its origin not in the senses but in Reason, and whose object is not to be found in the empirical world, as is after

68 Wolff (1740), 106 (§46).

69 Wolff (1740), 106.

70 *Diss.*, §9, 30.

71 *KrV*: B369, ff.

72 *KrV*: B376.

73 *KrV*: B390.

74 *KrV*: B370.

75 *KrV*: B370.

all the case with Aristotle's concepts of the Understanding (his Categories). Now the same holds of Kant's "Ideas [*Ideen*]" construed as "concepts of pure Reason".

But now let us turn to the differences between the two conceptions. Kant writes: "The Ideas [*ἰδέαι*] are, for him [sc. Plato] *archetypes* [*Urbilder*] of the things themselves, and not merely keys to possible experiences, like the categories."⁷⁶ So it is here, if not before, that it becomes clear that Kant is using the concepts, "concept", "Understanding", "experience", "category", etc., in his own peculiar sense that we find only in the writings published after 1781. Nonetheless, he assumes that these peculiar concepts not only do not stand in the way of understanding Plato, but that they are especially suited to promoting such understanding. If the Platonic *ἰδέαι* are "archetypes of the things" themselves, then they are evidently not concepts of human Understanding or Reason in Kant's sense—indeed, they may not even be concepts. In the *Dissertation* of 1770, the Platonic Idea was, after all, a divine intuition, which, as the ground of its objects must be called "*archetypus intuitus*", and which is at the same time completely intellectual (*intellektuell*), i.e., a productive intuition of the divine Understanding. By the same token, although the Kantian Categories are something through which experiences of objects are made possible, one would nonetheless not wish to say the same of Aristotle's Categories. Kant is fully aware of the hermeneutic difficulties involved in translating the philosophical terms and problems of antiquity into his own conceptual language. For this reason, he tries, in characterizing the Platonic Ideas, to express himself in a way that is least distorting: "In his [Plato's] opinion, the Ideas flowed out from the highest Reason, and from there they were bestowed on human [Reason], which, [for its part] no longer finds itself in its original state, but must laboriously recall the old, now much obscured Ideas, via Recollection (which is called 'Philosophy')." ⁷⁷

This short passage contains Kant's most important statements about Plato's theory of *ἰδέαι* in a somewhat attenuated description, showing that although Kant endeavors to reach an understanding (*Verständnis*) of Plato's doctrine, he nevertheless rejects it as untenable, in spite of its relative justification and even its paradigmatic value. A sign for the congruence of Kant's Critical understanding of the Platonic Idea with that of the pre-Critical *Dissertation* is his defense of Plato against the criticism of the Platonic republic raised by Brucker and others. Plato's conception, Kant avers,

76 KrV: B370.

77 KrV: B370.

is ... in fact completely correct, in setting up this maximum [i.e., of the perfect State] as an archetype [*Urbilde*], in order to bring, in accordance with that archetype, the legal constitution of human beings ever closer to the greatest possible perfection. For what the highest degree might be at which humanity must come to rest, and thus how great the chasm might be that necessarily remains between the Idea and its realization—no one can and ought to determine these things, for just this reason: it is *freedom* that is able to transcend any given limit.⁷⁸

Here, too, the Platonic Idea of “the Republic” is the Idea of a legal constitution of human beings in its “greatest possible perfection”—that is the *maximum perfectiōnis* of a state’s constitution as the paradigm (*paradeigma*) to be imitated, the “execution” of which in political praxis depends on the human freedom that can “transcend every given limit”, so that the distance between the Idea and its realization through humanity—and thus the magnitude of the “chasm” between them—can be made ever smaller. Even if this approximation cannot completely eliminate the chasm, it can nevertheless transcend any given, already achieved limit, so that there can be no highest degree of approximation lower than complete congruence with the Idea. To this extent, then, Kant can defend Plato.

Thus, Kant’s four theses regarding Plato’s theory of ἰδέαι are the following:⁷⁹

- (1) “The Ideas are, for [Plato], the archetypes [*Urbilder*] of the things themselves”.
- (2) “On [Plato’s] view, they flowed out from the highest Reason”.
- (3) “From the [highest Reason, in turn, the Ideas] have been apportioned to human [Reason], which latter however no longer is in its original state”;
- (4) “rather, [human Reason must] laboriously call back the old, now much obscured Ideas, via Recollection (which is called Philosophy)”.

Of these statements, (2) and (3) find no support at all—or at best very indirectly—in Plato’s texts, so that one might inquire as to their origin.⁸⁰ As far

78 KrV: B373, f.

79 KrV: B370.

80 The sources of Kant’s knowledge of Plato cannot here be exhaustively discussed (cf. Schwaiger [1999], 81, ff., Santozki [2006], 35, ff., 129–48). In addition to texts in Kant’s personal possession, like Cicero (*Orator* 7–10) and Seneca (*Letters to Lucilius*, 58 and 65), Diogenes Laertius (Book 111), and Cudworth (*Systema intellectuāle huius universi*) (ed. Mosheim, 1733), it was Brucker’s *Historia critica philosophiae* that was the main source of Kant’s knowledge of Plato. To this we may add Brucker’s *Historia philosophica doctrinae de Ideis* [HPDI], to which Brucker frequently refers in the Plato-chapter of his history of philosophy, as well as Alcinous’s *Didaskalikos* and Apuleius’s *De Platone et eius dogmate*, which were often reprinted in the Plato-editions available to Kant.

as we know, the only printed text of Plato to which Kant directly refers, is Friedrich Gedike's translation, *Four Dialogues of Plato: Meno, Crito, and Both Alcibiades*, which Kant recommended to the students of his logic lectures in order that they may learn the "Socratic method" from it (probably from the *Meno*).⁸¹

The effluence of the Ideas from the highest Reason points to the Neo-Platonic concept of emanation, which Brucker deploys at several points in his chapter on Plato.⁸² Since Brucker holds the Platonic ἰδέαι to have originated in the philosophy of the Pythagoreans, they have the same origin as numbers, viz., emanation from God.⁸³ For this reason they cannot be mere thoughts and abstractions, but are really existing things within the divine Mind (*Geist*) (*quae vērō ēmānātiō nōn nūdās nōtiōnēs et abstractiōnēs, sed entia realiter existentia, sive ut Platōnice loquāmur, ontōs ontā suppōnit*)⁸⁴—as Aristotle had said, though without mentioning emanations from God. The ἰδέαι, then, are archetypes generated by God out of himself, but on the other hand they also remain within the divine Reason, which God has generated out of himself as well (*cum ratiōnem Deus ex sē ēdūceret, in quā hāc mente suā ideae illae, sive entia intelligibilia existerent*).⁸⁵ This, according to Brucker, is the source of one of the many obscure points of Platonic philosophy. For sometimes Plato speaks of ἰδέαι as if they were thoughts (*Gedanken*) and concepts of the essence of things to which God looks when he wants to create the world, but mostly he describes them as entities that enjoy their own peculiar existence—entities which, to be sure, are contained in the realm of ἰδέαι, i.e., within the divine Reason (*tamquam entia sua quidem pecūliārī substantiā gaudentia, in regiōne tamen ideārum, sive logō Deī comprehensa*).⁸⁶ Brucker appeals to Aristotle not only for the genealogical origin of the Platonic ἰδέαι in the Pythagoreans' doctrine of number and for the substantiality of these ἰδέαι. He also construes the separation of the ἰδέαι from the sensible things, asserted by Aristotle to have been assumed by Plato in contrast to Socrates, as also entailing a separation from the divine Understanding that is its origin, within which the ἰδέαι—by contrast to mere thoughts or notions—have received a peculiar existence of their own.

Those who hold that the Ideas are separated from the divine Understanding [*Verstand*] through their substance [*substantiās ab intellēctū*

81 Stark and Brandt (1987), 134, 153.

82 E.g., *HCP*: 695, 698–700, 721, 724.

83 *ēmānātiōnem rerum sive entium ex summō Deō* (*HCP*: 696).

84 *HCP*: 695.

85 *HCP*: 697.

86 *HCP*: 697.

dīvinō sēparātās], can appeal to Plato and take *Aristotle* as their witness, as well as most of his successors.... For Plato held that the Ideas are not only eternal archetypes of things and thoughts [*nōtiōnēs*] in the divine Understanding, but also substances ... *ex sē per sē ipsās*, imparting their essence to the fluctuating things [*fließenden Dingen*], after having eternally [*von Ewigkeit her*] flowed out of the divine Understanding, in which they have, so to speak, their roots and foundation.⁸⁷

In his history of the theory of *ιδέαι* (*Ideenlehre*) Brucker had already laid down the thesis, supported by numerous sources, that Aristotle was the originator of the view that Plato's *ιδέαι* were separate not only from matter, but absolutely—i.e., from the divine Understanding, as well (*omnīnō et absolūtē, adeōque etiam ab intellēctū dīvinō sēparasse*).⁸⁸ Clearly the theologization of the Platonic theory of *ιδέαι* (beginning at the latest with Alcinous) distorted Brucker's interpretation of Aristotle's reports.

When Kant says of the *ιδέαι* that they have been bestowed upon human Reason by the highest Reason, but that the former no longer exists in its original condition, we can trace this theological justification for the significance of the Ideas for human thought back to Brucker. For Brucker traces the duplicity of human cognition (this time supported by Platonic texts) back to two modes of existence of the human soul. To wit: on the one hand, the soul's cognition is the knowledge it has before descending into its body, viz., the intuition it had of intelligibilia at that time (*sua tum intelligibilia contueātur*).⁸⁹ On the other hand, the soul has a second mode of cognition after it immerses itself in its body; this latter may be called "knowledge of nature [*nōtitia nātūrālīs*]."⁹⁰ This knowledge is, then, properly speaking, a kind of recollection of the intelligibilia that it cognized before its descent into its body. For textual support, Brucker looks to the *Phaedo*'s doctrine of *anamnēsis*, where Plato is said to have laid its foundation. To wit: we must at an earlier time have learned that which we now recollect; and that could not have occurred had our soul not been in some other place whence it descended into this human frame. For certain universal thoughts (*nōtiōnēs generālēs*) are imprinted on our minds, thoughts we necessarily had to have had before we could perceive anything through sensation, and in accordance with which we make our judgments. It follows that we had them before our birth and have forgotten them; and

87 HCP: 698.

88 HPDI: 65, f.

89 HCP: 673.

90 HCP: 673.

that our knowledge, when we regain it, is but a kind of recollection. At this point,⁹¹ Brucker points to Leibniz's view, that Plato's inborn concepts (*nōtittiae innātae*), which he cloaked in the obscure term, "recollection", are nevertheless to be preferred to the *tabulae rāsae* of Aristotle, Locke, and other more recent philosophers.⁹²

Brucker also offers a natural-philosophical explanation for the soul's career, based on the spiritual things (*geistigen Dinge*) that allegedly emanate from God, although Brucker does admit that Plato speaks unclearly and obscurely here, and that his only concern is what he teaches concerning the origin, nature, fall, and present state of the human mind.⁹³ For Plato the more noble part of the human mind (*Geist*) is not only caused by God—it actually stems from or out of God; for since Plato holds that all spiritual things (*alles Geistige*) must spring forth from God as their source, God must also be the source of the spirits of men (*fōns animōrum*).⁹⁴ Of course, God is such a source only through the intermediary World Soul that He creates first, out of whose simple substance he generated the soul of the human being. For this reason, the human soul is not directly taken out of the highest God, but from the World Soul, and correspondingly is not as perfect as the Ideas, but merely occupies the lowest stratum of God's emanations. Thus, for Brucker, it becomes comprehensible that Plato, predisposed as he was to the Doctrine of Recollection, could not have claimed anything else, since he otherwise could offer no reason why the soul would be familiar with the cognition of the sensible things—which can only be gained through the senses—before it, the soul, gets embodied.

The idea that human reason, as Kant says, must struggle to "recall" the "old" ἰδέαι because they are "now much obscured,"⁹⁵ seems to recur to Brucker's presentation of the Cave Allegory. The Allegory, according to Brucker, deals with a man trapped in a cave, seeing only shadow-images. But upon his release and ascent through several stages, he reaches an intuition of the things themselves (*ad intuendās rēs ipsās*), and ultimately continues and ascends to a view of the sun's rays. This, according to Brucker, is a passage in Plato's work suited for the clear understanding of the inherently obscure and difficult theory of forms.⁹⁶ To be sure, Plato does not speak of recollection here. Even Alcinous's

91 HCP: 673.

92 Brucker frequently refers to Michael Gottlieb Hansch's (1716), a treatise solicited by Leibniz, in which Leibniz himself explained his relationship with Plato's philosophy in a letter to the author. It is highly probable that Kant was acquainted with this publication.

93 HCP: 712.

94 HCP: 713.

95 KrV: B370.

96 Cf. HCP: 700.

definition of philosophy, which on Brucker's view is entirely in Plato's spirit, contains no direct indication of the Doctrine of Recollection: philosophy is the liberation (*solūtiō*) of the soul from the body and a kind of conversion (*conversio*) to the things that *are* in truth, and that are seen through the Understanding (*intellēctū videntur*).⁹⁷ This definition is also said to agree with the old definition of philosophy as the knowledge of things both divine and human, since for Plato and his school divine things are nothing other than those divine ideas and the substances existing in themselves.⁹⁸ Here, too, philosophy is not defined as the Doctrine of Recollection. It is likely that Kant's understanding of the Platonic philosophy on this point is based upon a familiarity with Plato's *Phaedrus*, to which he refers in the "Critical Solution of the Cosmological Conflict of Reason With Itself",⁹⁹ when he calls Zeno of Elea "a subtle dialectician [who] was already much blamed by Plato as a wanton sophist, [and who,] in order to show off his art, sought to prove one and the same proposition through likely arguments, but then pivoted and refuted them in turn through other, equally strong arguments."¹⁰⁰ It is impossible that Kant is acquainted with this passage—which refers to *Phaedrus* 261de, where Socrates says of the "Eleatic Palamedes" (Zeno) "that he speaks with such art that the very same things appear to the listeners to be like and unlike, both one and many, at rest and then again in motion"¹⁰¹—from Brucker's history of philosophy, nor again from Bayle-Gottsched's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (*Historisches und kritisches Wörterbuch*), since we cannot find there the details of the Kantian formulation, which are, however, nicely compatible with Plato's text. In this *Phaedrus*, the philosopher is defined through recollection:

For it is necessary that a human being must gain insight in accordance with the so-called εἶδος, proceeding from many sense-perceptions [αἰσθησεων] by reasoning [λογισμῶ] to a consolidated unity. But this just is the recollection of those things that our soul saw journeying with the god, looking down on those things we now say *are*, when it raised its head up to what *really is* [εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως]. Wherefore it is just that the mind [*dia-noia*] of the philosopher alone is winged: for through memory [μνήμη], he is always, as far as possible, in the presence of those very things by which a god, being in the presence of which, is divine.¹⁰²

97 HCP: 670.

98 HCP: 670.

99 KrV: B525, ff.

100 KrV: B530.

101 Greek translated by A.K.

102 *Phdr.* 249bc; Greek translated by A.K.

Of the philosopher described in this way, we may say, with Kant, that his philosophy is called: "Recollection".

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Hegel's Plato: A New Departure

Jere O'Neill Surber

1 Introduction

While other German thinkers before him occasionally referred either to specific Platonic texts or, more typically, some general (usually idealist and dualist) philosophical view that they associated with “Platonism”, G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) was arguably the first philosopher of the modern period who both engaged in a detailed study of Plato’s writings and incorporated its results as an essential element of his own philosophical project. Put quite directly, Hegel regarded Plato’s thought as having commenced in earnest (and not just prefigured) the entire history of the European philosophical tradition, established its basic problems, and provided the keys for Hegel’s own systematic attempt to bring them to a final resolution. While Hegel gave due credit to the philosophical advances of other figures of the tradition—Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Kant, to mention some of the most important for him—it was the problems posed and themes developed by Plato that, more than any other, remained central to his own philosophical project. It would not be an overstatement to claim that it was Hegel who established Plato, in the full complexity and profundity met in his dialogues (and not merely as a cipher for some pre-modern dualistic metaphysical view), as *still* an essential interlocutor in modern philosophy, German or otherwise.

Hegel’s profound appreciation of Plato was anchored by his conviction that the Platonic “idea” (*eidos*) represented the original historical appearance of what Hegel himself would call “the Concept” (*der Begriff*), that “unity of form and content” (or “identity of identity and difference”) whose development toward full systematic articulation constituted the history of philosophy itself. In support of this general thesis, Hegel offered a then (and still) quite heterodox reading of Platonic philosophy that endorsed a synoptic approach to the dialogues as, taken together, expressing a single philosophical insight, but one diversely inflected in individual dialogues in terms of both their themes and the various stylistic features associated with the dialogue form itself. Consistent with his own most fundamental philosophical convictions and

method, Hegel's novel interpretation of Platonic philosophy presented it as the original dynamic unity of diverse, but always only partial, philosophical perspectives. It was, perhaps, in this respect that Hegel's reading of the dialogues most influenced the subsequent reception of Plato in the German-speaking lands.

2 Background

It is this vital and distinctively *philosophical* role that Plato played in Hegel's own thought that merits special emphasis in considering the broader influence of Plato upon later German thought. To appreciate the novelty of Hegel's encounter with Plato, we should remember that it was not until the earliest phase of the modern period that the first, now canonical, edition of the Platonic dialogues appeared: the parallel Latin-Greek edition of Henricus Stephanus in 1578, whose pagination remains the standard form of citation. Further, it was not until Hegel's own contemporary, Friedrich Schleiermacher,¹ with collaboration by Friedrich Schlegel,² published the first volume of translations of the Platonic dialogues into German in 1804 (and continuing until 1828),³ that this body of work became available to readers without formal academic training in ancient Greek language and culture. This translation project was especially important for Hegel, whose education at the *Tübinger Stift* provided only a basic education in classical languages necessary for the preparation of its students for the Lutheran ministry. Hegel almost certainly could not have read Plato in the original Greek without at least some assistance from a translation.

In fact, it was not until the beginnings of German Classicism in the generation before Hegel's, with figures such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Gotthold Lessing, followed and popularized by the young Goethe and Schiller, that the French and English Enlightenments' preference for Roman models began to give way to a rediscovery of ancient Greek culture as, in significant ways, spiritually richer and more profound than the Roman. Of course, some general version of Platonism had long been an important element of theological thought, especially through the widespread influence of St. Augustine. Various Platonic themes had also served as a source of inspiration for poetic

¹ See Laks and Szlezák in this volume.

² All references to Schlegel in this chapter are to (Karl Wilhelm) Friedrich Schlegel, not his brother, August Wilhelm.

³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *PW*; see bibliography to André Laks' chapter for publication details.

or more generally aesthetic reflections, continuing into the modern era with Moses Mendelssohn's *Phädon* (1767),⁴ and certain works by Schlegel and the Jena Romantics.⁵ There were also the stirrings of modern interest in the works of Plato from various historical, classicist, or antiquarian perspectives. However, prior to Hegel, there was no concerted attempt both to study, in detail, the actual (or translated) texts of the Platonic dialogues or to confront the issues that they presented in the context of a vital and direct philosophical engagement. On these grounds, Hegel might fairly be regarded as the first modern *philosophical* reader of the texts constituting the Platonic corpus.

3 The Centrality of Platonic Thought for Hegel's Philosophical Project

Occasional references to Plato are scattered throughout most of Hegel's works across his career, though usually more as representing a general philosophical position than to any specific Platonic text. In this sense, Hegel differs little from some other figures. However, as an "external" indication of the actual significance of Plato's thought for Hegel's own philosophical project, the place Hegel accords his discussion of Plato in his groundbreaking lecture series on the history of philosophy⁶ is revealing, constituting, as it does, Hegel's primary sustained and detailed discussion of Plato. Roughly the first third of these lectures is devoted to introductory material, as well as the pre-Socratic philosophers through the sophists and Socrates. The middle third deals with Plato and Aristotle through the Neo-Platonists. The final third includes early Christian and Islamic thought, medieval philosophy, and all of modern philosophy, including that of Kant and of Hegel's own German Idealist contemporaries, Fichte and Schelling. Of the middle third of these lectures, Hegel's discussion of Plato is slightly longer than that of Aristotle, the two together constituting about half of that third of the lectures. This is to say that Hegel's discussion of Plato is the longest section of the entire lecture series devoted to a single thinker. By comparison, Hegel devotes less than half as much space to his discussion of Kant and half again as much to Leibniz (though this comparison may not be entirely indicative of Hegel's priorities, since he may have simply sensed, by this point in his lectures, that he was running out of time!).

Whether or not it is fair to read these lectures as any accurate indication of Hegel's actual philosophical priorities, there were also reasons deeply rooted

4 See also Rosenstock in this volume.

5 See also Szlezák in this volume.

6 Cf. Bibliographical Note at the end of this essay.

in his own novel conception of philosophy that pointed to Plato as a pivotal figure. Put simply, Plato's philosophy was the point where Hegel's two most general philosophical concerns converged. On the one hand, Hegel's view of philosophy was novel in maintaining that the very enterprise of philosophy was teleological, that it followed a logical course of development from its origins in pre-Socratic thought up to his own time. Indeed, both his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and its companion-work, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* aimed to demonstrate exactly this, though from differing perspectives. On the other hand, he was equally concerned to show that the culmination or *telos* of this development could be nothing other than a systematic synthesis of the "Truth" which each previous historically appearing philosophy expressed, though only partially. That is, the dominant vectors of Hegel's overall philosophical project were, on the one hand, historical and, on the other, systematic.

For Hegel, Plato's thought represented the original point of intersection of these two vectors which, when fully developed, would eventuate in his own historically grounded system of philosophy. Hegel's lengthy (and, taken on its own, entirely original) discussion of the pre-Socratics, followed by his discussion of Plato, was designed to demonstrate how the historically opposed views of Parmenidean Being and Heraclitean Becoming were taken up and synthesized, though always only problematically, in Plato's philosophy. For Hegel, it was precisely the progressive series of historical attempts to mediate or resolve the fundamental *aporiai* developed in Platonic philosophy (all ultimately tracing back to the fundamental opposition of Being and Becoming) that launched the history of the enterprise of philosophy itself, as Hegel understood it. However, in considering this historical development from its beginning in Plato's encounter with the pre-Socratics, Hegel was also convinced that this process was not merely haphazard or historically contingent but possessed a determinate direction and logical structure that, once sufficiently developed, could (and should) be presented in the form of a comprehensive philosophical system. It was exactly this task of effecting the "second (and full) convergence" of the vectors of history and system which guided and defined Hegel's own philosophical efforts. For Hegel, then, the *aporiai* of Platonic thought represented the Alpha, and his own philosophical system the Omega of philosophy as a distinctive discipline, the two connected, of course, by the logical succession of intermediate philosophical standpoints.⁷

⁷ See Hegel's own lengthy Introduction to the *LHP* for an extended presentation of this.

4 Hegel's Fundamental Assumption as a Reader of Plato

Valid enough as this may be as a general characterization of the importance of Plato's thought to Hegel's own philosophical project, the preceding requires the addition of a crucial insight which Hegel credits to Plato himself. It is an insight so important that it serves as the leitmotif for Hegel's entire interpretation of Plato in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and makes Hegel's reading of Plato entirely unique up to his day. According to Hegel, Plato not only established the basic questions to be confronted by all subsequent philosophy but also (to the credit of his "philosophical genius", as Hegel liked to put it) hit upon the most fundamental key to responding to them. This was the notion of the "idea" or "concept" (Hegel: *Begriff*), viewed as what Hegel called a "concrete universal". For Hegel, Plato was the first philosopher to see that an "idea" or "concept" (*eidos* for Plato, *Begriff* for Hegel) must always and necessarily be regarded as a *unity* of form and content. (Thus, on Hegel's view, the traditional English translation of "*eidos*" as "form" would be at best highly misleading, and at worst simply wrong.) For Hegel (believing himself to follow Plato on this point), speaking of "form" without "content" is as meaningless or contradictory as speaking of a "content" lacking all "form". Put differently, we cannot consistently "think pure form" devoid of all "content" any more than we can "think mere content", dissociated from some formal principle that allows us to refer to "*this* content" rather than any other random assemblage of elements.⁸

On another, more detailed approach, most prominent and explicit in his *Science of Logic*, Hegel explains that every Platonic "*eidos*" (or Hegelian "*Begriff*") is an "identity-in-difference".⁹ That is, the formal element of an idea or concept serves the function of unifying (or synthesizing) its multiple contents, while the "contentual element" ("das inhaltliche Element") involves a determinate set of differences that are unified. Of course, one can attempt to abstract the "universal form" from its "content" (as has all too often, according

8 Hegel makes this point explicitly at various points throughout his works. For examples, see his extended critique of "formalism" in the Preface to the "Jena Phenomenology" (Sec. 42, ff.), and in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*.

9 For Hegel's most detailed discussion of "identity", "difference", and "identity-in-difference", see *WL* 1: 258, ff.; *SL*: 409, ff. For his equating of Plato's "*eidos*" with his own "*Begriff*", see *WL* 11: 241–3; *SL*: 830–3. This section of Hegel's *Science of Logic* also contains a discussion of the relation between Plato's idea of "dialectic" and Hegel's own, the gist of which is that Plato's "dialectic" remained to a large extent "negative" in result, while Hegel's own produces ever higher "conceptual unities." Hegel attributes this to the fact, which he emphasizes in the *LHP* (discussed below), that Plato lacked both the modern idea of system and of a logical method appropriate to its articulation.

to Hegel, occurred in the history of philosophy), but the result, for Hegel and, as he claims, Plato, will no longer count as a genuine idea or concept, only an empty and meaningless cipher (in the case of form) or an unintelligible and inexpressible assemblage (in the case of content). Only the *unity* of form and content, and neither one nor the other alone, can be consistently regarded as an “idea” or “concept”.

5 Hegel on Fundamental Misreadings of Plato

Given this novel and quite heterodox way of understanding the Platonic “ideas” (ἰδέαι or εἰδή), it is not surprising that Hegel would reject most, if not all, traditional and contemporaneous interpretations of Plato. In the *VGP*, he singles out two readings especially to be avoided. Though they tend in different directions and usually occur at different historical points, they both share the flaw of “hypostatizing” thought or ideas (universals), on the one hand, and sensory experience (particulars), on the other.¹⁰

The first erroneous reading reduces the Platonic ideas to “properties of existing sensible things”, then abstracts them from the things and, in effect, makes them into another, albeit “super-sensible”, thing, which nonetheless in some sense exists alongside or over sensible things. Hegel regards such a view as severing the crucial connection between the Platonic ideas and thought itself as a dynamic process, thereby turning the Platonic ideas into “something out there”, and rendering them external to “their own true medium”, namely thought. Hegel, then, entirely rejects any view of Plato’s ideas as some sort of transcendent universals thinkable apart from the sensible particulars that they serve to unify under themselves. This criticism applied as well to Aristotle’s account of Plato’s ideas, much of medieval thought regarding the “Platonist” position with respect to the problem of universals, and probably even to the general direction of Schlegel and the Jena Romantics’ interpretation of Plato.

The second mistaken interpretation that Hegel cites is the view that ideas are “mere concepts”, understood in a more or less psychological sense as creations or functions of the mind. For Hegel, this “immanentist” view of the Platonic ideas severs the crucial connection between ideas and sensible things, turning the Platonic ideas into what we might, today, call “mental (or maybe linguistic) constructs” lacking any “objective” existence of their own. Clearly, this criticism is aimed at all ancient or modern nominalist readings, as well

¹⁰ *VGP*: 423–25; *LHP*: 2, 30–31.

as interpretations of the Platonic ideas viewed through modern empiricist or Kantian lenses. It might be added that the sort of “Kantianized Platonism” (or “Platonized Kantianism”?) developed in such Romantic works as Schlegel's lectures on “*Transcendentale Philosophie*” (Jena, 1800/01) would, on Hegel's view, err on this score as well, making them doubly erroneous (in that such interpretations both hypostatize the ideas from sensible particulars *and* tend to treat them as mental constructs), thereby firmly delineating Hegel's own philosophical distance from them.

From here, it is but a short path to what may be, for many both traditional and more recent readings of Plato, the most radical general outcome of Hegel's interpretation. On grounds already discussed, Hegel flatly rejects any “two-world” interpretation of Plato. Clearly, if Plato's ideas are necessarily indissoluble unities of form and content, and if they cannot be regarded as separate from the sensible particulars that they unify, then there can be no relevant metaphysical distinction between a “world of ideas (or universals)” and a “world of sensible things (or particulars)”. Hegel does concede that there are, in fact, dialogues (like the *Phaedo*) which seem to assume or argue in favor of such a difference, but he tends to regard these as results of the fact that Plato, lacking any notion of systematic reflection or presentation, was forced to consider the ideas from varying perspectives, some of which would inevitably emphasize one of their aspects at the expense of others (more on this below). However, Hegel, as one of the first “synoptic” readers of Plato's dialogues, suggests that, taken as a whole, the dialogues not only fail to support but indeed, in important instances, explicitly undermine any “two-world” interpretation of Plato. Following this conviction, Hegel's discussions of specific dialogues tend to be quite consistently free of any such assumption.

It is worth noting that Hegel's heterodox reading Plato on these issues significantly affects his subsequent interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy more generally. A case in point is Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's relation to Plato. If one accepts Hegel's interpretation of Plato on these matters, the question naturally arises: How does Hegel distinguish Plato and Aristotle's respective views of idea (or “form”) in relation to its “content” (or “matter”)? To begin with, it is instructive to note that, in Hegel's otherwise detailed discussion of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the section of the *VGP* immediately following that on Plato, he only mentions in passing Aristotle's extended critique of the Platonic ideas in *Metaphysics* A (990, ff.). Rather, Hegel suggests that “although the Idea of Plato is in itself essentially concrete and determined, Aristotle goes further” insofar as—thanks to his concepts of substance, *energeia*, and *dunamis*—“the relation of the moments in it can be more closely specified, and this relation of the moments to each other is to be conceived of as nothing

other than activity”.¹¹ Hegel, then, is suggesting the quite heterodox view that both Plato and Aristotle seek to express the same “concrete universal” or “*Begriff*” in their respective philosophies and, as such, do not significantly differ on such commonly cited issues as the hypostatization of form and content, or a two- versus one-world view. Rather, their difference lies in the fact that Aristotle’s philosophical approach permits a more complex and “concrete” determination of the *same* philosophical idea or *Begriff*, and injects into it a certain dynamic quality lacking in Plato. For Hegel, then, Aristotle’s philosophical stance should not be regarded as opposed to Plato’s but as a further development of what is already implicit within it (an approach subsequently employed throughout Hegel’s account of the history of philosophy).

6 Hegel’s Operative “Hermeneutic Principles” for Reading Plato

The fact that Hegel was arguably the first to read Plato’s dialogues from a distinctively philosophical perspective both in individual detail and viewed as a whole corpus of texts has already been suggested. Beyond this, however, while Hegel seems mostly to have steered clear of the contemporaneous “hermeneutical” debates of his time, he does introduce his discussion of Plato with some explicit reflections amounting to a sort of “limited (or regional) hermeneutics” for reading the dialogues. The following is a brief summary of these principles.

- (1) Hegel firmly rejects any approach to Plato that relies upon some “esoteric” Platonic teaching, be it an oral tradition sometimes mentioned by Aristotle; others sometimes alleged by mystical movements or societies more common in his time than ours; or even the often contested Platonic *Letters*. As Hegel flatly puts it, “In the Dialogues of Plato, his philosophy is quite clearly expressed”¹²—one is tempted to add, “and if not there, then not at all”.
- (2) Hegel is one of the first modern readers of Plato to draw attention and devote great attention to the philosophical significance of the dialogue form in which Plato expressed his thought.¹³ Still, while he generally acknowledges as relevant, and occasionally cites in his readings of individual dialogues such aspects of specific dialogues as their settings, historical context, *dramatis personae*, dramatic form, and other textual

11 VGP: 507; LHP: 2, 139.

12 VGP: 410; LHP: 12 (This statement occurs within Hegel’s extended polemic directed against any interpretation of Plato based upon “esoteric” sources.).

13 VGP: 412, ff.; LHP: 14, ff.

and contextual elements, he generally avoids dwelling on these features, usually directing the reader's attention away from the literary and toward the distinctively philosophical issues involved.

- (3) While Hegel credits the dialogue form as a device born of Plato's "genius" for presenting his thought, his praise is immediately qualified by the suggestion that, while it was the perfect (and maybe only) available vehicle for the expression of Plato's thought at the time, it was severely limited as an adequate medium for philosophical discourse.¹⁴ Here, Hegel is, of course, evaluating the dialogue form from his own much later perspective of "*wissenschaftlich*" method and system, and his complaint is that Plato, simply by his historical position, lacked any idea of these features that would have allowed him the means for adequate expression. Hegel does, however, eventually go to lengths to blunt his criticism by expressing seemingly genuine admiration that Plato was able to accomplish what he did given the intrinsic limitations of his form of expression.¹⁵
- (4) As mentioned earlier, Hegel is firmly committed not only to interpreting certain dialogues individually in considerable detail, but also to maintaining a synoptic overview of their philosophical significance and even sometimes "correcting" his own readings of individual dialogues from this perspective. On this score, he tends to regard each dialogue as opening a unique perspective on the overall "Truth" that Plato is attempting to express. Hegel also at times indicates how a particular aspect of an individual dialogue amplifies the reader's understanding of that "Truth".¹⁶ Hegel's interpretive sensitivity to the mutual dependence of whole (the *corpus platonicum*) and part (an individual dialogue) seems to echo Schleiermacher's contemporaneous development of the "hermeneutic circle".
- (5) As innovative and sensitive a reader of Plato as Hegel attempts to be, there can, in the end, be little question that Hegel approached Plato's dialogues with a twofold agenda. Its first aim was to establish Plato's thought as occupying a specific and central position within the history of philosophy as Hegel himself viewed it. The second was, so far as the limitations of the dialogue form allowed, to introduce a sort of "proto-systematic" structure into the collective corpus of the Platonic dialogues. If

14 VGP: 412, ff.; LHP: 14, ff. Hegel writes: "The beauty of this form [the dialogue] is highly attractive; yet we must not think, as many do, that it is the most perfect form in which to present Philosophy; it is peculiar to Plato, and as a work of art is of course to be much esteemed".

15 Cf., for example, Hegel's concluding summary of his view of Plato at VGP: 490; LHP: 116.

16 See VGP: 411; LHP: 13 for one among several passages where Hegel develops this point.

occasional forcing seems to occur, Hegel's response would likely be that that is the price to be paid for according Plato full respect as a philosophical interlocutor.

7 Hegel's Selection of Dialogues

Despite his professed inclinations to be synoptic, Hegel did, in fact, favor certain dialogues for sustained discussion and analysis and downplay or ignore others. To begin with groups of dialogues that seem to be less important to him and therefore receive relatively less of his attention, three are worth noting. First, following from the preceding discussion, Hegel tends to devote relatively little attention to dialogues, perhaps best represented by the *Phaedo*, that seem to endorse or be based upon a "two-world" view, or one that hypostatizes ideas and sensible things. Second, dialogues dealing with more epistemological issues, such as *Theaetetus* and *Meno*, tend to be of relatively less interest to him. Finally, with the exception of the *Sophist* and *Philebus*, Hegel pays little attention to other dialogues involving encounters of Socrates with sophists, for example, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*.

Instead, he concentrates on three dialogues in particular: *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, and *Republic*. The first thing to notice is that none of them, at least on Hegel's readings, seems to endorse a "two-worlds" or "hypostatic" view of the sort found, perhaps most explicitly, in the *Phaedo*. Rather, as Hegel reads them, the *Parmenides* is arguably the single dialogue most overtly critical of such a view; *Timaeus* adopts a genealogical and cosmological approach mostly irrelevant to, or at least distant from such assumptions; and the *Republic* seems, at times, to endorse such a view and, at others, to "deconstruct" it. As Hegel's approach seems to suggest, it is exactly in such dialogues in which the "two-worlds" or "hypostatic" view is either contested or absent, that Plato best succeeds in articulating "the Concept" as "concrete universal". Put in other terms, what, for Hegel, is most salient about these three dialogues is that they deal with issues that he regarded as fundamental for philosophy, in more expansive and even "proto-systematic" ways than many of the dialogues of more limited scope. Introducing his readings of these dialogues, he explicitly observes that the *Republic* and *Timaeus*, read together with the *Parmenides*, "constitute the entire body of Platonic philosophy".¹⁷

17 VGP: 439 The translation provided is my own, since the Haldane and Simson translation seems somewhat misleading. Cf. LHP: 49.

Beyond this, Hegel explicitly notes that his focus on these three dialogues has an additional motivation: they, more than any others, anticipate, if “through a glass and darkly”, the structure of his own mature philosophical system. In the *LHP* and elsewhere, he refers to the *Parmenides* as the source and forerunner, unique in the entire history of philosophy, of his *Science of Logic*. “The fully worked-out and genuine dialectic is, however, contained in the *Parmenides*—that most famous masterpiece of Platonic dialectic”.¹⁸ In reference to the *Timaeus*, Hegel writes that “the Idea thus makes its appearance as expressed in its concrete determinateness, and the Platonic Philosophy of Nature hence teaches us to have a better knowledge of the reality of the world”.¹⁹ Finally, the *Republic*, on his reading, not only contains an entire “philosophy of spirit” *in nuce*, but presents, in its middle sections, the “idea of the Good”, which he regards as the historical avatar of his own “Absolute Spirit”.²⁰ It is important to note that these three highest order concepts (*Begriffe*)—the Logical Concept, Nature, and Absolute Spirit—function, in Hegel’s own thought, as the three richest and most developed “concrete universals” (and “moments” of his own mature system), which explains why Hegel favors the three dialogues that (respectively) most clearly express them.

8 Hegel’s Summary of His View of Plato

As explained above, Hegel’s most extended and detailed discussion of Plato occurred as part of a series of lectures on the history of philosophy. In keeping with this format, Hegel concludes his discussion of Plato, presumably for the benefit of his listeners, with an explicit summary of the interpretation that he has offered.²¹ It deserves consideration since it represents the most concentrated statement of the results of Hegel’s engagement with Plato to be found in his entire corpus.

In this summary, Hegel is primarily concerned to reiterate and emphasize the following points. By virtue of the fact that Plato was the first thinker to understand ideas as “concrete universals” (genuine *Begriffe* in Hegel’s terms), his thought must be regarded as the effective beginning of the history of philosophy (which Hegel himself often described as the “history of the Concept”).

18 VGP: 452; LHP: 56.

19 VGP: 457; LHP: 71.

20 Cf. VGP: 471; LHP: 90 where Hegel explicitly labels the section devoted to his discussion of the *Republic*, “*Philosophie des Geistes*”.

21 VGP: 490; LHP: 116.

Viewed from this perspective, the pre-Socratics must be regarded as “proto-philosophers” whose thought provided the materials for the genuine emergence of philosophy with Plato. However, Hegel suggests that there is something of a “stroke of genius” at work in Plato’s accomplishment, since Plato’s form of expression, the philosophical dialogue, was wholly inadequate for articulating his deepest insights. In particular, and in part related to the limitations of the dialogue form, Hegel observes that Plato lacked the three essential “notions” that would have allowed this: the idea of a “scientific” or “logical” method of proceeding (i.e., Hegel’s idea of dialectic, not Plato’s, though, in certain limited respects, anticipated by the latter); the notion of systematic organization (the *locus classicus* of the statement of which was the concluding section of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled “*Transcendentale Methodenlehre*”); and (Hegel adds, anticipating subsequent discussions in his lectures) the “subjectivity of the Concept (*der Begriff*)”, which would not be developed until modernity.

Taking a step back from Hegel’s summary, it is clear that, in his overall assessment of Plato’s role in the history of philosophy, Hegel is drawing upon another version of the “form/content” distinction that he frequently employs to describe the underlying structure of the history of philosophy.²² Put in these terms, Hegel is claiming that, while Plato discovered (or invented) the “true content” of philosophy (i.e., the “concrete universal” or *Begriff*), he lacked the “systematic form” (and its historical presuppositions) necessary for its adequate articulation. Of course, one implication of such a claim is that, until the time of Hegel, all other previous philosophers must also have lacked such an adequate form of expression, although it did gradually develop as the “Concept” became increasingly “concrete” and less “abstract”. However, the significant point with respect to Plato was that this distinctively Hegelian view of the history of philosophy served to justify viewing Plato’s thought as the authentic origin of this history and including Plato as a full and irreplaceable interlocutor for all subsequent philosophy. Hegel would not have gone so far as to regard all later European philosophy as but “a series of footnotes to Plato” (Whitehead), but he would have decisively rejected any view of Plato’s thought as just one among other philosophical positions or alternatives, as dualistic or hypostatic readings of Plato tend to do. However, Hegel might well have agreed to the claim that his own philosophy was exactly that of Plato, articulated in a modern systematic form. If so, that would represent a full philosophical

22 Hegel presents (or at least refers to) this view of the teleological development of the history of philosophy in most of the prefaces or introductions to his major works. Its most explicit and developed statement is contained in the lengthy Introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

appropriation of Plato, and establish his thought in the central position, even for modernity, that Hegel believed it deserved.

9 Conclusion: Hegel's Role in the German Reception of Plato

Any brief or straightforward account of the overall role of Hegel's interpretation of Platonic philosophy in the context of its broader German reception is not feasible. We can, and have already, discussed its role among other contemporaneous engagements with Hegel. To restate the most important points: Hegel was the first German academic philosopher to read and discuss the Platonic texts in detail, and to establish them as an essential and vital element of contemporaneous philosophical discussion. In his approach, Hegel clearly disentangled Plato's philosophy from the earlier theological, esoteric, literary, and antiquarian contexts in which it had formerly been discussed. In Hegel's hands, Plato first became a full and active member of the modern philosophical faculty (so to speak). Of course, Hegel went even further than this (in fact, overreaching, some would say), casting Plato's philosophy as the single most important historical avatar of his own thought. Certainly, for Hegel, establishing the relevance of Plato's philosophy to any contemporaneous philosophical discussion went hand in hand with his view that it both served as the origin and prefigured the destination of Hegel's own philosophical project. However, in terms of the overall German reception of Plato, it is wise to distinguish these two aspects of Hegel's reading of Plato, since one might well grant the continuing philosophical relevance of Plato's philosophy without agreeing that a major reason for this was the role it played in Hegel's own philosophical project.

As to the subsequent influence of Hegel's interpretation of Plato, it is important to observe that Hegel's main reflections on Plato were delivered as part of a lecture series held on several occasions²³ and were not published in his lifetime. The material on which these lectures were based included Hegel's own notes as well as fair copies, sometimes with interpolated comments and summations, by some of his auditors. As a result, ever since the period of their original appearance between 1832 and 1845, the status of the texts and editions reconstructed from them has been and continues to be controversial. Perhaps even more significant was the fact that a great deal of Hegel's more detailed and nuanced work on various topics, including Plato's philosophy, was overshadowed, beginning even before his death in 1831, by broader controversies swirling around his overall viewpoint and its political implications, involving,

23 See the Bibliographical Note below.

among others, heated disputes between “Left” and “Right Hegelians”. Also, the fact that classical philology (including its application to Platonic texts) had already made significant headway in the German-speaking lands in establishing itself as an academic discipline separate from the philosophy faculty might be added to this list. The overall result was that there is no unbroken line of influence of Hegel’s reading of Plato leading from Hegel’s time into its immediate future.

To be sure, Plato’s thought played important philosophical roles for the generations directly following Hegel, including such figures as Arthur Schopenhauer²⁴ and Friedrich Nietzsche,²⁵ but their approaches to Plato were neither that of Hegel nor, in any significant way, influenced by his. This remains true for later Neo-Kantian readings of Plato such as that of Paul Natorp.²⁶ Perhaps one can discern some later commonality (if not direct influence) with Hegel’s view of Plato in those thinkers, like Martin Heidegger²⁷ and Hans-Georg Gadamer,²⁸ who, at least in their general approaches to Plato, rejected any “two-world” theory as an operative assumption or focus of their own readings. And one might observe that the “two fundamental principles” of “the One” and “the Dyad”, cited by the so-called Tübingen School as constituting the basis of Plato’s “unwritten doctrines”, strongly resemble Hegel’s account (itself having nothing to do with any unwritten Platonic teaching) of Platonic “ideas” as “identities-in-difference”.²⁹ However, none of this is intended to suggest any specific, direct, or enduring influence of Hegel’s reading of Plato. Perhaps it suffices to say that its primary effects were to free Plato’s philosophy from a mass of traditional entanglements, establish it as a living source for further distinctly philosophical reflection, and anticipate at least certain aspects of the directions which this philosophical liberation of Platonic thought enabled.

Bibliographical Note

The standard critical edition of the works of Hegel is *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Gesammelte Werke*, assembled under the auspices of the *Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste*³⁰ (Hamburg,

24 See Wicks in this volume.

25 See Bett in this volume.

26 See Lembeck in this volume.

27 See Gonzalez in this volume.

28 See Renaud in this volume.

29 See Höhle in this volume.

30 Previously, the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften*.

1968–2017: Meiner). Each volume, of which there are now more than thirty, was assigned to one or more individual editors. In particular, Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* originally appeared in two parts: 1812/13 and 1816. It will be cited as “WL” (I or II) and comprises two volumes of the critical edition: vol. 11, (1978) and vol. 12 (1981), F. Hogemann, and W. Jaeschke (eds).

The critical edition is currently occupied with the final editing and publication of the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, which Hegel delivered on six occasions in Berlin between 1816–17 and his death in 1831, and which are projected to appear in six volumes of the critical edition. At present, the most recent edition of this lecture series remains *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Erster Teil*, ed. M. Holzinger (Berlin, 2013). It is based upon the edition of E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel (Frankfurt am Main, 1979: Suhrkamp), which is, in turn, based upon K. Michelet's edition of 1833–36. Holzinger's edition (first part) will be cited as “VGP.”

The standard English translation of the *Wissenschaft der Logik* is *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst, N.Y., 1969: Humanity Books) and will be cited as “SL.” The best-known and generally serviceable (if not most recent) translation of the *Vorlesungen* is *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols., trans. E. Haldane and F. Simson (London, 1896: Routledge and Kegan Paul) and will be cited as “LHP,” followed by the volume number of this translation. Thus, the following citations to Hegel will be to either “WL (I or II)” or “VGP”, followed by the corresponding English passages in either “SL” or “LHP” and the appropriate volume number.

Schleiermacher on Plato: From Form (*Introduction to Plato's Works*) to Content (*Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory*)

André Laks

Plato was a major point of reference and important intellectual tool for numerous post-Kantian thinkers struggling to overcome Kant's transcendental idealism, with its unwelcome division between the unknowable "thing in itself" and what the object is "for us" under the conditions of experience.¹ Yet nowhere—not in Schlegel, Schelling, Humboldt, or Hegel—does Plato occupy a more central, stable, or elaborate place than in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.² Interpreters have often spoken of Schleiermacher's "Platonism". While the exact implications of this general label need to be specified,³ it does capture the fact that Schleiermacher's references to Plato throughout his philosophical works are numerous and usually very positive—indeed, always, when the first principles of philosophy are at stake. This is especially the case in his *Discourses on Religion*; his lectures on *Dialectic*, on *Ethics*, and *Aesthetics*; in various lectures given at the Berlin Academy; and most densely in the work I shall examine here in some detail, the *Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory* (*Grundlinien einer Kritik bisherigen Sittenlehre*). But there is, in addition to these philosophical works, Schleiermacher's translation of the majority of Plato's dialogues into German, together with related exegetical work, which he pursued throughout his life and which makes him an absolutely unique

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- 1 A slightly different version of this article has been published in French (*Archives de Philosophie* 26 [2014]: 259–79) and in Spanish (*Interpretatio* [UNAM, Mexico City], Vol. 1, no. 1 [2016]: 35–61). References to Schleiermacher's general *Introduction* to his translation of Plato use the pagination of the second edition (B) of *PW* (*Platons Werke*), 1.1. References to the other introductions of individual dialogues are to the pagination of the second edition of *PW*, 1.2. The *Grundlinien* are cited according to the critical edition by E. Herms, in the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe (KGA)* (Complete Critical Edition), 1.4, 27–357. These references are indicated by "Grundlinien", followed by the relevant page numbers.
 - 2 On Plato's key role in post-Kantian thought, see, among others, Vieillard-Baron (1979), and Asmuth (2006).
 - 3 On Schleiermacher's "Platonism", see Vorsmann (1968); Gadamer (1984, 1969); Moretto (1984); Neschke-Hentschke (2008, 1990), 117, ff.; Rohls (2000); Brino (2007a, 2007b).

figure in the philosophical landscape of his time.⁴ In fact, Schleiermacher, the philosopher and theologian, is considered—correctly, and in a sense to be elaborated below—to be the founding father of modern, i.e., “historical” Plato-studies. He published the first volume of his translation together with its famous *Introduction* in 1804; the last volume appeared in 1828, six years before his death. The impact of this immense work, which he began in collaboration with Friedrich Schlegel, but had to continue on his own,⁵ was tremendous, in two respects. First, in spite of some negative reactions, especially by his chief rival, the great philologist, Friedrich August Wolf,⁶ the translation itself was celebrated as the linguistic masterpiece it is, attracting admiration far beyond Germany’s borders.⁷ Second, the ideas and thesis developed in the *Introduction* regarding Plato’s specific mode of exposition triggered a long series of new editions, studies, and debates, that constitute the core of the “Platonic Question,” i.e., the question regarding the order of composition of the dialogues, and the relationship between chronology and Plato’s philosophical development (or lack thereof).

Schleiermacher’s own views on this question did not survive very long. It is true, of course, that Immanuel Bekker (who was to produce the standard edition of Aristotle’s works) dedicated the first volume of his *Platonis Dialogi, graece et latine* to Schleiermacher, “Plato’s Renewer [*dem Erneuerer Platons*]”,⁸ and that he edited the dialogues in the order Schleiermacher proposed in the *Introduction*. Thus, Bekker’s edition opens with the *Phaedrus*, which, for reasons that will become clearer below, Schleiermacher took to be Plato’s first work.⁹ However, Johann Gottfried Stallbaum decisively countered this view as early as 1832, in his edition of the *Phaedrus*. A few years later, Karl Friedrich Hermann criticized Schleiermacher’s chronology in the first volume of his *Geschichte und System der Platonischen Philosophie* (1839), and questioned,

4 Schleiermacher did not have time to complete the entire translation. In particular, he did not translate the *Timaeus*, which, as we shall see, was of primary importance to him. Other untranslated dialogues include the *Critias* (closely associated with the *Timaeus*) and the *Laws*, which Schleiermacher did not consider a crucially important work (cf. n. 22 and Schleiermacher’s *Introduction*, 51).

5 On the story of this enterprise, see Dilthey (1970), 37–62 and 72–5. Interpretive and philosophical disagreements between Schlegel and Schleiermacher eventually made collaboration impossible.

6 Wolf ridiculed Schleiermacher’s lengthy and “syrup-like” sentences (see Arndt 1996, li, n. 21).

7 Schleiermacher’s translation is still in print today, some 200 years after its first publication. As early as 1825, Leopardi called for an Italian equivalent (cf. Moretto 1984, 234–6).

8 A commentary in two volumes followed in 1823.

9 In this, Schleiermacher followed an ancient view reported by Diogenes Laertius, 3.38. Cf. Szlezák in this volume, §3.

in “Über Platons schriftstellerische Motive” (1849), whether Schleiermacher was right to minimize Plato’s unwritten doctrines (or *agrapha dogmata*, as Aristotle called them), to which Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann had paid due attention in his 1792/1795 work, *System der Platonischen Philosophie*. By 1861, when Friedrich Ueberweg published his *Untersuchungen über die Echtheit und Zeitfolge Platonischer Schriften und über die Hauptmomente aus Plato’s Leben*, Schleiermacher’s chronology was definitively crushed. Of course, the importance of his contribution does not really lie in the results or the particular thesis he defended, but rather in the fact that he had given a new and decisive impulse to the study of Plato’s philosophy, by raising in new terms the ancient question of how we should read the dialogues.

In order to understand how Schleiermacher himself got to this question, it is important to appreciate, much more than Plato scholars (as opposed to Schleiermacher scholars) commonly do, the relationship between Schleiermacher’s philosophical interpretation and his exegetical work. The simplest and most appropriate way to broach the question is to focus on the relationship between the general *Introduction* to Plato’s works, and the abovementioned *Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory* (henceforth, *Grundlinien*). And this is because the *Grundlinien*, in which Plato plays a most important role, happen to have been published in 1803, one year before the *Introduction*, suggesting that both works were developed at the same time. In fact, they are strictly complementary, in the sense that the *Grundlinien* concern the (systematic) content of Plato’s philosophy, whereas the *Introduction* only deals with the dialogue form.

...

Schleiermacher’s general introduction to his translation of Plato’s dialogues is about fifty pages long. It is striking that it says nothing—or very little—about Plato’s philosophy *per se*, i.e., about his doctrine: “Of the Philosophy itself we are here purposely to avoid giving any provisional account, even if it were ever so easy to do so ...”.¹⁰ What we learn in this respect is only that Plato was the first philosopher to have divided philosophy into different disciplines and to have perceived their ultimate systematic unity.¹¹ This last point corresponds to Schleiermacher’s own philosophical agenda of constructing the authentic

¹⁰ *Introduction*, PW I.1: 5.

¹¹ *Introduction*, 9. Schleiermacher adds: “first’, in a certain sense”—obviously because Socrates also has some claims to priority (cf. “Über den Werth des Sokrates als Philosophen”, 1814/15, in *KGA* I.11).

Wissenschaftslehre that Fichte had only named, but in fact missed. It is also what radically distinguishes Schleiermacher's from Schlegel's interpretation, for the latter, unlike Schleiermacher, read Plato as a philosopher who, because he is a philosopher, i.e. is in search of wisdom, is not yet actually in possession of a system.¹² But the *Introduction*'s aim, according to Schleiermacher, is precisely not a discussion of Plato's doctrine or system; rather, it aims to explain the formal features of his written exposition of that doctrine. It is most significant, from this point of view, that Schleiermacher presents his *Introduction* as providing a "complement" to what he calls the "analytic" doctrinal exposition presented by Tennemann ten years earlier in his *System of Platonic Philosophy*. Yet whereas Tennemann had "dismembered" Plato's opinions, Schleiermacher saw his own task in the *Introduction* as establishing the natural articulation of the individual works.¹³

There are two such formal features, which it is important to distinguish: first, the dialogical form of each dialogue; second, the sequential order of the various dialogues within the series they supposedly constitute.

As far as dialogical form is concerned, Schleiermacher takes it that Plato himself sketched out a conception "of his writings and their aim" in the famous *Phaedrus* passage on the value of writing, to which Schleiermacher was the first to draw attention.¹⁴ Schleiermacher sees the chief issue of this passage in the problem of communicating one's thought: the "hermeneutical" problem *par excellence*, in the original sense of "*hermēneia* [ἐρμηνεία]", i.e., "expression of one's thought".¹⁵ The problem raised by any written text is that one can never be sure "if the reader's soul has reproduced [the thoughts of the author] through [the reader's] own activity [*selbsttätig*], and consequently has appropriated them in truth, or if the apparent understanding of the words and letters has produced in [the reader's soul] only the vain illusion of knowing what it in fact does not know".¹⁶ The advantage of oral over written teaching is that "the teacher ... can at every moment know what the other [i.e., the pupil]

12 "Plato hatte nur eine Philosophie, aber kein System" (Schlegel 1958, 119).

13 On Tennemann's work, see Szlezák (1997), who, in accordance with his own critique of Schleiermacher (on which, see *infra*, n. 27), ranks Tennemann's approach, which gives independent value to Plato's unwritten doctrines, above Schleiermacher's.

14 *Introduction*, 17.

15 The specific problem of how to read Plato must have played an important role, together with those linked to the reading of the Bible, in Schleiermacher's interest in hermeneutics, on which he began to lecture in 1805.

16 *Introduction*, 17; cf. 21. A little later, Schleiermacher recalls that "Plato's main intention ... is to trigger [sc. in his reader] the production of his [the reader's] own ideas; our whole classification relies on acknowledging this fact" (48). Schleiermacher inherits the idea of *Selbsttätigkeit* from Fichte.

has understood and what not, and thus help the activity of [the latter's] intelligence, should it be deficient".¹⁷ Such a teaching will most naturally take the form of dialogue between teacher and pupil. Thus, choosing the dialogue form for written transmission aims solely at "making written teaching as similar to the other one [sc. oral teaching], which [latter] is superior".¹⁸

The formal peculiarity of Platonic dialogues, however, is not reducible to their dialogical form, the ultimate aim of which is avoiding misunderstandings. Rather, what they "aim" at, properly speaking, is revealed by the way in which they are organized in sequence—"the authentically Platonic form", as Schleiermacher calls it—which is just what the *Introduction* chiefly seeks to establish.¹⁹ Schleiermacher is here competing with ancient orderings, like those mentioned by Diogenes Laertius,²⁰ as well as with the Neo-Platonic model, according to which there is a proper pedagogical order of reading the dialogues, eventually leading to a grasp of the one key dialogue containing the core of Plato's teaching.²¹ Thus Schleiermacher first separates, like the ancient critics, the spurious from the authentic dialogues; within the latter group he then more originally distinguishes between dialogues of lesser importance, which he calls *Gelegenheitsschriften* (occasional writings), and major dialogues.²² These major dialogues are in turn divided into three groups, organized according to didactic progression.

Here again, Schleiermacher draws on an ancient idea, which, however, he implements in a very different way. The most influential ancient scheme, which went hand in hand with the development of Neo-Platonism, held that Plato's ultimate teachings are to be found in the *Parmenides* and its (alleged) Doctrine of the One.²³ But Schleiermacher gives a new and in some respects specifically modern twist to the question: he posits that the order of Plato's dialogues is such that the reader's intended progression mirrors Plato's own intellectual progress, viz., beginning from an alleged seminal intuition of the systematic unity of the sciences, and advancing through the exposition of the two main sciences, physics and ethics, which Schleiermacher calls the "real" sciences.²⁴

17 *Introduction*, 18.

18 *Introduction*, 19.

19 *Introduction*, 39.

20 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 3.49–50 and 56–62; *Anonymous Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*, Ch. 26, 14, ff. (cf. *Introduction*, 22–4).

21 Cf. Festugière (1969).

22 The major dialogues, according to the *Introduction* are: *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, plus *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Critias* (35).

23 See the classic study by Dodds (1928).

24 "*Realwissenschaften*", so called because they provide knowledge of things *that are*, and not only of epistemic and formal tools like concepts and judgments, which belong to

Thus, following the “elementary” dialogues, which, from a pedagogical point of view, are merely cathartic, there comes first a group of preparatory dialogues, in which the system already shimmers through, if obliquely. The two main parts receive detailed elaboration in the only two “expository dialogues” written by Plato, viz., the *Republic* (containing Plato’s ethics), and the *Timaeus* (containing his physics). The duplet, *Republic-Timaeus*, which requires completion by the *Sophist* (for reasons we will see below), thus displaces the *Parmenides* from its Neo-Platonic pride of place.

Clearly, the passage on (the limits of) writing in the *Phaedrus* is not enough to support Schleiermacher’s elaborate construction. For, according to the *Phaedrus*, writing is useful only for those who possess previous knowledge and thus only have to remember what they already know. But, according to Schleiermacher, this is not in fact the use to which Plato puts writing in his own works, since his primary aim is, on the contrary, to “bring along to knowledge the reader who does not already know,”²⁵ viz., by following the path “from the first stirring of primeval and guiding ideas up to a presentation [*Darstellung*], albeit an incomplete one, of the particular sciences.”²⁶ Is there a contradiction here, as claimed by some of his critics?²⁷ Not really, if we recall that Schleiermacher explicitly states: “the notion that Plato himself stirs in us about his writing and their aims” in the *Phaedrus*-passage is not merely a “first” run at the issue, but in fact represents a “rather slight treatment” of the

dialectic. While Schleiermacher recognizes that the pedagogical-systematic project does not *always* coincide with the chronology of the dialogues (cf. 27, f.), the important point is that they do so in enough cases to support the idea that they run parallel to each other.

25 *Introduction*, 19.

26 *Introduction*, 21.

27 That Schleiermacher eventually disregards Plato’s critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* when he locates in some of Plato’s dialogues his ultimate teachings was assumed by Nietzsche, who, referring to Ueberweg (1861, 21), writes in his “Einführung in das Studium der platonischen Dialoge” (1871–72): “Durch eine falsche Interpretation gelangt Schleiermacher dazu, eine Klasse von Schriften zu statuieren, deren Zweck sei ‘den noch nicht wissenden Leser zum Wissen zu bringen’” (“through a false interpretation, Schleiermacher goes so far as to postulate a class of writings whose [alleged] aim is ‘to bring the not yet knowing reader to knowledge’”) (KGA II.4: 10, f.; Schleiermacher’s quotation in PW 1.1: 19). The alleged inconsistency is the basis of the radical anti-Schleiermacherism of the so-called Tübingen School, which locates Plato’s teachings in his *unwritten doctrines*, not, as Schleiermacher thinks, in the written dialogues (cf. e.g. Szlezák, 2006). It is significant that in his introduction to the *Phaedrus*, which is exactly contemporaneous with the general *Introduction*, Schleiermacher attributes the critique of writing to Socrates (as opposed to Plato), in order to justify the fact that he, Socrates, did not write anything (PW 1.1: 75).

matter at stake.²⁸ As we shall see below, the notion of the Platonic “sketch”—i.e., that his expositions are essentially incomplete, with the implication that they could or should have been developed otherwise than they in fact were—plays a crucial role in Schleiermacher’s reading and appreciation of Plato. Still, in this particular case, it must be conceded that Plato’s eventual justification of writing in the *Phaedrus*, namely as an instrument for remembering, does not coincide with the one Schleiermacher gives for Plato’s own writings, viz., as a deficient, but the only possible way of bringing anyone, readers as well as listeners, to the foundation of knowledge.

As we have already seen, however, this does not imply for Schleiermacher that Plato himself “already knows”, at least not in the full sense of the term. For one of Schleiermacher’s key assumptions is precisely that the dialogues’ progression towards the foundation of the system of sciences reflects the progressive articulation of what was at first a mere premonition on Plato’s part. What Schleiermacher also calls the “natural sequence” of the dialogues²⁹ corresponds to this double perspective, making reader and writer participants in a joint venture. The reason why the dialogues’ “natural sequence” relies entirely on the concept of “one’s own activity [*Selbsttätigkeit*]” is this: the reader is implicated in the *production* of the full-fledged system, in virtue of the very fact that the latter is still only in the process of taking shape; hence the reader freely follows the path that the author is himself following. This is how—in a philosophical, rather than historical way—Schleiermacher *nolens volens* opens the gates to the question of the “development” of Plato’s thought, a question that in fact was not Schleiermacher’s own problem at all. Rather, Schleiermacher’s model is, in Aristotelian terms, the actualization of a potentiality, not that of an evolution of philosophical positions—albeit an actualization whose final shape, as we shall see, is not given from the start, and which may ultimately deceive us.³⁰

Schleiermacher’s *Introduction* does not claim to be an introduction to Plato’s system—only to its mode of presentation and acquisition. Thus, it is understandable that it does not enter into the content of the system itself, or, to the extent that it does, only in a very general manner, as for example

28 Schleiermacher talks about “[die erste Vorstellung], die uns Platon selbst von seinen Schriften gibt” and begins his explanation of the passage by stating: “Ziemlich geringfügig die Sache behandelnd ...” (*PW* 1.1: 17).

29 *Introduction*, 22; cf. 26.

30 Again, to borrow Aristotle’s language, one could say that, as Schleiermacher sees it, Plato’s philosophical system does not develop like a tree, the form of which inheres in the seed, but is rather more like a skill, which can go one way or the other (cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* Θ 2 1046b4, f.).

at the very end of his presentation with respect to the distinction between the preparatory and the systematic dialogues.³¹ Now, although we do learn a bit more about Plato's actual doctrine in the introductions to the individual dialogues,³² yet this, too, remains rather limited. For, on the one hand, each individual introduction is chiefly meant to provide more detailed justifications of the place occupied by the respective dialogue in the "natural sequence" than it was possible to give in the general *Introduction*. On the other hand, doctrinal indications are not developed beyond what is locally necessary to shed light on the dialogue in question. Two of these introductions, however, contain important information regarding Schleiermacher's systematic reading of Plato. The first is, of course, the introduction to the *Republic* (1828), to which I shall return below; the second is the introduction to the *Sophist* (1807), the dialogue which he always considered to be preparatory to the *Timaeus* (which, as mentioned, Schleiermacher did not have time to introduce or translate), and to which he came to attribute even more prominence, as I shall now explain.

According to Schleiermacher's own philosophical system (an elaboration of Schelling's philosophy of identity), the two first real sciences, physics and ethics, reflect the original split within the supreme unity that is God, viz., between Nature (Being) and Reason (Thought). Both disciplines contribute to recovering the original unity from opposite starting-points: physics, by naturalizing Reason (for its task is to discover Reason within Nature); ethics, by rationalizing Nature.³³ Now, it is clear from convergent indications in the rest of his works, and especially in the *Grundlinien* (to which we shall turn shortly), that Schleiermacher thinks of Plato as the first fully to implement this philosophical position, which Socrates had merely adumbrated. Physics and ethics are represented in the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*. As for signs of their ultimate identity, these may be found in the *Sophist*, whose proper subject, according to Schleiermacher, is neither "the sophist" nor "non-Being", but rather: "Being".³⁴ It is true that the *Sophist* is not located, formally speaking, at the same level as the *Timaeus* or *Republic*, since, according to Schleiermacher, it does not belong to the expository dialogues, but rather to the intermediate, preparatory ones. And this means that we know less, or at least less directly and specifically, about the apex of Plato's system, i.e., his theory of Being, than we do about his physics and ethics. Nonetheless, only the *Sophist* may be called the "innermost

31 *Introduction*, 46 (apropos of the relationship between the *Sophist* and the *Republic*).

32 Which are probably what Schleiermacher has in mind when he says, in the above-quoted sentence, that he will remain *provisionally* silent about Plato's own philosophy.

33 On the organization of Schleiermacher's system of the sciences, see Scholtz (1984).

34 Cf. introduction to the *Sophist*, 136.

sanctum [*innerste Heiligtum*]” of Plato’s philosophy³⁵—the only available analogue in Plato’s *œuvre* to Schleiermacher’s own dialectic.³⁶

Two things in the *Sophist* especially attract Schleiermacher’s attention, both linked to the idea of the ultimate identity of Being and Thought. There is, first, the conception of Being as “total Being”, both “one and many, moved and unmoved”,³⁷ a supreme unity in which opposites coincide³⁸ and which, contrary to both sides of combatants in the so-called *gigantomachia*—the Friends of Earth (the materialists: *Soph.* 246ab) and the Friends of the Forms (the idealists: *Soph.* 248a)—is endowed with “movement, life, soul, and reason”.³⁹ It is easy to see how Schleiermacher could identify here, as Scholtz puts it, “a kind speculative theology”.⁴⁰ Second, Schleiermacher reads into the famous passage on the five “greatest kinds [*megista genē*]” and their “community [*koinōnia*]”,⁴¹ a systematic theory of the various types of concept. The core of Schleiermacher’s interpretation, which is only intimated in the introduction to the *Sophist*, is most conveniently summarized in his lectures on the history of philosophy. There, we find confirmation that the concept of Being refers in the *Sophist* to “total Being”, i.e., to the highest unity of opposites;⁴² that the concepts of Sameness and Difference embrace the domain of all those concepts that provide “subjects” (“*Subjektbegriffe*”), all of which may be generated and classified in a deductive, scientific way via the method of division (*diairesis*); and that, finally, the concepts of Motion and Rest embrace all the “empirical concepts” derived from experience (“*Erfahrungsbegriffe*”), which enable the construction of judgments by being predicated of a subject.⁴³

It should be added that Schleiermacher’s reading of the *Sophist* presupposes—in virtue of Plato’s supposed insight into the identity of Being and Thought—a theory of Forms according to which these are not only general concepts like genus or species, but also active forces at work in the world of change, two complementary aspects that Schleiermacher sees reflected in the

35 Schleiermacher held that the systematic indications provided by the *Sophist* could be supplemented to an extent by the *Symposium*—a dialogue he took to have been substituted for the missing *Philosopher* in the incomplete trilogy, *Theaetetus*—*Sophist*—*Philosopher* (cf. Arndt 2002).

36 *Soph.* 249d.

37 *Soph.* 249d.

38 Cf. D’Amico in this volume.

39 *Soph.* 248e.

40 Scholtz (1984), 853.

41 Cf. esp. *Soph.* 253c and 254b.

42 Schleiermacher (1839), 100.

43 Schleiermacher (1839), 101.

double designation of the Form as *eidos* and *idea*.⁴⁴ Schleiermacher, who goes so far as to assert the existence of individual Forms,⁴⁵ thus defends a conception of Platonic Forms totally opposed to Aristotle's, who criticizes them on the grounds that they do not possess any causal power.⁴⁶ On the contrary, Forms are, according to Schleiermacher, real concepts actively shaping both the physical and the moral world: they are in fact the expression of God's power. Here, at the latest, does it become clear that Schleiermacher is very dependent upon the so-called Middle Platonist interpretation of Plato's Forms as God's Ideas,⁴⁷ a formulation which, clearly, played a large role in the long history of Plato's Christianization, of which Schleiermacher, too, is a part.

Schleiermacher's most explicit views regarding Plato's system, however, are to be found neither in his introduction to the *Sophist*, nor even in his lectures on the history of ancient philosophy, but in the aforementioned *Grundlinien* (*Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory*)—a bulky and difficult work it will be useful to present briefly at this point.⁴⁸

The *Grundlinien* are divided into three Books, devoted to the highest principles of morality; ethical concepts; and ethical systems, respectively.⁴⁹ Whereas a short Appendix at the end of Book III is devoted to the form of exposition of previous ethical systems (of which the general *Introduction* to the translation of Plato's works may be considered an autonomous extension⁵⁰), what interests Schleiermacher here is exclusively their philosophical content.

44 εἶδος and ἰδέα are in fact used indifferently by Plato. But there is a whole exegetical tradition which, building, on the one hand, upon the Aristotelian distinction between Socratic *eidos* and Platonic *idea* and, on the other hand, upon the Kantian distinction between concept and Idea ([*Verstandes-*] *Begriff* and *Idee* or *Vernunftbegriff*), reads this distinction back into Plato himself. After Schleiermacher, this will prove especially the case in the Neo-Kantian tradition of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp (cf. Laks 2004, 460–3).

45 Schleiermacher (1839), 102.

46 Aristotle, *Meta.* A9 991a9–11.

47 On Forms as God's Ideas, cf. Rich, 1954; on Schleiermacher's dependence on Alcinous (Albinus), see Neschke-Hentschke, 2008: 122, f. See also the quotation from the *Grundlinien*, reproduced below (pp. 157–158).

48 For a very helpful analysis of this work, see Brino (2014).

49 I. *Kritik der höchsten Grundsätze der Sittenlehre* (47–146); II. *Kritik der ethischen Begriffe* (147–264); III. *Kritik der ethischen Systeme* (265–350).

50 There are some interesting differences between the Appendix and the *Introduction* in the way Schleiermacher speaks of Plato's mode of exposition. In the *Grundlinien*, Plato is presented as the only master of the “heuristic” method, which is opposed to the “rhapsodic and tumultuous” method (e.g., the ancient classifications into tetralogies), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to the “dogmatic” (i.e., purely doxographic method, exemplified by Tennemann). Its proper virtue is to present simultaneously the principles and particular instances “as in an electric shock” (*KGA* 1.4: 349)—a simile probably alluding to

As the title, *Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theory*, indicates, Schleiermacher's intention is at bottom negative: the point is to criticize the ethical views of others, not to expound his own conception, which may at best be indistinctly discerned.⁵¹ His criticism is based upon a systematic classification of all ethical systems according to four criteria. All such systems have, according to Schleiermacher, thus far been founded on one of the following four dichotomies:

- (1) either on the idea of happiness (*Glückseligkeit*); or on that of perfection (*Vollkommenheit*);
- (2) either on the idea of naturalness (*Natürlichkeit*); or on that of morality (*Sittlichkeit*);
- (3) either on the idea of restriction (*beschränkende Ethik*); or on that of "formation" (*bildende Ethik*);
- (4) either on an idea of ethics as something universal (*das Ethische als Allgemeines*); or as something individual (*das Ethische als Individuelles*).⁵²

Three of these four pairs of criteria (1, 2, 4) are constituted by subcontrary terms. In these cases, the principle of a truly ethical position may be found in a third, unnamed item. Thus, neither happiness nor perfection (1) can claim to be authentic ethical principles, because both are passive states, whereas an ethical posture implies activity (*Tätigkeit*). As far as pairs (2) and (4) are concerned, neither nature nor morality, on the one hand, nor universality and individuality, on the other hand, should be isolated from one another. The only acceptable scheme, from an ethical point of view, is one that gives both perspectives their due. Only in the case of pair (3) does one of the two criteria satisfy the ethical requirement, as it is Schleiermacher's view that ethics must indeed be "formative [*bildend*]". It is also, as far as Schleiermacher's "Platonism" is concerned, a crucial criterion, since "formation" vs. "restriction" is tantamount to "Plato vs. Kant". For Kant represents a "restrictive" or "prohibitive" ethic, whereas Plato (allegedly) is the prime exemplar of a philosophy of *Bildung*.

In the course of his critique, Schleiermacher distinguishes systematically between the Ancients and Moderns. The latter are essentially represented by Spinoza, "the English" (i.e., Shaftesbury, but also Christian Garve), Kant, Fichte, and Schelling; among the Ancients, the most quoted figures are Plato,

Meno's likening of Socrates to an electric ray (*Meno* 80a5), which does not appear in the *Introduction*.

51 Schleiermacher says as much in a letter from 3 September 1802, addressed to Eleonore (KGA V.6: 112).

52 (1): 69–81; (2): 81–3; (3): 83–90; (4): 90–99.

Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicurus, Aristippus, and the Cynics. It is fully understandable, given the nature of the text, that apart from the occasional compliment (e.g., crediting Aristippus for defending an “active” conception of virtue, even if the kind of end he embraces, viz., pleasurable movements, implies total “passivity”),⁵³ Schleiermacher rejects most of these doctrines for lacking the properly ethical criteria implied in the classificatory scheme described above. There are, however, two conspicuous exceptions to this general disapproval, one Ancient, one Modern: Plato and Spinoza. These two already received high praise in Schleiermacher’s *Discourses on Religion* (1799; i.e., a few years before the *Grundlinien* and the general *Introduction* to Plato’s works),⁵⁴ and are regularly mentioned side by side in the *Grundlinien*.⁵⁵

Why does Schleiermacher consider Spinoza and Plato superior to the other Moderns and Ancients, respectively? Because their respective ethical theories are founded in a definite conception of God as an infinite being.⁵⁶ In this respect, Plato deserves an even higher place than Spinoza, as may be seen in the following passage from the introduction to the *Grundlinien*. It is worth reproducing it in full, as it most perspicuously crystallizes Schleiermacher’s view of Plato’s ethical system; I emphasize the most important passages on this point—the reader will discern their echo throughout this chapter.

Everyone who is somewhat familiar with him [sc. Plato] must know how from the very beginning he started out from a mere *premonition* [*Ahndung*] to pursue a *common foundation* [*Grund*] for the science of the True and the [science of the] Good, i.e., for Physics and Ethics; and how he constantly searched for it, coming ever closer over time to this, their origin. Yes, one may indeed say that there is no significant exposition [*Darstellung*, sc. among his works] in which it is not this striving whence light shines over the Whole. For to Plato the infinite Being [*unendlichen*

53 Horace, *Ep.* 1.1.19, f.: *nunc in Aristippi furtim praecepta relabor/et mihi res, non me rebus subiungere conor* (at other times, I fall back insensibly into the precepts of Aristippus, and try to subordinate things to myself, and not the other way around) (trans. A.K.).

54 See KGA 1.2: 213 (*der heilige verstoßene Spinoza*); and 262 (*der göttliche Plato*). Schleiermacher’s praise of Spinoza belongs to the tradition begun by Herder, who defended Spinoza against Jacobi’s accusation of atheism (cf. Herder, *Gott*, 1787).

55 See the recurring formula, “only Plato and Spinoza” e.g., in the 1803 Berlin edition of the *Grundlinien*, 45.

56 Schleiermacher holds that ancient philosophers generally kept logic, physics, and ethics separate, without conceiving of their ultimate unity, i.e., God. By contrast, Plato, raising himself up to the perspective of the Infinite, was able to use it as a foundation for the system of sciences. Plato thus anticipated Fichte’s *Doctrine of Science* (*Wissenschaftslehre*), and even more clearly Spinoza, as his *Ethics* begins with God, i.e., infinite substance.

Wesen] does not appear only as *existent and productive* [*seiend und hervorbringend*], but also as poetically composing [*dichtend*], and the World [appears to him] as *an artwork of the Divinity*, in the process of coming-to-be, [itself] composed from an infinite number of [other] artworks. For this reason, too—viz., that everything that is particular [*Alles Einzelne*] and actual is only coming to be, whereas only *that infinite [Being] which is forming* [*bildende*; sc. the particular entities coming-to-be] [may be said] *to be*—for this reason Plato, unlike that man [sc. Spinoza] does not consider universal concepts to be merely human illusion and delusion. Rather, in virtue of the reverse procedure, they become for [Plato] *the living thoughts* [*Gedanken*] *of the Divinity*, which are to be represented in the [sensible] Things; [these universal concepts become for him] the eternal Ideals in which and [with respect] to which All is. Now since [Plato] posits for all finite Things a beginning of their coming-to-be, as well as a progressing ... through time, there necessarily arises in all [sensible things] that are granted kinship with the highest Being, the demand *to approximate the Ideal* [of this Being], for which [demand] there can be no more apt expression than “*becoming similar to God*”.⁵⁷ It is manifest that therefore here another, even stronger bond of Ethics to the highest science is forged than there [sc. in the case of Spinoza].⁵⁸

The most blatant deficiency in Spinoza's ethics, on Schleiermacher's view, is that his rejection of teleology, while legitimate from a certain perspective, leaves him without the concept of art, *Kunst*,⁵⁹ which is the only basis on which man can imitate or follow God, shaping (*bilden*) perfection out of imperfection.⁶⁰ Plato's superiority, as far as the content of ethical doctrine is concerned, is only tempered in the *Grundlinien* by the fact that his ethics does not present the formal virtue of Spinoza's *Ethics*, which literally begins with and devotes its first book entirely to God.⁶¹

57 The phrase, “to become similar to God”, clearly refers to Plato's *Theaetetus* 176b.

58 *Grundlinien*, 65, f. (trans. A.K.).

59 “... entblößt von jeder Vorstellung einer Kunst oder eines Kunstwerkes”. Cf. *Grundlinien*, 64. Further criticisms stemming from this are that (a) Spinoza's ethics does not concede any special place to human beings but concerns “every particular thing to which a soul may be attributed”; and (b) that, as a result, it does not make room for *Bildung*, i.e., ethical “formation”.

60 “*Der Weg zur Bildung aus dem Unvollkommenen in das Vollkommene*” (*Grundlinien*, 64, f.).

61 Schleiermacher may well have drawn on the *Laws*, the very first word of which, as is well known, is “God [θεός]”; yet, as mentioned above, he never gave the *Laws* serious consideration.

The fact that God does not constitute, so to speak, the first book of Plato's ethics, is one of the reasons Schleiermacher, in the passage reproduced above, speaks of Plato's mere premonition (*Ahndung*). This word is crucial for understanding Schleiermacher's relationship to Plato, for it concerns both (a) Schleiermacher's analysis, in the general *Introduction* to the translations, of the developmental form of exposition of Plato's philosophy; and (b) the fact that Plato's philosophy, considered from a doctrinal and systematic perspective, remains, despite its great merit, basically incomplete. "Incompleteness" does not here suggest that Plato did not cover all the topics that an ethics should cover; on the contrary, one of Plato's great merits for Schleiermacher is precisely that it does cover a much wider range of topics than other philosophers, like love, friendship, the State, and aesthetics.⁶² Rather, Schleiermacher holds that due to the formal characteristics of Plato's dialogues, the various ethical topics are not equally developed or systematically articulated;⁶³ more importantly, even the divine Plato was able sometimes to err—and indeed ultimately did err, since, after all he was a Greek, that is, a pagan.⁶⁴ In fact, Schleiermacher's conviction is not only that Plato erred in moral matters, but that he even fell prey to immorality. On this latter point, the *Grundlinien* are silent, a remarkable fact crying out for explanation, given the declared critical purpose of the work. On the other hand, Schleiermacher's introduction to the *Republic* is very severe towards Plato's ethics, which is all the more striking since the *Republic*, as we have seen, is for Schleiermacher not just another dialogue, but indeed the only dialogue in which Plato's ethics is properly expounded. Not that Schleiermacher, in this introduction denies that Plato's *Republic* is full of much, indeed of the highest merit. He calls its structure "magnificent", and praises the developments of the Form of the Good in a way recalling the *Grundlinien*.⁶⁵

Still, his criticisms are harsh. They bear on the parallelism between soul and State, which, according to Schleiermacher, is as fatal for Plato's conception of the soul and its virtues in general, as it is for political institutions in

62 Consider Schleiermacher's comment on Plato's treatment of love: "Weit allen andern voraus ist auch hier wieder Platon, welcher von Freundschaft und Liebe ... so zusammenhängend redet, daß es leicht wäre, aus allem, was zerstreut darüber vorkommt, ... ein Ganzes zu machen. Es darf nun erinnert werden, wie er symbolisierend den Geschlechtstrieb mit dem Bestreben nach gemeinsamer Ideenerzeugung verbindet, und auf die Unvollkommenheit des persönlichen Daseins und seine Unzulänglichkeit zur Hervorbringung eines höchstens Gutes diese Aufgabe gründet" (*Grundlinien*, 301).

63 Cf. the quote in the previous note about "gathering what is dispersed".

64 The Plato of the *Republic* expresses a "Hellenism" opposed to the spirit of Christianity, according to Schleiermacher's introduction to the *Republic*, 33.

65 See introduction to the *Republic*, 40, f.

particular, which Schleiermacher tries with utmost determination to refute. Plato's doctrine is "impious", the institutions of the *kallipolis* make one "shudder".⁶⁶ The causes of Schleiermacher's indignation are obvious: first, the communism of love and marriage amongst the rulers, which destroys the family; second, the deployment of political lies. These basic features of the Platonic *kallipolis* violate Schleiermacher's Christian, but also more broadly his liberal and even democratic principles.⁶⁷ Thus, while we may discern a clear continuity and agreement between the *Grundlinien* and the introduction to the *Republic*, the difference in his estimation of Plato's achievement in morals is striking: exclusively positive and laudatory in the *Grundlinien*, severely critical in the introduction.

How can we explain this discrepancy? The *Grundlinien* is dated to 1803, the introduction to the *Republic* to 1828. Thus, it might at first blush seem that Schleiermacher's appreciation of Plato changed over time, or that he only later came to realize how shocking some aspects of the *Republic* in fact were. This is not only implausible in itself, but a letter to Henriette Herz from 30 July 1803 clearly shows that from early on, Schleiermacher took a dim view of the ethics expounded in the *Republic*: "I have kept my criticism [*Tadel*] of Spinoza and Plato quite 'esoteric', and he who does not have good eyes won't notice it".⁶⁸

In his stimulating 1992 article, Herms draws attention to the fact that Schleiermacher's considered position in ethics is far more anti-Platonic than Platonic. This is not only because Schleiermacher is a Christian and a liberal, but also because his analysis of ethical action in fact relies—contrary to what Schleiermacher's celebrated "Platonism" would at first sight suggest—on a fundamentally Aristotelian framework. Schleiermacher holds, for example, the distinctively Aristotelian tenet according to which an ethical action results from a definite choice made under essentially contingent circumstances.⁶⁹ But if this is the case, then how can we explain Schleiermacher's hyperbolic praise of Plato in the *Grundlinien* and elsewhere, or Schleiermacher's repeated criticism of Aristotle (despite occasional praise) in that same work?⁷⁰

Herms's ingenious solution to this paradox is that the *Grundlinien*, content-oriented as they may be, nevertheless solely concern themselves with the form of ethics (the philosophical, not the literary form, of course), suggesting that they are neutral as far as their specific ethical contents are concerned.

66 Introduction to the *Republic*, 35.

67 For a detailed discussion of Schleiermacher's critiques, see Zimbrich (2008).

68 *KGA* V.6: 430 (trans. A.K.).

69 Herms (1992), 6, 10, 24, f.

70 In particular, Schleiermacher praises Aristotle's conception of God as uninterrupted activity (89), which furnishes the paradigm for a conception of ethics as *being active*.

Hermes thus distinguishes “Schleiermacher’s full approbation of the form of [Plato’s] scientific ethics” from Schleiermacher’s “resolute criticism of the Plato’s substantive determinations of ethics”, which we find in his introduction to the *Republic*.⁷¹ Conversely, Schleiermacher’s often devastating criticisms of Aristotle in the *Grundlinien* only concern the form of his system, without precluding the substantive correctness of his account.⁷² Nevertheless, Hermes’s distinction, illuminating as it may be, probably does not suffice to account for the situation in full. It is true that, on the one hand, Schleiermacher writes the following in the foreword to the *Grundlinien*:

In the case of every authentic science—such as ethics after all wants and ought to be—there exists no other critique than that of scientific form; and formulating such a critique is what will be attempted here.⁷³

But on the other hand, he also says, a few lines below, that the form and content of ethics are reciprocally determined.⁷⁴ Moreover, there is little doubt that the formal determinations considered by Schleiermacher in the *Grundlinien* are also substantive determinations, e.g., when he claims that a virtue should be “formative” (*bildend*).

One relevant consideration for understanding the relationship between Schleiermacher’s praise and blame of Plato may well lie beyond the opposition of form and content, namely the aforementioned notion of premonition (*Ahndung*), as opposed to subsequent realization. For a premonition may be excellent, yet its realization deficient. May this not be one of the reasons at least why Schleiermacher could say that Plato’s ethics, as expounded in the *Republic*, is incomplete?⁷⁵ This reading seems confirmed by the fact that the doctrinal elements on which the reconstruction of Plato’s ethics is based in the *Grundlinien* are taken not from the *Republic* itself, i.e., from the work dedicated (according to Schleiermacher) to Plato’s exposition of his ethics, but rather from the *Timaeus*, where Plato, in connection with the *Sophist*, refers to

⁷¹ Hermes (1992), 6.

⁷² For the relevant passages, cf. Hermes (1992), 24, n. III.

⁷³ “Es gibt nämlich gar für jede eigentliche Wissenschaft, wie doch die Ethik sein will und soll, keine andere Kritik, als die der wissenschaftlichen Form, und eine solche aufzustellen soll hier versucht werden” (*Grundlinien*, 36; quoted by Hermes 1992, 9).

⁷⁴ “Denn ohne Zweifel muss es, wie für die Kunst auch für die Wissenschaft gelten, daß Gestalt und Gehalt einander gegenseitig zur Bewährung dienen ...” (*Grundlinien*, 36).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Grundlinien*, 37: “So hat gleich Platon, obschon er unter der ersten und trefflichsten Arbeitern dieses Feldes hervorragt, keine zu Ende geführte und vollständige Darlegung seiner Ethik hinterlassen”.

the highest principles of his philosophy.⁷⁶ In other words, Plato's ethics at its best is not ultimately to be found in the work that, according to Schleiermacher, is officially dedicated to it. And this is because there is a gap between Plato's substantive (and not merely formal) ethical principles and his actual ethics, one which Schleiermacher alone could fill, aided by both Christian and modern values more generally.

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76 See *Grundlinien*, 65 (quoted above, p. 158, which makes the link between the *Timaeus* and the ethical goal of "making oneself similar to God". On the relationship between the *Timaeus* and the *Sophist*, see above, p. 153.

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Friedrich Schleiermacher's Theory of the Platonic Dialogue and Its Legacy

Thomas Alexander Szlezák

With his three-volume translation of Plato, published from 1804 to 1816—and especially his general introduction to the whole project¹—Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) sparked the most far-reaching revolution in Plato-interpretation since Marsilio Ficino's translation and commentary in the fifteenth century. Both Schleiermacher's many admirers and the occasional critics agreed on this point, as I will show in Section 1 of this chapter, based on a sample of representative opinion. Section 2 provides a sketch of the main features of German Plato-interpretation before 1804, in order to bring out the turn [*Wende*] initiated by Schleiermacher more clearly. Section 3 argues, among other things, that Schleiermacher took his starting point—Plato's critique of writing at *Phaedrus* 274b–278e—from his predecessors, Dieterich Tiedemann and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, while offering a completely different account of Plato's view of the value and function of writing. Section 4 seeks to do justice to Schleiermacher's new understanding of Plato's critique of writing by examining this famous text itself in closer detail. This enables us in Section 5 to determine more precisely the new and pioneering elements of Schleiermacher's position. Last, in Section 6, I argue that already in the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher's solutions to the main questions of Plato interpretation underwent considerable curtailment, but that his style of reading Plato's critique of writing has exerted continued influence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and that his interpretation of the relation of writing to orality in philosophy has become the basis of a theory of the Platonic dialogue still championed by many interpreters today.²

§1

Let me begin with a brief account of scholarly opinion regarding Schleiermacher's importance. More than 100 years after the appearance of

¹ *PW* 1: 5–36.

² Translated by Alan Kim.

Schleiermacher's translations, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff declared that after the enduring influence exercised by Ficino's Latin translation

a new epoch in the understanding [of Plato] was inaugurated by the unfinished German translation undertaken by Schleiermacher at Friedrich Schlegel's urging. That translation can now no longer be at all enjoyed.³

In other words, despite its incompleteness and "unenjoyability", Schleiermacher's German Plato nevertheless inaugurated a "new epoch", not least owing to Schleiermacher's "ingenious grasp of the philosophical ideas", and his solutions to "many textual difficulties".⁴ In Wilamowitz's judgment we can sense the historical distance with which this great Greek scholar looks back on the development of Plato interpretation since the Renaissance. Heinrich von Stein, an interpreter closer in time to Schleiermacher by fifty years, was more enthusiastic: "that basic idea of Schleiermacher's"—i.e., that the form of Plato's works necessarily followed from his intention of setting the reader's own thought into motion—was "the most epochal event in the understanding of the Platonic writings since they first passed from their author's hand".⁵ Here, Schleiermacher's achievement is not evaluated in the time frame of the past 500 years, but with a view to the entire history of Plato-scholarship: von Stein is convinced that "Schleiermacher ... is the first to have found the key to the complete understanding of Plato in his entirety".⁶ Thus he marks himself a follower of August Boeckh, Schleiermacher's student, who, fifty years earlier again, had written of his teacher: "No one has ever understood Plato so completely, or taught others to understand him, as much as this man", who "had solved the understanding that two millennia had not been able to solve in such a way".⁷ Not long after Boeckh, Immanuel Bekker summed up Schleiermacher in the preface to his edition of Plato (Berlin, 1816) simply as "*Platōnis restitutor* [Plato's reconstructor]".

Boeckh, Bekker, and von Stein were by no means alone among their contemporaries in such glowing appraisals. Even those striking a cooler tone agreed on the "epochal" nature of Schleiermacher's approach. For Friedrich Ueberweg, for example, theology, philosophy, and philology were indebted to Schleiermacher for "utterly epochal transformations",⁸ and even a decided

³ Wilamowitz (1929), 5.

⁴ Wilamowitz (1920), 336.

⁵ Stein (1862), 33, n.

⁶ Stein (1862), 34, n.

⁷ Boeckh (1808), 81–121; (1872), 1–38 (praise of Schleiermacher's translation, 17–25).

⁸ Ueberweg (1861), 12.

opponent of Schleiermacher's picture of Plato like Karl Friedrich Hermann conceded that he had been the "first to have prompted a deeper penetration into the spirit of the Platonic writings", and was prepared to grant him "justified admiration".⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche (of course) stood aloof from the near-universal Schleiermacher-euphoria, acidly describing this idol of German *Geisteswissenschaft* as "that womanish, pseudo-ingenuous [*geistreichelnde*], untrue and unclear Schleiermacher".¹⁰

Equivalent to that favored epithet, "epochal", is the late Hans-Georg Gadamer's view that Schleiermacher, whom he sees chiefly as the "discoverer of the dialogue-form", "truly made history [in] entirely deriving his Plato-picture from the dialogues and ... push[ing] the indirect tradition ... to the side".¹¹ Here Schleiermacher is still acknowledged to have determined decisively the "history" (of Plato-scholarship)—and this will not change in future; but identifying him chiefly as the "discoverer of the dialogue-form" can already be seen as a downgrade, compared to earlier assessments. Even Wilhelm Dilthey had attributed to him a much more valuable contribution: "It was only through him that the understanding [*Erkenntnis*] of Greek philosophy became possible"¹²—a judgment echoed by Werner Jaeger's telling analogy: Schleiermacher was "the Winckelmann of Greek philosophy", inasmuch as he had been the first "to reveal the essence of all genuine philosophizing" in the works of Plato.¹³

Further opinions by philosophers and philologists concerning Schleiermacher's rank and significance could easily be added, without altering the big picture: it was the *communis opinio* of German Plato scholarship—including the numerous emigrants who would become successful teachers in Anglo-Saxon countries after 1933, passing their convictions on to later generations—that "Schleiermacher, who like none other before him still had a real organ for Plato",¹⁴ had laid the foundations for a new understanding of Plato, to which we remain indebted to this day. But how was Plato regarded before Schleiermacher's new approach?

9 Hermann (1839), 347, 362.

10 As he put it in a letter to Erwin Rohde. Nietzsche (1938), 278.

11 Gadamer (1987), 374, 383.

12 Dilthey (1870), 37.

13 Jaeger (1952), 398.

14 Hoffmann (1922), 1051.

§2

In the second half of the eighteenth century, two works stood out from the motley crowd of vastly different presentations and valuations of Plato, in virtue of their sterling philosophical and philological quality: Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie*,¹⁵ and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*, which latter was preceded by his *System of the Platonic Philosophy*.¹⁶

The scope of this chapter does not permit a fitting tribute to these two historians of philosophy.¹⁷ Only a few basic features of their Plato interpretations can be listed here, always with a view towards Schleiermacher, who was indebted to them for important suggestions, but who nonetheless departed from them on key points. I hope that the reader will accept my combined treatment of these two predecessors of Schleiermacher, in view of their very broad agreement (their differences are insignificant with respect to our current topic). Still, at a more fine-grained level, Schleiermacher seems to be reacting more to Tennemann than Tiedemann.¹⁸

According to these two scholars, an adequate understanding requires us to begin with the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. It agrees with the statements of the *Seventh Letter*, asserting that the letters of the alphabet are lifeless signs, whereas only philosophical thought is alive: this is why the philosopher “neither can nor is permitted to communicate [his] completely pure convictions in writings”.¹⁹ Plato had “a double-philosophy, an outer and an inner, i.e., a secret [philosophy]”.²⁰ The dialogues, on the one hand, and a philosophy not destined for written dissemination through writing, on the other hand, represent two levels of the reduction of reality back to its first principles. Both levels taken together constitute the “system” of Plato’s philosophy. The doctrine of principles in the narrower sense remains unwritten because it would take too much for granted for the untutored reader to handle, and because it must be shielded from denigration by the malicious and uncomprehending.

15 *The Spirit of Speculative Philosophy*, in six volumes, 1791–1797; Plato treated in Vol. II (1791).

16 *History of Philosophy*; Plato treated in Vol. II (1799). *System of the Platonic Philosophy*: 2 vols., 1792.

17 I have taken a few steps in this direction in my (1997) and (2010).

18 Evidence for this in my (1997), 51–53. Regarding evidence in the works of Tiedemann and Tennemann for the further points made in the following sketch, again see my (1997) and (2010).

19 Tennemann (1792–1795), Vol. I, 137; cp. Tennemann (1798–1819), Vol. II, 214.

20 No distinction is drawn here between esotericism and secrecy. For the difference between these two attitudes, see my (1985), 400–405; and my (1993), 152–155.

Aristotle's reports concerning Plato's unwritten philosophy are reliable and are confirmed by the dialogues in such cases where they overlap. Both interpreters, Tennemann and Tiedemann, strove for a contemporary philosophical interpretation of Plato's esoteric philosophy. They construed this "highest of all theories" as general ontology, which Tiedemann gave a Kantian, transcendental-philosophical turn.

This picture of a "double Plato"—i.e., of the exoteric dialogues and unpublished esoteric philosophy—features not only the aforementioned main ideas, but also a series of thoughts and perspectives that Schleiermacher took up and developed further. To wit: that Plato wanted "to habituate [his] students to think for themselves"; that he was not just a thinker, but also an artist; that the "images, analogies, allegories, and myths" are necessary as "supplements of the playful, poetic imagination [*Phantasie*]"; that the dialogue-form has "great advantages for generating persuasion"; that for Plato, content and form belong together (even if they are to be separated by the interpreter—which Schleiermacher will oppose); that one must distinguish between the main and subsidiary purposes of a given dialogue; and above all: "that the general rules of a healthy art of interpretation do not suffice in the case of Plato", so that further rules are needed "that give special consideration to the peculiarities of his writings".²¹

What gets postulated here is nothing less than a new hermeneutics tailor-made for the Platonic dialogues. Schleiermacher evidently wished to fulfill this postulate.

§3

Like his predecessors, Schleiermacher also takes Plato's critique of writing (*Phdr.* 274b–278e) as his point of departure in the "Introduction" to his translations.²² However, he does not read Plato's critique "esoterically", sees in it no call for the philosopher to restrain or even censor himself in the written text. Schleiermacher is certainly aware that Tennemann drew attention to the "similarity" of the *Phaedrus*'s critique to the *Seventh Letter*'s philosophical injunction against publishing the "most serious" (σπουδαιότατα);²³ yet this does not spur Schleiermacher on to compare the two texts (just as indeed he did not

21 For quotations by Tennemann, see my (2010), 424, f.

22 Vol. I.1 [1804]: 5–36.

23 *Phdr.* 344c6. Schleiermacher alludes to this in his introduction to the *Phaedrus* PW I, 3; 1855 ed., 52.

translate the *Letter*). Though Schleiermacher regards the critique of writing to be a suitable starting point, he nonetheless devalues it as a mere “justification of Socrates”—evidently of the *historical* Socrates—“for his not having written anything”.²⁴ The critique belongs solely to the *Phaedrus*, and the *Phaedrus* is the earliest of all the dialogues. Thus, Schleiermacher insinuates, Plato in his maturity no longer believes in the stern youthful verdict concerning the scant value of writing.

Schleiermacher takes Tennemann’s conviction that Plato had “wanted to habituate his students to think for themselves” and transforms it into his core idea: Plato had wanted to “compel” the *reader* through the *written* dialogue to generate within himself the living thought intended by the author (for the text consists, as Tennemann had already stressed, of signs that are as such lifeless). Schleiermacher is convinced “that Plato had after all wished to bring the reader, who does not yet know, into knowledge”.²⁵ The problem—viz., that Plato himself thought writing could serve as no more than a mnemonic aid for the one who *already* knows—is circumvented by Schleiermacher via the assumption that Plato “must have also sought to make written instruction as similar as possible to that better [form of instruction, i.e., oral teaching]”.²⁶ This implies for him that philosophical writing *necessarily* takes on the form of dialogue,²⁷ for only in this way could one guarantee that content and form would be “inseparable”—something allegedly characteristic of Plato. More particularly, the reader’s own generation of ideas (*Ideenerzeugung*) comes about thanks to a particular use of writing that Schleiermacher calls “indirect communication [*indirekte Mitteilung*]”, consisting in the calculated use of certain artistic means that Schleiermacher calls “arts [*Künste*]”. These include “obliquely beginning with some particular matter”; “that seemingly often arbitrary continuation [of the argument]”; “that frequent starting over of the investigation from a new point of departure”; the intimation of a whole “through unconnected strokes”; the ending of an investigation without explicit conclusion; and the “weaving” of a riddle from threads of contradiction.²⁸ By such means, Plato is said to achieve one of two possible effects “with almost everyone”: either the reader fully generates the idea in the way Plato intends, or he becomes conscious

24 *PW* 1, 3; 1855 ed., 52.

25 “Introduction”, 16.

26 “Introduction”, 15.

27 Schleiermacher did not translate the *Timaeus*.

28 Schleiermacher enumerates the arts (*Künste*) twice, at “Introduction”, 16 and 30.

of not having understood anything at all.²⁹ Indirect communication constitutes the “authentically Platonic form”, which (naturally) is an “inner” form of thought-generation (*Gedankenerzeugung*). It also involves the fact that the *next* dialogue in sequence begins at just where the foregoing one had reached its (tacit) end.

With his discovery of indirect communication as the defining characteristic of Plato's art of writing, Schleiermacher believed himself to have solved three problems at once. First, the problem of genuineness: dialogues that do not exhibit this genuinely “inner” Platonic form are to be dismissed as spurious. Second, the problem of chronology: from the very beginning, Plato intended to join one dialogue to another, and he rigorously realized this linkage from the earliest, the *Phaedrus*, to the last, the *Republic*. Third, the problem of Plato's esotericism: through an adequate understanding of the cyphers of indirect communication—or its failure—the reader “raises himself to be a true hearer of the inner [meaning] ... or fails to do so”. And this is for Schleiermacher “the only sense in which one could here speak of the esoteric and exoteric, viz., that it designates solely a quality of the *reader*”.³⁰ Thus Schleiermacher strives to replace the “outer” esotericism of Tiedemann and Tennemann, who took a Platonic oral theory of principles as historical fact, with an “inner” esotericism. That is, in virtue of an indirect communication not comprehensible to all, the text itself separates out the esoteric “true hearer of the inner” from the exoteric, common reader from whom the inner sense remains concealed. Now, if we start from the assumption, not stated by Schleiermacher, that thanks to the “arts” of indirect communication *everything* may be communicated, even if “not explicitly uttered and verbally laid down”,³¹ then it follows that for Plato there was no reason at all to supplement the dialogues with an oral theory that would offer additional content. And from here it was but a small step for Schleiermacher's successors to the view that that which was in no wise necessary, thanks to the capacities of the written indirect communication, was in fact trivial or had never even existed. At least this was the *effect*, seen from a historical perspective, of replacing the “outer” esotericism documented by the *Testimonia platonica* by the new esotericism—allegedly evoked by the text itself and realizing itself solely *within* the reader—even if Schleiermacher

29 Regarding the question how one should, from a hermeneutic standpoint, evaluate the fact that Schleiermacher does not consider an obvious third possibility, see p. 182, f., below.

30 “Introduction”, 16, f.

31 This is Schleiermacher's formulation regarding the first of the “arts” at “Introduction”, 16, f.

himself did not draw this conclusion. Rather, just like his predecessors, he held that “unmediated *teaching* was his [sc. Plato’s] only esoteric activity, whereas writing was only his exoteric [activity]”, and that Plato could “express his thoughts purely and completely”³² only in the activity of teaching.

§4

Now since Tiedemann and Tennemann, on the one hand, and Schleiermacher, on the other hand, put the Platonic critique of writing to such different uses, it behooves us to examine this much-discussed text more closely, avoiding the selectivity common in the secondary literature.

In the *Phaedrus*, the critique of writing is meant to solve the last remaining problem, viz., regarding the propriety and impropriety (εὐπρέπεια, ἀπρέπεια) of writing (γραφή). Socrates introduces a religious aspect to the course of the discussion: wherever *logoi* are concerned, there both word and deed must be pleasing to the gods.³³ This aspect appears again at the end of the critique of writing, thus forming a kind of bracket around this last chapter of the dialogue. At *Phdr.* 278d3–6, the *philosophos* is distinguished from God (who alone is fully *sophos*), but in such a way that one senses that only he, the philosopher, at least stands close to the God.

Following this prelude, Socrates develops, over the course of five points, the following picture of the relation between orality and literacy (*Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit*):

- 1 An *ad hoc* invented “Egyptian” tale of the invention of writing by Theuth, and its evaluation by Thamus, makes clear that writing can be no means (φάρμακον)³⁴ for remembering, but only for reminding, and that using it makes the user not truly wise but only seemingly clever, and vain.³⁵
- 2 Next, Socrates lists the three main defects of writing: (a) it can offer no new answers to new questions; (b) it does not know to whom it should or should not speak; (c) and, in the case of unjust vilification, it always needs its author to come to its defense. Only the living, ensouled speech of the “knower”—i.e., the dialectician, who is able to determine the nature of things dialectically—is free of these three defects.³⁶

32 “Introduction”, 17.

33 *Phdr.* 274b9–10.

34 *Phdr.* 275a5.

35 *Phdr.* 274c–275d.

36 *Phdr.* 275d–276a.

- 3 Next comes a vivid simile: just as a sensible farmer would never sow his seed in the gardens of Adonis, where they would yield nothing, so, too, he who has knowledge of the just, the beautiful, and the good, will not sow his seed in the “gardens of Adonis” of literacy. Yet just as the farmer sometimes might “as an amusement and in honor of the holiday”³⁷ plant a little Adonis garden, so, too, the one who knows may utilize writing in order to relieve his memory or as an amusement. But he will devote his serious efforts entirely to the oral, dialectical instruction of a “suitable soul”. The *logoi* “planted” in this manner will be able to fend for themselves.³⁸
- 4 Before the conclusion, Socrates sums up the results of the foregoing discussions: a speech is expert or “artful [ἔντεχον]” as philosophical rhetoric only if it is grounded in dialectical insight into the essence of the matters it deals with, and grounded in knowledge of the soul(s) of the addressee(s). It would be all too naïve to expect clarity and reliability from any sort of writing whatsoever. Writings can at best be mnemonic aids for those who already know. Only those oral *logoi* have value, which are conducted for the sake of teaching and learning.³⁹
- 5 This leads to the final clarification: only he deserves the name, *philosophos*, who wrote what he wrote as one who *knows*, and who possesses the ability to come to the aid of his writing in oral discussion. Precisely by coming orally to the aid of the text, he demonstrates the latter’s lesser value. Whoever does not fulfill these three conditions (knowledge; ability to aid; ability to outmatch his own writing)—that is whoever is unable to exhibit things of a higher rank (any *timiōtera*) than what he had written—such a person may be called a poet, writer, or legislator, depending on the nature of his written product⁴⁰—but not a philosopher.
- Now a literate culture like ours finds this “demotion of writing” (Schleiermacher) hard to take. Thus, it is understandable that ever since Schleiermacher, one has given in to the temptation of inverting the meaning of this passage into its opposite, so as to get Plato back on the side of our culture of literacy. We can only resist this temptation if we restore to the central concepts and ideas of this text the sense they had for Plato.

The ancient reader would have seen in the simile of the “garden of Adonis”⁴¹ an implicit answer to the question of whether, for Plato, one might intentionally

37 Trans. Nehamas and Woodruff.

38 *Phdr.* 276b–277a.

39 *Phdr.* 277a–278b.

40 *Phdr.* 278b7–e4.

41 *Phdr.* 276b3.

refrain from entrusting certain contents to writing—whereas most modern philosophical readers will simply not know what such “gardens” were, or in what sort of “festival [ἑορτή]”⁴² they were employed. They were in fact little earth-filled clay pots or baskets in which seeds were planted. They were kept in dark rooms and watered until they sprouted after a few days. Now why should one not sow one’s entire seed stock in little gardens of Adonis? Might this not lead to greatly increased agricultural yield? No, for every ancient reader would have known that such rapidly sprouting plants remain without fruit—they are not ἔγχαρπα,⁴³ which is also why at the Festival of Adonis one let the little clay pots with the wilting plants drift away on the water while bewailing Adonis.⁴⁴ A farmer who sowed his entire seed stock in little gardens of Adonis would *eo ipso* no longer be a *rational* farmer (νοῦν ἔχων γεωργός),⁴⁵ since he would lose his harvest and starve. So, when Plato here compares the philosophical author with the prudent farmer, he is postulating that both will handle their seeds (σπέρματα)⁴⁶ in the same manner, i.e., will certainly not sow them *all* in “gardens of Adonis”—be they tangible, real bowls of clay, or metaphorical-literary “gardens of letters”.⁴⁷

But even without this oft-misunderstood farmer-analogy, one can show that our text does not permit the complete written rendering of the dialectician’s insights. The key concepts of “helping”, “keeping silent [*Schweigen*]” and the “things of higher value”—which interpreters and commentators either ignore or misconstrue—demonstrate this point with sufficient clarity—especially when illustrated by the dialogues themselves.

The text characterizes the non-philosopher as “one who does *not* possess anything of higher value than what he has composed or written” (τὸν μὴ ἔχοντα

42 Phdr. 276b5.

43 Phdr. 276b2.

44 Gerhard J. Baudy (1986) has given a good presentation of this rite in its religious-historical context.

45 Phdr. 276b1–2.

46 Phdr. 276c5.

47 The explanation, variously advanced in the twentieth century, that the Platonic philosopher could in fact sow *all* of his seed stock (i.e., his entire philosophy) into his literary gardens of Adonis, just not seriously (σπουδῇ) but playfully and in a festive spirit, runs counter to the farmer-analogy. For then the philosopher would be analogous to the foolish farmer who playfully brings out his entire seed stock in clay bowls at the Festival of Adonis—but it is just this idea that the analogy is intended to reject. If one were nonetheless to accept it, then the analogy would lose its function and point. (This interpretation was most recently advanced by W. Kühn 1998. His entire argument of course reveals that Kühn has not grasped what a garden of Adonis is; for a refutation of his arguments, see my 1999).

τιμιώτερα ὧν συνέθηκεν ἢ ἔγραψεν).⁴⁸ In Greek, these “more valuable things” (τιμιώτερα) cannot literally designate the conduct of dialogues as such—as moderns for a long time tried to argue, so as to rule out the discomfiting statement that there could be for Plato any “more valuable” contents than what the dialogues contain. But had he meant *that*, then the text at 278d8 would have to read: “τὸν μὴ ἔχοντα τιμιώτερόν τι τοῦ συντιθέναι ἢ γράφειν”. Yet Plato is not contrasting two activities—oral, dialogical philosophizing, on the one hand, and writing, on the other—but rather two content-complexes: first, those that we find in the book; second, those that the *philosophos* personally lays out (λέγων αὐτός)⁴⁹ orally to “aid the *logos*”. These contents—concepts, thoughts, images, analogies, theses, theories, and proofs—must be of higher philosophical value and rank when compared with what has been fixed in writing, so that, once laid out, they will “prove the written material to be of little worth” (cp. τὰ γεγραμμένα φαῦλα ἀποδείξαι).⁵⁰

That “*logoi*”—spoken and written “speeches” and expositions [*Darlegungen*] of all kinds—are evaluated by comparison with each other according to the philosophical rank or “value” of their contents, is nothing new at this point in the *Phaedrus*. Rather, such a comparison of worth has determined the action of the dialogue from the very beginning.⁵¹ Young Phaedrus declared Lysias’ speech on *erōs* to be unsurpassable, provoking Socrates to contradict him.⁵² The discussion then turned on the question whether it is possible to say “more and more significant things” about this same topic, i.e., about *erōs* (εἰπεῖν... μείζω καὶ πλείω περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πράγματος).⁵³ Phaedrus clarifies further: if Socrates wants to outdo Lysias, then he must produce “other things, more, and of higher value” (ἄλλα [ἔτερα] πλείω καὶ πλείονος ἄξια).⁵⁴ And these “more valuable” things are for him naturally also “better” *tout court* (βελτίω).⁵⁵ This demand is reiterated four times and pertains to the *content* of the speech on *erōs* that is supposed to eclipse that of Lysias. This is absolutely unambiguous in the context of the passage and is confirmed impressively over the course of the dialogue. Socrates delivers in his two *erōs*-speeches exactly what Phaedrus had demanded, namely speeches on *erōs*, the content of which is far superior, with his second speech outshining his first by a good deal, so that it is no later

48 *Phdr.* 278d8.

49 *Phdr.* 278c6.

50 *Phdr.* 278c6–7.

51 On the dramatic action of the *Phaedrus*, see *PSP* I: 24, ff.

52 *Phdr.* 234c6, ff.

53 *Phdr.* 234e2–4.

54 *Phdr.* 235b4–5; 236b2.

55 *Phdr.* 235d6.

than the middle of the dialogue that the reader now knows how it looks when the originator of a *logos* outdoes his *own* previous *logos* with something “better” and of “higher value”. For Socrates has, by means of his second speech, clearly proved his first speech to be of (relatively) lesser value. Now anyone who has grasped the unity of the *Phaedrus* (viz., that throughout it treats of the necessary conditions for recognizing one *logos* as superior to another)⁵⁶ will also see that “*timiōtera*”,⁵⁷ being a synonym of *pleionos axia*,⁵⁸ takes up the original theme at the beginning of the dialogue. The dialectician’s oral *logos* must be superior to his own written *logos* in virtue of its “more valuable [*pleionos axia*]” contents, and this relationship just defines the Platonic *philosophos*: he who does not have at his disposal “more valuable things [*timiōtera*]” than those contained in his writings, is not worthy of the title, “philosopher”. This of course now implies that the “most valuable”, what is of highest rank in the dialectician’s philosophy, is not to be found in his writings. It is only in the *elenchus* that the dialectician will now, “speaking for himself [*legōn autos*]”, introduce this superior part (or parts thereof) into the discussion, i.e., in *oral* commentary—thus making immediately evident the relatively lower rank of his own written text.

But is it conceivable that the Platonic philosopher would intentionally hold back portions of his knowledge and “keep silent” about them? It is not only conceivable: it is explicitly claimed that this is one of his distinguishing capacities. Whereas the written text is available to all and does not know whom it should address and whom not,⁵⁹ the living and ensouled speech of “the knower” is not only capable of defending itself, but also knows with whom to speak or not speak, respectively: this *logos* is ἐπιστήμων δὲ λέγειν τε καὶ σιγᾶν πρὸς οὓς δεῖ.⁶⁰

However, if the dialectician (the “knower”) is able and entitled to keep quiet in personal conversation, then he is *a fortiori* able and entitled to leave out essential matters in composing a written text. For the text can at any moment fall into the hands of unsuitable readers, as Socrates explains, that is, into the hands of such people with whom, in face to face contact, he would keep silent.

Like the notion of the *timiōtera*, this concept of “keeping quiet towards those towards whom it is necessary” (*sigān pros hous dei*) is illustrated in the dialogues. Whenever a dialogue-leader mentions an important question essentially belonging to the theme at hand, while at the same time excluding

56 On the much-debated question of the unity of the *Phaedrus*, see *PSP* 1: 27–30.

57 *Phdr.* 278d8.

58 *Phdr.* 235b5; 236b2.

59 *Phdr.* 275e1–3.

60 *Phdr.* 276a6–7: “know[ing] for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent” (trans. Nehamas and Woodruff).

its treatment from the conversation, he is doing nothing other than *sigān pros hous dei*: he is “keeping silent” towards interlocutors not intellectually equipped for a full dialectical discussion of this philosopher’s *timiōtera*. At one of these “loci of omission”, in *Republic* IV, Socrates says that the question regarding the structure of the soul cannot ever be solved “exactly [ἀκριβῶς]” “with methods such as we are currently using in our discussions”; rather “another longer and fuller way” leads to the solution.⁶¹ Schleiermacher, here following Tennemann, explicitly understood this textual indication of a “purer and more exact procedure” as the omission of something that Plato had already developed, namely “in his oral lectures”.⁶² So whereas he does here recognize that behind the published text there lies the philosophically more significant approach of the oral philosophy, Schleiermacher nevertheless remained blind towards other, even more significant omissions in the *Republic* and in other dialogues, e.g., towards Socrates’ refusal to communicate his view of the essence of the Good (of his *dokoun* concerning the *ti estin* of the *auto to agathon*), or his denial of Glaucon’s request to provide a sketch of dialectic.⁶³ Interpreters belonging to the line initiated by Schleiermacher went even further, simply denying the existence of such passages of omission in Plato.⁶⁴ It was generally not recognized that these passages are conceived by their author as illustrations of the dialectician’s capacity to *sigān pros hous dei*.

Similarly, one failed to see that the dialogues, being *eidōla* (*Phdr.* 276a9) of the “knower’s” living speech, programmatically illustrate a third key element of the critique of writing (in addition to the *timiōtera* and *sigān*), viz., coming to the aid of *logos* (the βοηθεῖν [τῷ] λόγῳ).⁶⁵ Paying attention to the relevant passages,⁶⁶ it becomes clear that, in Plato’s dialogues, it is only ever the figure of the dialectician to whom the capacity of defending one’s argument or of one’s position in case of attack is suited; and that this Platonic “aid” does not consist in a smoothed out, refined repetition of the original discussions, as Vlastos’s all too crude interpretation would have it,⁶⁷ but rather in the introduction of more expansive and challenging themes and theses, in short: of *timiōtera*. The examples of *boēthein tō(i) logō(i)* developed in the dialogues

61 *Rep.* 435d1–3.

62 *PW* III, 1: 356.

63 *Rep.* 506e, 533a.

64 See Szlezák (2015).

65 *Phdr.* 276c8.

66 On the Platonic *loci* of omission, see Krämer (1959), 389–399 and 484–486. I have given complete interpretations regarding these *loci* in their respective dramatic contexts in *PSP* I and *PSP* II.

67 See Vlastos (1963), 653.

all vividly illustrate the critique of writing's claim, viz., that the true philosopher, in defending himself, brings "things of higher value" into play, and in this way outshines his own earlier position. Prime cases include the final proof of immortality in the *Phaedo* as a "defense" (ἐβόηθει τῷ λόγῳ)⁶⁸ for the Socratic position now apparently damaged by Simmias and Cebes' objections; or the presentation of the ideal polity as an "aid" for Justice, in response to Glaucon and Adeimantus' attacks upon it.⁶⁹

In sum, the critique of writing speaks of nothing other than Plato's esoteric philosophizing. There are people who simply have no business doing philosophy (οὐδὲν προσήκει),⁷⁰ and towards them, the dialectician must keep silent (*sigān pros hous dei*).⁷¹ Written texts [*die Schrift*] neither can teach philosophical truth adequately,⁷² nor can they keep quiet towards unsuited listeners, and hence can neither seek out their appropriate addressees, nor defend themselves in case of unjust denigration.⁷³ All this is the province of the "knower" alone, who writes his living speech directly upon the soul of the interlocutor.⁷⁴ He only takes seriously this oral dialectic.⁷⁵ Should he nevertheless have written an "image [*eidōlon*]" of a dialectical *logos* as a "game", then this image necessarily represents [*abbildet*] the dialectician's ability and procedure, exhibiting him as he seeks out the correct partner, answers questions, or keeps quiet, i.e., restricts his philosophical communication with partners with little or no suitability. If he must defend his writing, then he resorts to oral arguments of "higher rank", concerning which the written text—since it will constantly fall into the hands of unsuitable readers—had necessarily to "keep quiet". Aided by contents that are *timiōtera*, the dialectician is able to exhibit the relatively lower rank of his own writing.

68 *Ph.* 88e.

69 *Rep.* 368b. On these two examples, see *PSP* I: 243, ff. and 280, ff. On "coming to the aid of *logos*", see all of *PSP* I and *PSP* II, *passim*, as well as my (1989), and its abridgement in Rossetti (1992).

70 *Phdr.* 275e2.

71 *Phdr.* 276a7.

72 *Phdr.* 276c9.

73 *Phdr.* 275e5.

74 *Phdr.* 276a1–9.

75 *Phdr.* 276e4–277a5.

§5

Schleiermacher himself never interpreted the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. He only took up its point of departure, viz., that the lifeless signs of writing cannot by themselves awaken philosophical understanding. He ignored the rest of this rich text—yet the one thing he did take up, he immediately labored to pervert into its opposite. His credo, “that Plato had, after all, wanted to bring the not-yet-knowing reader into knowledge”,⁷⁶ has no textual support. Indeed, this credo flatly *negates* the basic claim of the critique of writing. Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the few who clearly saw this point: Schleiermacher's

whole hypothesis directly contradicts the declaration in the *Phaedrus* and is supported by a false interpretation.... According to Plato, writing has no instructional or educational purpose whatsoever, but only serves as a reminder.⁷⁷

By listing the “arts” (cf. p. 170, above) by which Plato allegedly pursued a goal ascribed to him in violation of the text, Schleiermacher suggests that Plato, at precisely the moment in which he analyzes the drawbacks of writing, nevertheless strives, through an especially ingenious deployment of writing, to overcome those very same drawbacks—which in fact are for Plato inherent and therefore in principle insuperable defects of writing (*graphē*) as such and without restriction.⁷⁸

In the final analysis, Schleiermacher did not really take the critique of writing seriously; he did not recognize the innovative reflection on the role of the medium in the communication of knowledge as one of Plato's great achievements. Thus, he also wanted, as mentioned above, to restrict the critique temporally, as well, claiming that the mature Plato was no longer committed to it. The outcome of this utterly inadequate approach to the mature, experienced writer, Plato, is not merely *un-Platonic*—it is, in spirit, *anti-Platonic*, for Schleiermacher in effect places the dialectician's spoken word on an equal footing with the published work.

76 “Introduction”, 16.

77 Nietzsche (1871/1872), 240.

78 This tacit suggestion of Schleiermacher's had great success in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In general, one construed the dialogue-form as “the attempt of its author to eliminate the drawbacks of written speech”. To cite just one of innumerable representatives of this view, see Ebert (1974), 31.

So, it only stands to reason, that followers of Schleiermacher, if not Schleiermacher himself, would come explicitly to articulate this equivalence. Plato's "dialogue book [*Dialogbuch*]" is for Schleiermacher more than a mere book: it is, in a representative remark by Paul Friedländer, "the only form of the book that seems to eliminate [*aufheben*] the book itself".⁷⁹ It follows that this higher type of book is, for the exponents of this tradition, free of the flaws that Plato criticizes as inherent in writing or *graphē* as such: the *Platonic* writings are uniquely able "utterly to deter the inappropriate reader" (that is: Plato's writings themselves know whom to address, or not address); they *can* justify themselves to an interrogator ("*Rede und Antwort stehen*") (that is: they can answer and come to their own aid), since, after all, they have been "inscribed in the souls"⁸⁰ with dialectic (that is: they can set into motion thinking-for-one-self without mediation). In other words, everything that according to *Phaedrus* 275d–276a the dialectician alone is able to do in *personal* conversation, *Plato's* books are also capable of. This view might be defensible had Plato somewhere excepted his own writings from the critique of *graphē*. But he nowhere does so; rather, as the *Seventh Letter* makes unmistakably clear, the inevitable worries raised against written communication of knowledge count for Plato's own work, as well.⁸¹

§6

Schleiermacher's solutions to two of the three great problems of Platonic scholarship were not especially successful. His critique of the genuineness of

79 Friedländer (1964), 177.

80 Stein (1862), 73. For a very similar view, see Ebert (1974), 31, whom I mention only as a prime example of twentieth-century mainstream Plato-interpretation.

81 In order to compensate for the lack of any textual evidence that the critique of writing does not apply to the Platonic dialogues themselves, scholars invented a new meaning for the Greek word "σύγγραμμα", which Plato uses to indicate that there exists no text by him dealing with what is nevertheless a serious matter for him (*Seventh Letter* 341c); they allege it means something like "systematic treatise". Since the dialogues are not treatises, Plato must not be thinking of his own work when he critiques writing. The σύγγραμμα-argument was the common property of the most prominent Platonists of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it does not hold water, since the Greeks (including Plato) did not give the special sense of "treatise" to "σύγγραμμα", blithely applying σύγγραμμα to Plato's dialogues as well (see *PSP* 1: 376–385). Since the refutation of the σύγγραμμα-"argument", the chorus pleading exemption of the Platonic dialogue from the inherent weaknesses of writing has grown somewhat quieter. Still adhering to the σύγγραμμα-argument is Burnyeat (2015), 164.

dialogues, by which he rejected the *Menexenus* and *Hippias Major* with weak arguments, and the *Greater (First) Alcibiades* with somewhat stronger but not decisive ones, left little impression; even less convincing was his chronology of the dialogues, which placed the *Phaedrus* at the beginning, and the *Republic* at the end as the final capstone (with *Timaeus* and *Critias* as a sort of appendix)—both, *nota bene*, in Schleiermacher's view, proved "once and for all".⁸² Today, Schleiermacher's chronology itself may be dismissed as a curiosity, yet the self-assurance with which it was presented has something strange and disconcerting about it, and casts a negative light upon the dialogue-theory according to which the "genuine Platonic form"—whose "inner" secret is the indirect communication with its knowledge-awakening "arts"—reveals and explains everything with compelling, "inner" necessity, including the chronology and genuineness of the dialogues. Despite the acceptance of Schleiermacher's "discovery of the dialogue-form" (Gadamer), numerous chronologies and atheteses were proposed shortly after 1804, making a mockery of the supposedly "necessary" conclusions of Schleiermacher's discovery.⁸³

Indeed, Schleiermacher's theory of dialogue did totally revolutionize the philosophical estimation of the Platonic dialogue, of the purpose it serves and the way it operates. This gained him immense renown and enduring influence for two centuries, even though his arguments were no stronger than the ones he used to support his criticism of the genuineness or the chronology of the dialogues. Schleiermacher construes the Platonic dialogue as an autarkic philosophical-literary unity, in clear contradiction to Plato's own declaration in the *Phaedrus*, that a written text always requires the aid of its originator, and that the true philosopher must come to the aid of his text through recourse to contents of a higher status. Appealing to Aristotle's reports that clearly testify to the existence of such a "higher" theory of first principles, Schleiermacher claims that that theory "in no way contains anything unknown in our texts or anything that departs from them".⁸⁴ Only someone who has very superficially looked into the Aristotelian reports, and who certainly has not seriously worked through them (say, with the help of Tiedemann or Tennemann, or even

82 Introduction to the *Phaedrus*, in *PW* 1, 1, 47. Schleiermacher similarly emphasizes the dating of the *Republic* after the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, etc., "Introduction", *PW*: 1, 1, 33.

83 Thesleff (1982), 8–17, offers a most illuminating overview of the more than 130 attempts across the two centuries since Tennemann (1792) to put the dialogues in their "correct" order.

84 "Introduction", 13.

the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias)⁸⁵ could write in such a way. As far as concerns the claimed omnipresence of the “indirect” communication in the whole of Plato’s work, Karl Friedrich Hermann already soberly pointed out that much, and often the best of the dialogues is in fact rendered in a most direct and didactic manner. When, lastly, the “straightforward, undisturbed progress of the second half” of the *Phaedrus* is interpreted as the “imperfection of that indirect conduct of the conversation that constitutes Plato’s true genius,”⁸⁶ an imperfection attributable only to the youth of the author—then it is clear that Schleiermacher’s bias in favor of the allegedly higher status of indirectness keeps him from honoring the text’s clear and straightforward argument, which, after all, he could not deny. The alleged necessity of the dialogue form for all things Platonic can in the end only elicit head-shaking, especially in view of the *Timaeus*’s cosmological monologue.⁸⁷ Schleiermacher’s conception of an overarching, comprehensive unity of all the dialogues, the architectonic of which was always fixed and clear to the author, and progressively realized in a grand didactic project, had soon to give way to the notion of a gradual evolution of Plato’s philosophical insights, a view especially championed by Karl Friedrich Hermann.

We cannot help but notice a double discrepancy: first, between the claims and the actual achievement of the Schleiermacherian theory of dialogue; and second, between the picture that Schleiermacher paints of the dialogues and what they in fact exhibit. This double discrepancy is the result of a double blunder, one exegetic, the other hermeneutic.

Schleiermacher’s *exegetic* blunder consists in dispensing with a full interpretation of the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. He believed himself already to have grasped Plato’s full intention from the first section, dealing with Thamus’s devaluation of Theuth’s invention of writing.⁸⁸ He paid scant attention to Plato’s further thoughts, thereby overlooking the analysis of the defects of writing, and the Platonic answer to these shortcomings, viz., the rigorous subordination of written mediation of knowledge to philosophical instruction (διδασχῆ).⁸⁹

85 Less than twenty years after Schleiermacher’s “Introduction”, C.A. Brandis, in his *De perditis Aristotelis libris* (still worth reading today), wrote the following: “qui autem contendunt integram Platonis doctrinam in eius dialogis contentam esse, non meminerunt plura Aristotelem ex magistri doctrina et in libris qui extant et in deperditis tetigisse, quorum ne vestigia quidem in dialogis reperiuntur” (Brandis [1823], 2).

86 Introduction to the *Phaedrus*, *PW* 1, 1: 53.

87 Of course, the dialogical prelude (*Ti.* 17a–27b), which deals with entirely other matters, as well as the presence of an audience, do not alone make the great speech of Timaeus (*Ti.* 27c–92c) into a cosmological *dialogue*.

88 *Phdr.* 274b–275d; cp. the analysis above, p. 171.

89 *Phdr.*, 275a7; 277e9.

He failed to see the Platonic meaning of the following key concepts: *sigān pros hōus dei*; *boēthein tō(i) logō(i)*; and *timiōtera*. Consequently, Schleiermacher failed, *a fortiori*, to see that Plato illustrated the meaning of these concepts in the action of his dialogues themselves. It may seem especially odd that the theologian, Schleiermacher, failed to notice the “theological” reference that frames the discussion like a bracket. He might have found the meaning of this reference in the *Seventh Letter*, where Plato states he had not “thrown away” his *spoudaiotata* (most serious things) like Dionysius, but had rather preserved them with reverence (ἐτόλμησεν... ἐκβάλλειν as opposed to ὁμοίως γὰρ ἂν αὐτὰ ἐσέβετο ἐμοί).⁹⁰ In any case, the *Letter* did not pique the interest of Schleiermacher as a translator, and perhaps, too, his Protestant faith rebelled at the Platonic conviction that the objects towards which the true philosopher directs his mind have a “divine” status,⁹¹ so that he who turns towards them assumes the duty of preserving them from any degradation.⁹²

In addition to the incompleteness of the exegesis of the critique of writing we have the incompleteness of the inquiry into the actual state of the dialogues: it is clear that the so-called arts of indirect communication that are supposed to guarantee the awakening of genuinely philosophical thinking via the written text are taken from the early, aporetic dialogues, and contribute little or nothing to understanding the constructive dialogues of Plato's middle or late periods.

Schleiermacher's *hermeneutic* blunder consists in the assumption that indirect communication has the capacity of reaching its goals of security and clarity of knowledge through a series of techniques, any of which taken in its own right is cause for uncertainty and obscurity.⁹³ For security and clarity are precisely what Plato finds lacking in knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) derived from any kind of written text, and which philosophical *didachē* alone can guarantee, viz., the *saphes kai bebaion*, the *bebaiotēs*, the *saphēneia* and *to enarges*.⁹⁴ On Schleiermacher's account, Plato had employed means such as “unconnected strokes”, unsolved riddles in the text, allusions, and intentional omissions, in order to attain one of two possible aims in the reader: either the authentically Platonic generation of the intended thought; or the consciousness of “having found and having understood nothing” (“Introduction”, 16). How odd! What about the third and most plausible outcome, viz., that the reader ends up

90 *Seventh Letter*, 344d7–9.

91 Cf. *Rep.* 500c.

92 I hope to have shown the *religious* to be not the least important motive suggestive in Plato's view of an esoteric mode of operation; see my (2008), esp. 232, f.

93 Cp. the enumeration of these “arts” on p. 170, f., above.

94 *Phdr.* 275c6, 277d8–9, 278a4.

coaxing forth something un-Platonic of his own *out* of the text, or rather laying it *into* the text, in the firm conviction to be the first and only “true hearer of the inner” to have finally grasped the true Plato?⁹⁵ The history of Platonism shows that this has practically been the norm in Plato-interpretation over the centuries. Schleiermacher’s own hermeneutic contains the important—and undoubtedly correct—proposition, “that misunderstanding comes about on its own [*daß sich das Mißverstehen von selbst ergibt*]”.⁹⁶ But if that is so, then how can the various means of indirect communication, designed to provoke unsettlement, indeterminacy and openness, fail to open wide the gates to misunderstanding? Thus, Schleiermacher does not only come into conflict with the Platonic text, but also with his own general hermeneutics.

How then are we to understand the unique success of a position that on most points represents a clear regression as against Tennemann, and which was already in the following generation at first timidly criticized, then refuted on well-founded grounds?⁹⁷

Schleiermacher’s new Plato-picture owed its overwhelming success to its consonance not only with the spirit of nineteenth-century Romanticism, but also with the post-metaphysical drift of our own age. The interpretation of the Platonic *œuvre* from a single, unified principle that promised to show the inseparable connection between content and form and thus to understand Plato the artist as inseparable from Plato the thinker—this corresponded completely with the anti-rationalistic yearnings of German Romanticism, especially as this unitary principle was conceived as “inner”, realizing itself in the private understanding of the individual reader as the “true hearer of the inner” (in stark contrast to Tennemann’s “outer” method). The elimination of the esoteric theory of principles, which still was well known to Tiedemann and Tennemann, fit perfectly into the anti-elitist dream of equality that the German bourgeoisie had been dreaming since the French Revolution. (Even today one still takes offense—acknowledged or not—at the “elitist” exclusion of the “unsuited”, without pausing to think how deeply this view is rooted in

95 I have shown that Schleiermacher’s theory of dialogue ultimately amounts to hermeneutic solipsism at *PSP* 1: 370–374.

96 Schleiermacher (1999), 92.

97 Already his student, August Boeckh, criticized Schleiermacher’s denigration of the Aristotelian testimony in his review (Boeckh [1808], 6–8). Scholars who later sought to interpret the philosophy of the *ἄγραφα δόγματα*, like Brandis, A. Trendelenburg, and C.H. Weisse, also clearly did not follow the Schleiermacherian line. K.F. Hermann’s sharp critique of Schleiermacher’s theory of dialogue applies arguments that remain valid today (cf. Hermann [1849], 281–305. Nietzsche’s correct rejection of Schleiermacher’s “wrong interpretation”, in his lecture of 1871/1872, did not appear in print until 1913 (see note 77, above).

Plato's thought.)⁹⁸ The additional fact that that esoteric doctrine of principles was massively "metaphysical" also sealed its fate as *doctrina non grata* in the post-Romantic, anti-metaphysical era.⁹⁹

The temporary victory of the anti-esoteric Plato-picture (considered "modern" in its day, but now again antiquated in turn) over the older picture that recognized the indirect transmission as one of two sources of our knowledge of Plato—this victory should not be understood only as a triumph of anti-metaphysical critique, but rather as the victory of a typically "modern" *German metaphysics* over the classical Greek metaphysics of the fourth century, BCE. For Schleiermacher's Plato-picture reflects that of his close friend, Friedrich Schlegel, who, as is well known, inspired Schleiermacher's whole translation project in the first place. Schlegel, for his part, was captivated by the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and the latter's concept of infinite reflection.¹⁰⁰

It lies in the concept of the human being, that his ultimate goal must be unreachable and that his path to it must be infinite.... But he can come ever closer to this goal: and hence the infinite approximation of this goal is his true destination [*Bestimmung*] as human.¹⁰¹

Schlegel did not shrink from applying this idea directly to Plato's philosophy, which, he held, was also committed to "the relative unrepresentability of the Highest". Since the highest reality for human beings is only partially knowable, it follows that philosophy, too, is in principle incapable of being completed. Since the infinite truth is unreachable, all we are left with is the striving *for* truth, approximative progression and approximate perfection. And if truth is unreachable and the progression infinite, then Plato's philosophy must in fact be unsystematic, for system-building is only possible when the search has been completed. In a stroke of bold, circular reasoning, Schlegel rejects any esoteric dimension in Plato: an esoteric doctrine is, he argues, incompatible with the

98 Just consider such passages as the following: *Rep.* 476b10–11; 494a4; 503b7; 503d11; 535a–539d (cf. *PSP* 11: 1–43—Chapter 1, "The correct use of dialectic").

99 Cf. Krämer (1982). Krämer not only proves Plato's oral doctrine of principles to be the foundation of Western metaphysics, but also offers, *en passant*, as it were, the hitherto most thorough philosophically founded critique of Schleiermacher's starting point and its consequences, 31–149.

100 A detailed presentation of Schlegel's philosophy and its relation to Fichte's idealistic metaphysics is not possible here. For a penetrating and well-documented analysis of the intellectual-historical nexus, see Krämer (1988). Marie-Dominique Richard's outstanding presentation of Schlegel's interpretation of Plato is also valuable (Richard [2004]). The French translation also includes Schlegel's texts on Plato (489–566).

101 Fichte (1794), *Werke* VI, 300.

dialogues' conception of philosophy—i.e., with the very thing that he has read *into* them. On this basis, Schlegel then condemns the first generation of Plato's students and their reports of the *agrapha dogmata*—naturally, without subjecting them to philosophical or philological examination.

Now Schleiermacher's "inner" form of indirect communication was superbly suited to this vision of Plato, for once we eliminate the indirect transmission with its clearly defined statements—e.g., regarding the *ti estin* of the Form of the Good; regarding the existence and nature of a second principle; or the hierarchical structure of reality, etc.—then there is room enough for every "true hearer of the inner" to try his hand at interpreting, at his own discretion and with his own creativity, the "riddles", the "allusions" and the (allegedly) "unconnected strokes" with which Plato sketches out the Whole. No wonder, then, that the "open-ended", the (allegedly) non-committal Plato, always open to any correction of his views, became the guiding paradigm of the Plato-interpretation of the generations following Schlegel and Schleiermacher.

This vision of Plato also influenced the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of Plato, first, via the English translations of Schleiermacher's introductions to the dialogues, which William Dobson already published two years after the death of the German theologian, and that were still in print in the twentieth century;¹⁰² and second, via the tradition starting with Paul Shorey, who absorbed the Schleiermacherian creed during his time as a student in Munich; running through his student, Harold Cherniss, whose radical devaluation of Aristotle's reports are rarely read, but often parroted; and finally to the numerous emigrants who firmly established the German tradition in the United States.¹⁰³ These include Leo Strauss, whose "esoteric" reading of Plato has nothing to do with the esoteric interpretation of the so-called Tübingen School, but is instead a classic example of the (putatively) deeper insight of a "true hearer of the inner" in Schleiermacher's sense: esoteric reading between the lines, rather than recognition of the historical fact that Plato operated with a theory of principles that he intentionally omitted from his written work.

In conclusion, let me point to three peculiarities of the Plato scholarship of recent decades that would not likely have blossomed in the way they did, had Schleiermacher not prepared the ground for them more than 200 years ago.

¹⁰² Schleiermacher (1836).

¹⁰³ I mention here only the following: Ludwig Edelstein, Friedrich Solmsen, Jacob Klein, Paul Friedländer, Werner Jaeger, Kurt von Fritz. Nothing could be more wrong than the view, expressed by Dorothea Frede, that in the United States, Schleiermacher has been received only at the margins. For a refutation, cf. the provisional remarks in my (1997), 61, f. The German influence on Anglo-American Plato-scholarship would require a separate investigation, which, for obvious reasons, cannot even be begun here.

(I do not wish to speak of direct “influence”, not to mention “causal” connections—I do not wish to make Schleiermacher responsible for the derelictions and blindness of today’s scholars.)

K.F. Hermann had made clear in his 1849 refutation of Schleiermacher that the *Phaedrus*, the *Seventh Letter*, and the Aristotelian testimonia agree in this, viz., that “the core of Plato’s doctrine was not laid down in his writings”.¹⁰⁴ Now it is notable that we may discern a strange kind of blockade-operation in just these three areas, particularly in anglophone scholarship: that is, one avoids including the testimonia of indirect Plato-transmission in the interpretation of the dialogues, and combats those who do so;¹⁰⁵ one treats the *Seventh Letter* as un-Platonic, although the intensive 200-year-long quest for convincing signs of its inauthenticity has remained fruitless;¹⁰⁶ and one refuses to acknowledge that Plato himself interpreted, in the dialogues themselves, the meaning of the key concepts of the critique of writing, illustrating them by means of the dramatic action, and that an intra-dialogical correspondence within the *Phaedrus* shows that the meaning of *timiōtera* unambiguously refers to more important contents.¹⁰⁷

All three blockade-actions serve the goal of preventing the philologically and philosophically ineluctable acknowledgment of an oral theory of principles, and to limit Plato to his written work—which, however, according to

¹⁰⁴ Hermann (1849), 283.

¹⁰⁵ One likes to claim that Aristotle’s *précis* (*Referate*) of Plato are incomprehensible and contradictory—a view that was refuted more than 100 years ago by Léon Robin in his (1908). Or else one claims that Aristotle does not distinguish between his *précis* of other philosophies, on the one hand, and his own criticisms thereof, on the other; this view, too, is untenable: cf. my (1987), 45–67.

¹⁰⁶ As to the worthless book of Burnyeat and Frede (2015), see my review in *Gnomon* (2017). Of course, a proof of the inauthenticity of the *Letter* would benefit the anti-esoteric position since it depends entirely on dismissing the *Letter* (the occasionally attempted anti-esoteric interpretation of the *Letter* has rightly fallen out of fashion). By contrast, the position of those who accept an unwritten doctrine of principles in no way depends upon assuming the authenticity of the *Letter*; their position follows entirely from the dialogues themselves.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *pleionos axia* (*Phdr.* 235b, 236b) = *timiōtera* (*Phdr.* 278d). As representative of an entire line of research, let me mention the two commentaries on the *Phaedrus* by C.J. Rowe (1986) and H. Yunis (2011). Both lack an explanation of the key concepts of the critique of writing that I dealt with above (pp. 176–178), and both are blind towards the meaning, clarified within the *Phaedrus* itself, of *timiōtera* (cf. pp. 175, f., above), not to mention towards the presence of these key concepts in dialogues other than the *Phaedrus*. In this respect, Italian scholarship is decidedly more advanced, as evidenced by the commentaries by Giovanni Reale (1998) and Bruno Centrone (1998), which recognize the crucial connections.

his own estimation required the “aid” of his oral philosophy. In this threefold blockade the great theologian lives on, Schleiermacher, who as a Protestant held up the principle of “*sola scriptura*” and, perhaps unwittingly, tried to apply it in the realm of Plato-interpretation, as well.

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108 Cf. bibliography to the chapter by Laks in this volume.

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Plato's Conception of Time at the Foundation of Schopenhauer's Philosophy

Robert Wicks

When commonly thinking about Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, Plato's influence does not immediately come to mind. Schopenhauer's reputation as a "pessimist" is probably the first thought, and if one's acquaintance is more than passing, his belief that a meaningless, blind "Will" is at the bottom of all things quickly follows. Perhaps next, in no particular order, are his vanguard incorporation of Asian thought into Western philosophy, his bitter condemnations of G.W.F. Hegel and salaried university professors, the uncomfortable anecdote of his having angrily thrown a noisy cleaning woman down a staircase in a fit of frustration, and for those who are more well-versed, his deep and abiding influence on Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Concerning Plato, most scholarly discussions of Schopenhauer tend to concentrate on the status and role of Platonic Ideas in his philosophy, usually in reference to how they inform Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory.¹ This is a fruitful approach, as circumscribed as it is, and we will consider Schopenhauer's understanding of Platonic Ideas near the end of this essay. More important, however, is to situate such an inquiry within the context of the more fundamental recognition that Schopenhauer's initial reading of Plato, a philosopher he often called "the divine", set the groundwork for Schopenhauer's philosophical ascension to a so-called better consciousness through art, morality and asceticism.

In the absence of this wider context, it is easy to overlook how Plato's initial influence kindled the driving insight at the foundation of Schopenhauer's philosophy—an insight more deep-seated than Schopenhauer's famous metaphysical apprehension that the world is Will. This is his appreciation of the nature of time as "the moving image of eternity", as Plato described it in the *Timaeus* (37c–e). Upon this, Schopenhauer set his more characteristic view that the spatio-temporal world is a prison of endless frustration, a view

¹ The primary textual location for Schopenhauer's aesthetics is *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I (WWR I), Book III, §§30–52.

itself inspired significantly by Plato's allegory of the cave (*Rep.* 514a–520a) and the *Epinomis*.

In this essay, we will develop these points of Platonic inspiration for Schopenhauer to illustrate how profoundly and extensively Plato's thought shaped Schopenhauer's philosophy.

1 Schopenhauer's Early Encounter with Plato's Writings

In 1809, at the age of twenty-one, Schopenhauer began his university studies at Göttingen. Prior to this, he had served until age nineteen as a business apprentice according to his father's wishes, after which he completed a couple of years of university preparation.² At the advice of his philosophy instructor in Göttingen, Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761–1833), Schopenhauer carefully read Plato and Kant to establish a basis for studying other philosophers. Schulze's advice was long-lived: for the rest of his life, Schopenhauer typically employed Platonic and Kantian lenses to interpret the world around him.

After two years in Göttingen, motivated to develop his knowledge by attending the lectures of one of the leading philosophers of the time, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Schopenhauer concluded his university training with two additional years (1811–13) at the University of Berlin—a newly-established university which had started classes a year before, in 1810. Among his courses, Schopenhauer attended lectures on Plato's dialogues given by the philologist, August Boeckh (1785–1867). Boeckh was then publishing on Plato's doctrine of the world (1810), although his class appears to have been a review for Schopenhauer, judging from the latter's manuscript notes and later correspondence. In light of his experience reading Plato in both Göttingen and Berlin, however, we can say that by 1812, at age twenty-four, Plato's philosophy, as well as Kant's, was firmly rooted in Schopenhauer's mind. This combination of Plato and Kant bore negatively on Schopenhauer's reception of Fichte's lectures, which, despite an initial enthusiasm, were soon experienced as obscurantist and intellectually misguided.³

2 Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer (1747–1805) died when Arthur was seventeen, and Arthur continued with the business apprenticeship for two more years in respect for his father.

3 When he was writing his dissertation in 1813, within a year of having attended Fichte's lectures, Schopenhauer wrote in his notebooks that he regarded Fichte's philosophizing as motivated mainly by a merely technical, theoretical concern with Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself, rather than by a genuine perplexity about the nature of the world. As such, he did not regard him as a true philosopher (*MR* 1: 81, §112 [Rudolstadt 1813, Q]).

Schopenhauer's early understanding and appreciation of Plato's thought is evident in a manuscript excerpt from 1810, when he was studying Plato under Schulze's advice. The excerpt indicates that Schopenhauer was identifying significantly with Plato's views, and had not yet become the atheism and pessimism for which he eventually became well known.

[Platonic Ideas (*Ideen*)] must have resided in the Deity (*in der Gottheit*) at the creation of the species, and in this way the Deity conveys its Idea to man through the organ of nature, which is to be regarded as its language. Figuratively, it becomes clear when we say that the Ideas are realities existing in God. The corporeal world is a concave lens that diffuses the rays emanating from the Ideas; the human faculty of reason is a convex lens that again brings them into focus and once more presents the original pictures of the Ideas, although they have become less clear through the indirect path. But those Ideas that reside within us without having an object in the material world of sense have been conveyed to us by God directly, so to speak, and not like those first Ideas through the language of nature.⁴

The above picture has a theistic grounding, although from the quote alone we might hesitate to equate "the Deity" with the Judeo-Christian "God", since Schopenhauer describes the proposition that "Ideas are realities existing in God" as merely figurative.⁵ As for life on earth, the spatio-temporal world appears in this vision as a great book that presents a timeless message to us, one we can decipher through the use of reason, thereby apprehending the absolute truth, or meaning of things-in-themselves.

4 MR 1: §15 "Earliest Sketches, 1809–10", "On Plato", "De Republica, lib. VI, in fine", 11.

5 In an excerpt from the same time (MR 1: §12 [Earliest Sketches, 1809–1810], 10), Schopenhauer nonetheless refers to the coming "Kingdom of God", which he defines in a Kantian manner as "the inner law" (MR 1: §25 [Initial Sheets], 16). As late as 1814, immediately prior to working on *The World as Will and Representation* in Dresden in that same year, Schopenhauer was referring in his notes to "*sharing in the peace of God*"—a peace arrived at, he believed, through a "better consciousness" that transcends the illusion of the spatio-temporal world, "sin", and "death" (MR 1: §189 [Weimar 1814, Y.], 113–114). Schopenhauer also described this quest for a better consciousness as aspiring to "the holy spirit" by abandoning the "will-to-live" (MR 1: §158 [Weimar 1814, U.], 98). Taken together, these excerpts reveal that despite his periodic doubts about God's existence, Schopenhauer's thinking retained theistic sentiments in the months following the October 1813 completion of his doctoral dissertation, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, into the beginning of 1814. He turned 26 in February 1814 and left Weimar for Dresden in May 1814.

Schopenhauer read Kant in parallel with Plato, and one can imagine the tension he must initially have experienced in trying to square Plato's account of the world with the metaphysically skeptical views of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The *Critique* agreed with Plato that the spatio-temporal world does not present us with reality as it is in itself, but argued that reason is not powerful enough to determine the exact nature of this higher reality. Moreover, the *Critique* relativized concepts and ideas to the human being's own activity, as nothing more than our own intellectual projections, as far as metaphysical certainty is concerned. This tension between Plato and Kant, like two sticks rubbing together to produce a flame, generates Schopenhauer's philosophy, which may be appreciated as a continual negotiation and compromise between these two great thinkers.

At first, Schopenhauer assimilated Kant to Plato, emphasizing their common attitude towards the spatio-temporal world and asserting, "Kant's thing-in-itself is nothing but the Platonic Idea".⁶ To Kantian ears, this equation is unjustified, since Kant maintained that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, and hence, not supremely knowable as Plato himself took the Ideas to be. Kant used the term "Idea" with greater restraint, to refer to rationally extrapolated and idealized focal points beyond the possibility of experience towards which our empirical knowledge converges, like "virtual images" in a mirror.

Schopenhauer interprets Kant along an alternative track, however, more in accord with Kant's theory of freedom. Schopenhauer was captivated by Plato and Kant's agreement that our true inner natures are outside of time and space, in the realm of things in themselves, and that the spatio-temporal world is only a set of appearances. Schopenhauer thereby attended to passages in Kant that refer more determinately, although only speculatively, to the nature of things in themselves. Despite the epistemological barriers that Kant erected, Schopenhauer observed that Kant accounts for our freedom by referring to each human being's "intelligible character" that resides in a space- and time-less beyond.⁷

Given that our intelligible characters are beyond time and space, as epistemologically unapproachable as those characters may be, it is easy to see how Schopenhauer would understand them as being on the same level as, if not identical to, Platonic Ideas, without worrying about their actual unknowability. From this perspective, Schopenhauer's assertion that the Kantian

⁶ *MR* 1: §228 (Dresden 1814), 143.

⁷ Schopenhauer identifies intelligible characters with Platonic Ideas: "The character of each individual man, in so far as it is thoroughly individual and not entirely included in that of the species, can be regarded as a special Idea ..." (*WWR* 1: §28, 158).

thing-in-itself is the Platonic Idea makes more sense. Plato and Kant recognized only two levels of reality—appearance and ultimate being—so there is no place metaphysically to locate Kantian intelligible characters except within the realm of things in themselves. Kant writes:

Secondly, we should also have to allow the subject an *intelligible character*, by which it is indeed the cause of those same actions [in their quality] as appearances, but which does not itself stand under any conditions of sensibility, and is not itself appearance. We can entitle the former the [empirical] character of the thing in the [field of] appearance, and the latter its [intelligible] character as thing in itself.

Now this acting subject would not, in its intelligible character, stand under any conditions of time [for]⁸ time is only a condition of appearances, [but]⁹ not of things in themselves.¹⁰

To enhance these connections between Schopenhauer and Plato, let us return to the excerpt from 1810, cited earlier. Here, Schopenhauer presents Plato's view metaphorically by describing the spatio-temporal world as a "concave lens that diffuses the rays emanating from the Ideas" and the faculty of reason as "a convex lens that again brings them into focus and once more presents the original pictures of the Ideas". As we will see shortly, the emanating rays' going-forth-and-returning through the concave and convex lenses expresses via metaphor the elementary structure of Schopenhauer's account of aesthetic experience and genius, where the apprehension of Platonic Ideas figures centrally. Of note is how this rendition of Plato appeared about four years before Schopenhauer developed his characteristic metaphysical view that the thing-in-itself an eternally driving, irrational and mindless Will.¹¹

In *The World as Will and Representation* III, Schopenhauer describes the experience of beauty as the awareness of Platonic Ideas. He maintains that when we appreciate an object's beauty, we "no longer consider the where, the

8 Modification of Kemp Smith's translation. –Ed.

9 Modification of Kemp Smith's translation. –Ed.

10 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A539/B567.

11 Schopenhauer's manuscripts indicate that he explicitly thematized his metaphysical theory that the thing-in-itself is Will after mid-year 1814, in Dresden. This was in the wake of his having started to read Asian religious texts, namely, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads, respectively, in December 1813 and the spring of 1814. He wrote, apparently for the first time: "*The world as thing-in-itself* is a great will which knows not what it wills; for it does not *know* but merely *wills* just because it is a will and nothing else" (MR I: §278 [Dresden 1814, P.P.], 184–185).

when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*.¹² In this kind of aesthetic experience, we lose ourselves in the object, ignore our spatio-temporal individuality and feel lifted away from worldly considerations to a better consciousness that presents the object's timeless essence. When aesthetically perceiving the beauty of a cat, or a dog, for instance, we appreciate the animal's beauty by bringing to mind the timeless image of the perfect cat or dog. When apprehending a person's beauty, we similarly envision an idealized version of the person, as in traditional portraiture or a wedding photograph.

Schopenhauer's account of beauty is open to criticism, if only because it falls short of explaining the full range of beauty. In view of our present interest in highlighting Plato's influence, we can see nonetheless that Schopenhauer's account of the experience of beauty structurally matches Plato's characterization of the use of reason to transcend the spatio-temporal world in the apprehension of Platonic Ideas.

When Schopenhauer composed *The World as Will and Representation* (1814–1817), however, he replaced reason as the way to become aware of Platonic Ideas with a directly intuitive awareness that requires a disengagement from “the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things”, as described above. On Schopenhauer's view, most people have this awareness in a low intensity, but it is a matter of constant disposition and concentrated power in “geniuses”. Virtually a philosopher and prophet endowed with a capacity to apprehend a physical object timelessly, the genius can see immediately through and beyond that physical object to the Platonic Idea it instantiates, and subsequently construct an artwork whose idealized style allows other people to discern that object's timeless truth with greater ease.

The subordination of reason to direct intuitive perception in Schopenhauer's philosophy, as expressed in *The World as Will and Representation* and thereafter, is explained through the combined influence of Kant and the British Empiricists. Whereas in Plato, truth is known through reason, Kant's challenge to pure reason's metaphysical capacities convinced Schopenhauer that it is vain to expect reason to touch absolute truth. Schopenhauer accordingly conceived of reason in a more pedestrian manner as a mental function which, as the British Empiricists similarly described it, served mainly and nominally to generate abstract concepts through the observation of commonalities among physical objects. He sympathized with the empiricist view that our primary contact with reality is not rationalistic, but is through direct experience, namely, through “intuitive” as opposed to “abstract” representations. Yet,

12 WWR I: §34, 178.

unlike Kant, and more like Plato, Schopenhauer believed that human knowledge is not completely estranged from metaphysical realities.

It remains that Plato and Schopenhauer have opposing estimations of the truth-value of artistic representation. Plato's familiar view is that art's epistemic value is very low. For example, he regards a painting of a tree (and this holds for any pictured physical object) as an imperfect copy of some existing three-dimensional tree. That three-dimensional tree is itself regarded as one among a multitude of imperfect copies and mere shadows of the higher-dimensional, unitary, and timeless form of the perfect Tree. If we want to know this original, higher-dimensional, timeless and perfect form, then it is counterproductive to use as a vehicle the two-dimensional work of art that is the imperfect imitation of a three-dimensional object, and as such, is the shadow of a shadow, an imitation of an imitation. To use a work of art twice removed from the timelessly perfect tree as a way to know that Idea, is a step more misguided than trying to have dinner by eating a food magazine.

Plato's downgrading of the twice-removed painting of a physical object with respect to the Idea that the former imitates, in fact overlooks how a depiction can be stylized and idealized to a point that its virtual world appears even more perfect than the actual spatio-temporal world. The classical Greek sculptures that so carefully perfected the proportions of the human body (sculptures common in Plato's own city) are paradigms of this in the field of art. Their idealized contours are inspiring despite how their stony being is too dull to match the living, moving, delicately-balanced, physiological reality of an actual person. Likewise, the painting of a tree is made simply of insensate paint. And yet, there remains a sense in which the virtual reality that an idealized artistic image presents, allows us to envision more effectively the perfected reality that the Platonic Ideas radiate. Schopenhauer's theory of beauty almost exclusively highlights this remarkable feature of artworks.

Having rejected reason as the means to apprehend Platonic Ideas, Schopenhauer maintained alternatively that the Ideas are apprehended intuitively and directly via a special and elevating kind of consciousness, typical of genius, that mostly disregards spatio-temporal considerations. If we read Plato's allegory of the cave through Schopenhauer's aesthetics, the person who leaves and then revisits the cave would not be the philosophical, reason-oriented individual, but the visionary artist and genius who sees intuitively through the spatio-temporal veil to grasp, and then communicate, timeless constancies, viz., the Ideas. Through interplay between Plato and Kant's influence, Schopenhauer replaces the rationalistic philosopher with the artist, a cultural torchbearer who, through the creation of idealized artistic images, reveals timeless truths to others less perceptive.

2 Schopenhauer's Platonic Appreciation of Time

The experience of beauty leads us to a more fundamental theme, namely, Schopenhauer's understanding of time, which has a seminal Platonic component. It is commonly held that Schopenhauer simply adopts Kant's view that time, as far as we can know, is nothing more than one among several universally valid forms that the human mind projects in the act of synthesizing experience.¹³ Time is among our fundamental modes of organizing sensory inputs, and is our most basic mode insofar as any given group of sensations must first be organized in time, before any further processing can occur.

Recognizing how time gives structure to our experience, along with space and causality as forms of sensory organization integrated with time, Schopenhauer echoes Kant by asserting that the spatio-temporal, causally-interconnected world is a mind-dependent being. As such, it does not resemble ultimate reality, the thing-in-itself. To use an everyday analogy: the entire spatio-temporal world is like our experience of the sweet taste of sugar, an experience whose subjective quality contrasts with the objective, mind-independently-existing, sugar crystals in the sugar bowl that cause the pleasant taste. As mind-dependent, the experience of sweetness is not in the crystals themselves, but is a subjective upshot of the crystals' contact with our sensory apparatus. The experience of sweetness bears no resemblance to the crystals, although the crystals evoke the experience. Similarly, Schopenhauer characterizes the spatio-temporal world as a dream or nightmare from which we would do well to awaken ourselves in the awareness of the objective, and very different, truth that resides space- and time-lessly beyond.

Regarding Kant's notion of time, there is a subtle controversy which bears importantly on our inquiry, and in which Schopenhauer takes Plato's side against Kant. Their difference of opinion is as follows: "Plato [at *Parmenides* 156c–e] asserts that change takes place *suddenly* [*plötzlich*, i.e., instantaneously], occupying no time at all.... Kant, by contrast, expressly asserts that change does *not take place suddenly*, but *over an interval of time*".¹⁴ Accepting Plato's position and then extrapolating from it, Schopenhauer concludes that the present moment—the *now*—is "the pure dividing line between past and future". It is "without duration" and "*never exists*".¹⁵ Time, Schopenhauer

13 Schopenhauer states: "If, among the information [*Aufschlüssen*] which Kant's marvelous profundity has given the world, there is *anything* undoubtedly true, then it is the Transcendental Aesthetic, thus the doctrine of the ideality of space and time" (Schopenhauer, 2010, §22, 265).

14 Schopenhauer (1997), 32.

15 Schopenhauer (1997), 34 (§26, "The Time of Change").

maintains, must be thought of as either past or future, where the present moment is a timeless point of no magnitude, a mere differential, or nothingness, in the flow of time.¹⁶

This yields some fertile results. If it is possible to attend intensely to the timeless present—to “be here now” fully—and thereby to set aside one’s interest in the past and future, then we could be aligning ourselves well with any realities that reside along the dimension perpendicular to and beyond space and time. With such a better consciousness, we would see through the veil of the ordinary world. For Schopenhauer, the Platonic Ideas are behind that veil, along with what he refers to in his mature philosophy as the thing-in-itself as Will. The timelessness of the present moment, the “permanent now” or the *nunc stans*, is consequently the most real aspect of our ordinary experience for Schopenhauer. This, we may now submit, is the crucial and philosophically productive insight that Schopenhauer derived from Plato’s assertion that time is the moving image of eternity.

In sum, owing to his reading of Kant, Schopenhauer eventually denied that Platonic Ideas can be apprehended through reason, as Plato maintained. Emphatically retaining the importance of apprehending these timeless realities, however, Schopenhauer preserved the substance of Plato’s view by postulating a different way to apprehend them: in place of reason, he substituted the intuitive awareness of the timeless present. The timelessness of this awareness and the involved enhancement of the quality of ordinary consciousness convinced Schopenhauer that this was the way to apprehend the timeless, Platonic, higher-dimensional realities.

We have already described this transformation of consciousness in Schopenhauer’s theory of beauty, albeit without this background of the Platonic theory of sudden changes and its implication that the present moment is timeless. We can now appreciate more fundamentally why Schopenhauer emphasizes that we should forget about the past and future when aesthetically contemplating an object. The following excerpt describes this well:

Thus, we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object

16 We can also refer to this as the “punctual present”, an essentially mystical, reflection-evading notion, which here manifests itself as the cornerstone of Schopenhauer’s philosophy.

actually present.... If, therefore, the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject has passed out of all relation to the will, what is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the *Idea*, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade. Thus, at the same time, the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure* will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*.... The pure subject of knowledge and its correlative, the *Idea*, have passed out of all these forms of the principle of sufficient reason. Time, place, the individual that knows, and the individual that is known, have no meaning for them.¹⁷

This transcendent state does not merely yield knowledge of Platonic Ideas. The timeless quality of a person's consciousness who contemplates Platonic Ideas is also peaceful and relatively immune to day-to-day suffering. We will discuss this anesthetic quality below. Let us presently complete our epistemologically-oriented path to indicate two further regions within Schopenhauer's philosophy in which this timeless, Plato-inspired consciousness is central: his moral theory and his advocacy of asceticism.

The precise theoretical opposite of the moral standpoint is the purely selfish standpoint. Since we are social beings from the start, however, a pure or thoroughly permeating selfishness that fails to recognize the existence of other people as such, but regards them as being on a par with inanimate objects, is either a mere theoretical construct, or if existing, a case of extreme psychopathology. In a more ordinary sense, we still regard extremely selfish, self-serving people as being either morally unaware or morally uncaring, even if their selfishness precipitates valuable social results. The quality of consciousness is at issue, and for the most part it is either ignorant or dismissive of moral values that conflict with its selfish aims.

Recognizing this, most moral theories describe the moral perspective as being less egoistic, and at the extreme, as being universally non-egoistic, as if everyone were exactly on a par in moral measure. Kant is paradigmatic in this regard, since his moral rules are *prima facie* binding for rational beings in general, independently of social, historical and personal contingencies. Schopenhauer follows suit insofar as he regards egoism as immoral, and believes that moral awareness resides precisely in overcoming the perception that people are essentially different from one another. The vicious view that humans are truly in a state of perpetual conflict and competition, a war of all

17 WWR I: §34, 178–179.

against all, is both devilish and metaphysically ignorant in his view. The truth, he holds, is rather that the differences between people are illusory.

Having seen above how Schopenhauer characterizes the awareness of beauty as significantly transcending spatio-temporal dimensions, we can appreciate his similar stance on moral awareness. Here he once more frames his account in terms of our transcending the principle of sufficient reason, which he understands as a summary principle which includes, among the fourfold kinds of necessary connection we imagine and project, those we employ to organize our sensory experience, namely, space, time and causality. Characterizing space and time themselves as the “principle of individuation”, Schopenhauer argues that if we develop an awareness that transcends space and time, then we will see that the difference between “I” and “not-I” is illusory. Accordingly, once one is more enlightened, one will identify with everyone and experience a metaphysically-grounded feeling of compassion:

“Individuation is merely appearance, originating by means of space and time.... My true, inner essence exists in everything living just as immediately as it makes itself known only to me in my self-consciousness”.—This knowledge, for which in Sanskrit the formula *tat-tvam asi*, i.e., “that thou art”, is the standing expression, is that which bursts forth as *compassion* on which, therefore rests all genuine, i.e., disinterested, virtue, and of which every good deed is the real expression.¹⁸

Schopenhauer’s conception of moral awareness is another application of his prescription to transcend our ordinary spatio-temporal consciousness through an intense awareness of the present moment. Consider the following excerpt, where he associates morality with transcendence:

But eternal justice will be grasped and comprehended only by the man who rises above that knowledge which proceeds on the guiding line of the principle of sufficient reason and is bound to individual [spatio-temporal] things, who recognizes the Ideas, who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and who is aware that the forms of the phenomenon do not apply to the thing-in-itself. Moreover, it is this man alone who, by dint of the same knowledge, can understand the true nature of virtue....¹⁹

18 *Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, “On the Basis of Morals”, §22, 268. (“That thou art”, i.e., “Thou art that”. –Ed.).

19 *WWR* I: §63, 354.

Similar to how Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory substitutes direct intuition for reason as the means to apprehend Platonic Ideas, his moral theory, in a parallel contrast to Kant's rationalistic approach, substitutes direct intuition for reason as the means of apprehending the world in a moral—and for Schopenhauer, one could say “Christian”—way.²⁰ Both aesthetic and moral awareness bring us into contact with a higher reality, but with an important difference: the artistic genius is aware of Platonic Ideas, whereas the morally aware person more penetratingly grasps the unity that underlies those Ideas, namely, the seamless ultimate reality, or thing-in-itself as Will. The morally-aware person sees beyond the differences in intelligible character between people to discern how we are all ultimately an expression of the same reality. Aesthetic and moral awareness remain sufficiently akin, however, to reiterate the classical thought that these two kinds of awareness reinforce each other, i.e., that beauty and goodness go philosophically hand in hand.

Schopenhauer's account of asceticism, or “denial-of-the-will”, extends his presentations of aesthetic and moral experience in a yet more metaphysically penetrating way. Here, through an awareness that transcends space and time, consciousness reaches into an inexpressible realm which bears only a negative characterization. This mystical awareness marks the culmination of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and his philosophy serves as a stairway to it.²¹

Moral awareness takes us beyond the spatio-temporal world to appreciate the metaphysical unity that underlies the world of individuals, but with a psychological price: once the differences between people become negligible, another person's suffering might as well be one's own. At the deepest metaphysical level the suffering *is* one's own, although our consciousness, as individuated, is shielded from experiencing this complete and overwhelming reality. If the suffering with which one identifies in moral awareness were literally actualized in one's consciousness, it would be unbearable, since it would contain the pain of every being, past, present and future.

With universal empathy comes a metaphysical revelation: the substance of ultimate reality, blind Will—the very substance of oneself, everyone and everything else—is in itself a senseless, unsatisfiable, suffering-producing

20 For Schopenhauer, physicalism signifies “the antichrist”: “That the world has only a physical and not a moral significance is a fundamental error; one that is the greatest and most pernicious, the real perversity of the mind. At bottom, it is also that which faith has personified as antichrist” [“*was der Glaube als den Antichrist personificirt hat*”] (*Parerga and Paralipomena*, II, Ch. VIII, “On Ethics”, §109, 201).

21 Just as the artistic genius creates a work of art that helps us to apprehend the Platonic Ideas more directly, Schopenhauer writes a philosophy that helps us to apprehend ultimate reality more directly.

and hence, repulsive being. Schopenhauer's response to this apprehension is moral: the only real way to eliminate suffering is to minimize the intensity of Will itself, specifically, by minimizing one's own willfulness through a rejection of worldly desire. Only here is true peace to be found:

His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it. The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from virtue to *asceticism*. In other words, it is no longer enough for him to love others like himself, and to do as much for them as for himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomenon, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of that world recognized as full of misery.²²

The ascetic outlook arises only subsequent to one's assuming the moral perspective. Goodness is the condition for enlightenment. Transcending the spatio-temporal world, asceticism requires the same timeless, Platonically inspired, standpoint necessary for aesthetic and moral awareness. It is noteworthy that Schopenhauer includes the genuine philosophical standpoint as well, as issuing from such a timeless orientation:

The genuine method of considering the world philosophically, in other words, that consideration which acquaints us with the inner nature of the world and thus takes us beyond the phenomenon, is precisely the method that does not ask about the whence, whither, and why of the world, but always and everywhere about the *what* alone. Thus, it is the method that considers things not according to any relation, not as becoming and passing away, in short not according to one of the four forms of the principle of sufficient reason. On the contrary, it is precisely what is still left over after we eliminate the whole of this method of consideration that follows the principle of sufficient reason; thus, it is the inner nature of the world, always appearing the same in all relations, but itself never amenable to them, in other words, the Ideas of the world, that forms the object of our method of philosophy. From such knowledge we get philosophy as well as art; in fact, we shall find in this book that we can also reach that disposition of mind which alone leads to true holiness and to salvation from the world.²³

²² WWR I: §68, 380.

²³ WWR I: §53, 274.

To conclude our discussion of Schopenhauer's Platonic conception of time, we must address a controversial question in Schopenhauer interpretation, for it will inform our concluding discussion of Platonic Ideas. This concerns the quality of our knowledge of the thing-in-itself.

There are three possibilities: (1) a strictly Kantian position: we cannot have any knowledge of the thing-in-itself; (2) a traditionally metaphysical position: we can have complete and absolute knowledge of the thing-in-itself; (3) an intermediary position: we can have partial knowledge of the thing-in-itself. The third option ranges from (3a), an extremely partial knowledge of the thing-in-itself, approaching the strictly Kantian position, to (3b), a close-to-total knowledge of the thing-in-itself, approaching the traditionally metaphysical position.

We can identify Schopenhauer with (3b). Of interest to us is his rationale and the Platonic conception of time that underlies it. The following excerpt from the second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* (1844) presents his position.²⁴

Hence even in inner knowledge there still occurs a difference between the being-in-itself of its object and the observation or perception of this object in the knowing subject. But the inner knowledge is free from two forms belonging to outer knowledge, the form of *space* and the form of *causality* which brings about all sense perception. On the other hand, there still remains the form of *time*, as well as that of being known and of knowing in general. Accordingly, in this inner knowledge the thing-in-itself has indeed to a great extent cast off its veils, but still does not appear quite naked. In consequence of the form of time which still adheres to it, everyone knows his *will* only in its successive individual *acts*, not as a whole, in and by itself.²⁵

Our knowledge of the thing-in-itself as Will is partially distorted through our own finitude, but it is still reliable, owing to our having set aside considerations of space and causality, as in aesthetic and moral awareness. It is not unlike perceiving the world through a pair of sunglasses. Relevant to our interest in the influence of Plato upon Schopenhauer is the operative conception of time

²⁴ Schopenhauer expresses the same view in similar words in the first edition (1818): "Finally, the knowledge I have of my will, although an immediate knowledge, cannot be separated from that of my body. I know my will not as a whole, not as a unity, not completely, according to its nature, but only in its individual acts, and hence in time, which is the form of my body's appearing, as it is of every body" (§18, 101–2).

²⁵ WWR II: Ch. XVIII, "On the Possibility of Knowing the Thing-in-Itself", 197.

involved. In the above excerpt, Schopenhauer does not specify the kind of temporal awareness appropriate for knowing the thing-in-itself, since he speaks more generally about the necessary presence of time as opposed to space and causality. He does have something further to say on this in his dissertation, however, where he describes his understanding of immediacy and the immediate objects of experience:

We have seen that by virtue of the nature of inner sense, the sense that belongs to the subject as the condition of apprehension, only a series of representations that is both simple in the sense of not allowing of coexistence, and fleeting in the sense of not possessing anything permanent, can be *immediately present* to the subject. And by saying that representations are *immediately present* is meant that they are not simply known in the unity of time and space, which constitutes the totality of experience brought about by the understanding, but, as representations of the inner sense, in time alone.²⁶

The upshot is that the kind of temporal awareness relevant to apprehending the thing-in-itself as Will is immediate. Since Schopenhauer's conception of immediacy is influenced by Plato insofar as it involves a timeless present, Plato's idea of sudden changes can be seen to have profoundly influenced Schopenhauer's understanding of how we come into contact with ultimate reality.

3 Schopenhauer, Plato and the Spatio-Temporal World as Filled with Suffering

The existence of suffering, especially due to natural causes, has posed a perennial existential and moral question. At some point everyone poses the question—to the silent and endless skies, to other people, to oneself—why millions of innocent people, including children, have died over the centuries due to disease, earthquakes, tornados and other natural causes. How humans can treat other humans so viciously, typically in wartime, but also in general, is similarly troubling. At the age of sixteen, such questions arose for Schopenhauer during a visit to the military port of Toulon, where he recoiled at the degradation inflicted upon the galley-slaves.

26 Schopenhauer's Early "Fourfold Root", §21, "Of the Immediate Object", 19.

His later acquaintance with Plato supplied him the image of the ordinary world as a cave of ignorance, wherein we experience only the shadows of reality. Primarily epistemological in nature, Plato's allegory of the cave may also suggest that ignorance can be bliss, as the prisoners reveal themselves to be so accustomed to their limited condition, that they level a death-threat towards anyone who casts doubt upon their shadow-world. Yet, as presented in the *Epinomis*, the ordinary world is not described as a happy one. In his notes to the dialogue, Schopenhauer wrote that its subject was "the essential wretchedness and misery of life", as we can confirm in the following excerpt.²⁷ Note Plato's concluding remark about how, given the nature of the spatio-temporal world, few would likely want to relive their lives:²⁸

I claim that people cannot become blessed and happy; there are but a few exceptions to this rule. (I limit this claim to the duration of our lives. Those who strive to live as nobly as they can during their life and at their end to die a noble death have a good hope of attaining after they die everything for which they have striven.) I am not saying anything clever, but only what we all know in some way, both Greeks and foreigners: from the start the terms of life are harsh for every living thing. First we have to go through the stage of being embryos. Then we have to be born and then be brought up and educated, and we all agree that every one of these stages involves countless pains. In fact, if we don't count hardships, but only what everyone would consider tolerable, the time involved turns out to be quite brief—a period round about the middle of a person's life, which is thought to provide a kind of breathing-space. But then old age quickly overtakes us and tends to make anyone who takes his whole life into account unwilling ever to go through life again, unless he is full of childish thoughts.²⁹

Schopenhauer's own dismal descriptions of ordinary life in *The World as Will and Representation* compare well. When one is a theist, however, as Schopenhauer was in his early days, the problem of evil is less of a problem: one can acknowledge that God's ways are inscrutable, and remain faithful that there is a morally justified reason for the existence of all suffering. But once

27 MR II: "Plato II", 439.

28 Contrast Nietzsche's life-affirming advocacy of the opposite ideal of the person "who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity, shouting *da capo*—not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle ..." (Nietzsche, 1966, 68).

29 Plato, *Epinomis*, 973c–974a (trans. McKirahan).

God, or any kind of overseeing benevolent consciousness (or consciousnesses), is removed, an absurd and uncaring world soon shows its face. The problem is not that suffering exists. It is rather *why* it exists, and Schopenhauer's metaphysics of Will answers that suffering exists because reality is a senseless urge. Plato divided the soul into reason, will and appetite. Having rejected reason as the path to truth, Schopenhauer locates reality in our will and appetite, and finds that fact repulsive.

As we know, Schopenhauer followed Kant in characterizing the spatio-temporal world as an appearance that we construct in the presence of absolute reality, or the thing-in-itself. In his own formulation, Schopenhauer understood space, time and causality as features of the principle of sufficient reason, referring to space and time in particular as the principle of individuation. The structure of Plato's allegorical cave, in other words, is more literally the principle of sufficient reason, which individuates the thing-in-itself as Will to generate the nightmarish appearance of a multiplicity of conflicting, selfish individuals, perpetually at war. On Schopenhauer's reading, Plato's allegory of the cave is indeed useful in its epistemological lesson, but its existential import is even more striking: the ignorance within the cave's boundaries is also the reason why we suffer.

4 Schopenhauer and Platonic Ideas

With an appreciation of how Schopenhauer characterizes our knowledge of the thing-in-itself as Will—our access is translucent rather than transparent—we can now consider the status of Platonic Ideas in Schopenhauer's mature philosophy. At first, we saw that Schopenhauer strictly identified Kant's thing-in-itself with the Platonic Ideas. Soon realizing that this was too coarse, he drew a slight distinction between the two: whereas the Ideas are timeless *objects*, the thing-in-itself as Will, although equally timeless, is not an object. The substance H_2O , for example, is not an object *per se*, although an ice cube, which is a manifestation of H_2O , and which is H_2O through and through, is an object. In this sense, Schopenhauer referred to Platonic Ideas as the "immediate objectifications" of Will:

Therefore by [Platonic] *Idea*, I understand every definite and fixed grade of the will's objectification [*jede bestimmte und feste Stufe der Objektivation des Willens*], insofar as it is thing-in-itself and is therefore foreign to plurality.³⁰

30 WWR I: §25, 130.

Now if for us the will is the *thing-in-itself*, and the *Idea* is the immediate objectivity of that will at a definite grade [*auf einer bestimmten Stufe*], then we find Kant's thing-in-itself and Plato's *Idea* ... to be, not exactly identical, but yet very closely related, and distinguished by only a single modification.³¹

... *Idea* and thing-in-itself are not for us absolutely one and the same. On the contrary, for us the *Idea* is only the immediate, and therefore adequate, objectivity of the thing-in-itself, which itself, however, is the *will*—the will in so far as it is not yet objectified, has not yet become representation. For, precisely according to Kant, the thing-in-itself is supposed to be free from all the forms that adhere to knowledge as such [i.e., free from all forms of the principle of sufficient reason].³²

It will help to decide between two different ways to understand this notion of the Will's "objectification". Schopenhauer could be referring (a) to a cosmic process that takes place independently of human beings, speaking as a traditional metaphysician, and implying that Platonic Ideas as objects have a mind-independent existence, or he could be referring (b) to how the Will appears to us in view of our own mind's operation, in which case the Platonic Ideas as objects would not exist in themselves, but would come into and go out of existence with the presence of human beings. The objectification of the Will can be interpreted either mind-independently in line with Plato's philosophy, or mind-dependently in line with Kant's.

Schopenhauer formulates a position that brings these two options closer together, consistent with his account of our translucent access to the thing-in-itself as Will. He aims to capture how Platonic Ideas are (1) objects, e.g., as described in his aesthetic theory, (2) involve multiplicity, since there are many Ideas, and yet (3) express a timeless reality that is truer than the spatio-temporal world. The Platonic Ideas as objects are more real than the spatio-temporal world, but are not quite reality as it is in itself. As universal individuals, they are like the intermediary proposition of a syllogism insofar as they establish a connection between, at one extreme, the seamless and blind universality of the thing-in-itself as Will, and at the other, the countless number of contingently-existing spatio-temporal objects in the physical world.³³

31 WWR I: §31, 170.

32 WWR I: §32, 174.

33 It is unclear whether the intermediary role of space and time (which, as universal individuals, link abstract, universal concepts with contingent, individual sensations) in Kant's transcendental deduction was in the back of Schopenhauer's mind when he formulated his account of Platonic Ideas.

To make sense of this timeless intermediary zone, we need to consider the two-level structure of the principle of sufficient reason as Schopenhauer understands it, in conjunction with his view that we have a translucent access, seemingly close to transparent, to the thing-in-itself as Will. Schopenhauer characterizes the principle of sufficient reason as having a “root” and a “four-fold” expression. The root is the subject-object distinction along with the general idea of necessary connection. The fourfold expression is the recognition of four distinct kinds of necessary connection that respectively define and govern four autonomous epistemological spheres: (1) conceptual relationships, as in logic, (2) formal mathematical and geometrical relationships, (3) external, material, causal relationships, (4) inner, psychological motivations.

As an upshot of its fourfold application, the principle of sufficient reason generates the experience of a spatio-temporal world, thoroughly deterministic in structure. The root of the principle operates in general and throughout, both in the ordinary, spatio-temporal perception of objects, and in the transcendent apprehension of Platonic Ideas, which is independent of the principle’s specific fourfold application. In the latter, a timeless subject apprehends a timeless object, both of which are expressions of the principle’s root. Owing to the presence and operation of the subject-object distinction, the awareness of Platonic Ideas consequently has a human-relative component. The subject-object style of awareness involved nevertheless transcends the spatio-temporal world, as in aesthetic experience, reflecting how the root of the principle of sufficient reason transcends each of its fourfold applications.

Since the principle of sufficient reason plays a constitutive role in the apprehension of Platonic Ideas, then those Ideas cannot be representing reality exactly as it is in itself. On the other hand, despite their principle-of-sufficient-reason-generated appearances as “objects”, neither can the set of Platonic Ideas be regarded as an entirely human-constructed appearance, since Schopenhauer holds that our apprehension of the thing-in-itself as Will, and hence, our apprehension of its immediate objectifications, is close to how things really are. This is supported by how our apprehensions of Will’s immediate objectifications, the Platonic Ideas as objects, are through only the root of the principle of sufficient reason in conjunction with the specific form of time, where the latter is transcended to some extent by attending exclusively to the timeless present. We apprehend the Platonic Ideas as expressions of the thing-in-itself as Will through a “thin veil”.

To develop further a characterization of the Platonic Ideas’ intermediary position between the thing-in-itself as Will and the ordinary objects in the spatio-temporal world, we can develop a previous analogy which was framed within a common-sense context. There, the spatio-temporal world compared

to the mind-dependent sweet taste of sugar, and the thing-in-itself as Will compared to the objectively-existing, mind-independent sugar crystals in the sugar bowl. No resemblance obtained between the sugar's sweet taste and the sugar crystals, and likewise, no resemblance obtained between the spatio-temporal world and the thing-in-itself as Will.

We can now add a second layer to this analogy by considering our mental image (say, formed with our eyes closed) of a full moon, and the actual full moon in the evening sky. In this case, there is a resemblance between the circularity in the mental image and the moon's actual circularity. Analogous to the mental image of the full moon would be the genius's painting, i.e., representation, of some Platonic Idea, or the genius's direct apprehension of the Platonic Idea, regarded as a representation in the genius's mind. Analogous to the actual full moon would be the Platonic Idea itself that the genius apprehends, or which the painting represents, from a particular perspective. Many different paintings can represent the same Idea, just as people on earth can each see the moon from a different angle.³⁴

Following this analogy, then if there were no human perceivers, the Platonic Ideas would still exist in their own right, although not exactly as we perceive them as objects. In his manuscripts, Schopenhauer originally describes Platonic Ideas as timeless acts of will, not quite as objects, consistent with this way of understanding them:

The (Platonic) Idea or the thing-in-itself must be regarded as a will of which bodies are the objectivity; it is therefore not a representation at all, but just the thing-in-itself.³⁵

However, upon taking a step into Will's objectivity and regarding the Platonic Ideas as "objects", it follows that without the presence of human beings and the operation of the principle of sufficient reason that generates the very form of an "object", there would be no Platonic Ideas. As objects in general, but also as a multiplicity of timeless objects, they represent the thing-in-itself less clearly, and in a more human form, than does our direct, inner apprehension of the thing-in-itself as Will.

Schopenhauer appreciates the difficulty in accounting for the multiplicity of Platonic Ideas, and in 1814 refers to this diversity as a "transcendental

34 In Lockean terms, the analogy is that ordinary life is analogous to an experience composed mainly of ideas of secondary qualities, and that the life of genius is analogous to an experience composed mainly of ideas of primary qualities.

35 *MR* 1: §287 (Dresden 1814, R.R.), 194.

diversity”, distinguished in kind from the diversity of spatio-temporal objects.³⁶ The intended meaning of “transcendental” is unclear, but if he is adopting a Kantian usage, as may be the case, then he is relativizing this diversity to a higher-level mental function which is an epistemological impediment, rather than considering this transcendental diversity to be a mind-independent feature of the thing-in-itself as Will. Consistent with this, Schopenhauer’s references to how the Platonic Ideas dissolve at the point of total enlightenment also suggest that as “objects”, he is conceiving of them as mind-dependent entities:

We, however, who consistently occupy the standpoint of philosophy, must be satisfied here with negative knowledge, content to have reached the final landmark of the positive. If, therefore, we have recognized the inner nature of the world as will, and have seen in all its phenomena only the objectivity of the will; and if we have followed these from the unconscious impulse of obscure natural forces up to the most conscious action of man, we shall by no means evade the consequence that, with the free denial, the surrender, of the will, all those phenomena also are now abolished.... finally, the universal forms of this phenomenon, time and space, and also the last fundamental form of these, subject and object [and along with this, by implication, the Platonic Ideas]; all these are abolished with the will. No will: no representation, no world.³⁷

Within the scope of philosophical theory, the thing-in-itself as Will is the “final landmark”. Schopenhauer mystically acknowledges a higher level of awareness beyond the philosophical, and leaves the ultimate metaphysical situation open thereby, if seemingly only by a crack. This renders the Platonic Ideas, as well as the thing-in-itself as Will, less than ultimate as far as we can know.

It thus is a misinterpretation to regard Schopenhauer’s Platonic Ideas as mind-independent objects. With respect to how they are in themselves, Platonic Ideas are understood better as timeless acts of Will, similar to how Kant characterized intelligible characters. Indirect support for this resides in Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant’s notion of a transcendental object, since the

36 Schopenhauer writes: “After the elimination of the diversity of individuals which is to be found solely in our perceiving them in time and space, there is still a diversity which is not to be found in them and which I would therefore like to call transcendental diversity”. This is the diversity of the species itself, we can also say the diversity of the (Platonic) Ideas”. (*MR* 1: §287 [Dresden 1814, R.R.], 193.).

37 *WWR* 1: §71, 410–411.

status of the transcendental object in Kant's philosophy which Schopenhauer critiques compares closely to that of Platonic Ideas in Schopenhauer's philosophy, when they are interpreted to be mind-independent objects.

According to Schopenhauer, Kant refers to any object that we observe in space and time as the appearance of a specific reality that exists outside of space and time. If we are perceiving a chair, for example, then that chair is regarded as the appearance of the chair "in itself", as the chair exists independently of space and time, and of us. This chair "in itself" is "the transcendental chair" that is said to cause our various spatio-temporal perceptions of the chair. Further underlying the transcendental chair is the thing-in-itself, of which the transcendental chair is a specific expression. As the three elements in the example, we have (1) the timeless, mind-independent, thing-in-itself, (2) the timeless, mind-independent, transcendental chair and (3) the apparent, mind-dependent, spatio-temporal chair.

Schopenhauer objects to this three-level arrangement, arguing that the transcendental chair in our example is an incoherent and unstable intermediary entity. He recognizes only the bipolar distinction between "representation" and "thing-in-itself", and maintains that there is consequently no proper place for any exactly intermediately-located entities to be situated:

In accordance with what has been said, the object of the categories with Kant is not exactly the thing-in-itself, but yet is very closely akin to it. It is the *object-in-itself*, an object requiring no subject [i.e., a mind-independent object], an individual thing, and yet not in time and space, because not perceptible; it is object of thinking, and yet not abstract concept.... However, this much is certain, that, when we reflect clearly, nothing can be found except representation and thing-in-itself. The unwarranted introduction of that hybrid, the object of the representation, is the source of Kant's errors.³⁸

Essentially the same argument applies to undermine the interpretation of Platonic Ideas in Schopenhauer's philosophy as being mind-independent objects. One can take this to signify that Schopenhauer would not consistently have conceived of Platonic Ideas in this way, as mind-independent objects. Following his basic distinction between appearance and reality, one would

38 WWR I: "Appendix: Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy", 444.

rather assign the Platonic Idea *as object* to the higher realm of representation and the Platonic Idea *as timeless act of Will* to the thing-in-itself as Will.³⁹

Although closer to reality, Platonic Ideas as objects would thus be understood as being within the timeless aspect of the world *as representation*, and as dissolving with that world, when humans either die or achieve ultimate enlightenment through the denial-of-the-will. Schopenhauer's metaphor of the Platonic Ideas as being like rainbows, i.e., illusions that display constancy amidst a world of flux, explicitly reinforces, if only in a literary way, the idea that Platonic Ideas do not have a mind-independent existence within Schopenhauer's philosophy. He writes:

For the Idea and the pure subject of knowing always appear simultaneously in consciousness as necessary correlatives, and with this appearance all distinction of time at once vanishes, as both are wholly foreign to the principle of sufficient reason in all its [specifically fourfold] forms. Both lie outside the relations laid down by this principle; they can be compared to the rainbow and the sun that take no part in the constant movement and succession of the falling drops.⁴⁰

For example, the lions that are born and that die are like the drops of the waterfall; but *leonitas*, the Idea or form or shape of the lion, is like the unshaken and unmoved rainbow on the waterfall.⁴¹

5 Conclusion

Schopenhauer initially identified strongly with Plato's philosophy and recognized Platonic Ideas as the ultimate realities. After absorbing Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Schopenhauer denied that reason is the means to apprehend

39 Schopenhauer acknowledges that individuation can extend to the activity of the thing-in-itself as Will: "... *individuality* does not rest solely on the *principium individuationis* and so is not through and through mere phenomenon, but that it is rooted in the thing-in-itself, the will of the individual; for his character itself is individual. But how far down its roots go, is one of those questions which I do not undertake to answer" (*Parerga and Paralipomena*, II, Ch. VIII, "On Ethics", §116, 227).

40 WWR I: §41, 209.

41 WWR II: Ch. XLI, "On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature", 483.

Platonic Ideas, maintaining instead that the Ideas are apprehended through direct intuition. Agreeing fundamentally with Kant's view that time is a form of the human mind, but qualifying this with Plato's view that changes are immediate, Schopenhauer adopted the view that the present moment is timeless, and that if we attend closely to this moment, we will achieve a better consciousness that attunes us directly and intuitively to higher-level realities, among which are the Platonic Ideas as timeless objects, the thing-in-itself as blind Will, and finally, an ineffable mystical dimension that resides beyond everything determinately imaginable.

Inspired by Kant's view that the spatio-temporal world does not accurately represent ultimate reality, Schopenhauer interpreted Plato's allegory of the cave primarily in epistemological terms as referring to the spatio-temporal realm as constructed by the principle of sufficient reason. Supplementing this with Plato's view that happiness is not to be found in the spatio-temporal world, the allegory presents us with not only an epistemological enclosure, but an existential enclosure characterized by a deep frustration in the search for happiness.

We can conclude that Plato's influence on Schopenhauer was fundamental and far-reaching, for in the absence of Plato's claim that all change is sudden, rather than continuous, Schopenhauer would not have been in the position to develop his explanation of how we can transcend the constraints of the spatio-temporal world to arrive at a better, more enlightened state of mind. In this respect, his philosophy can be understood as an extended reflection upon Plato's characterization of time as "the moving image of eternity".

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Plato-Reception in the Marburg School

Karl-Heinz Lembeck

The two most important protagonists of the so-called Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, are not only famous for their acute interpretation of Kant's transcendental logic, but also count as ambitious readers of Plato.¹ At first, the Marburgers' connection between Kant's transcendental philosophy and Plato's thought seemed highly suspect to contemporary philologists. It is true, of course, that a "productive relationship to Plato" has been attributed generally to the *fin-de-siècle* research community to which the Marburgers belonged, insofar as Plato's body of thought gets interpreted as "confirmation and proof of the contemporary philosophical task". Nevertheless, the particular way in which the Marburg School "annexed and incorporated [Plato] into modern systematic philosophy"—especially in the case of Natorp—remained suspect to many.²

The conception of philosophical-historical appropriation governing this critique may nonetheless seem internally inconsistent: on the one hand, it urges that we ought not freeze in "pure historical contemplation", but should strive to supplement it with *philosophical* reflection; on the other hand, it abhors a systematizing style of reading as the source of error, which threatens to impugn the ancient model's claim to ideality. On the one hand, one knows that one will fail to elicit an answer from the historical source without an appropriate philosophical question; on the other hand, one believes that one ought only pose such questions that are not of philosophical-scientific, but only of ideological (*weltanschaulich*) significance. Both Cohen and Natorp seek to avoid these inconsistencies by pursuing an unabashedly systematic interpretation of the Platonic opus, though of course in the firm conviction that they are able nonetheless to meet the demands of historical fidelity.

Although controversial, Cohen and Natorp were by no means unsuccessful in their attempts to mediate between Kant and Plato. Indeed, in the mid-1920s, many were convinced that it had been Kant himself who had restored to Plato a respectable place in the system of modern Western thought. So, for example,

1 Thanks to Prof. Alan Kim for translating this article into English, and for his very helpful comments.

2 Cf. Horneffer (1920), 119, f.

Richard Kroner already speaks of Kant as the “renewer of the Platonic philosophy” as if it were a commonplace,³ with Max Wundt explicitly following Kroner in 1924.⁴ Such views are however evidently to be understood as a reaction to the Neo-Kantian tradition (and especially the Marburg School) having already established a systematizing direction of historical interpretation. This is all the more true today, since we now know that Kant had relatively little direct knowledge of Plato’s thought, seeing him above all as a *Schwärmer* (sc. a gushing enthusiast—Tr.) not easily rehabilitated for a scientific metaphysics.⁵ Of course we must concede that this *Schwärmer* was Plato as one imagined him towards the end of the eighteenth century, i.e., a Plato decidedly in the shadow of Neo-Platonism, in whose work one had one-sidedly stressed the moment of otherworldliness,⁶ and who, to top it all off, was largely contaminated by the legacy of Christian thought.

Hence, an expressly philosophical appropriation of Plato’s work only became possible again with Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁷ It was above all Schleiermacher’s systematic intention that sparked this development. As Dilthey would later put it, Schleiermacher was always dominated by the “basic thought that the world was a systematic nexus, the knowledge of which demanded a system that logically articulated all phenomena”.⁸ He sought such a nexus already in Plato. Schleiermacher tried to apply Kant’s general precept—that one cannot learn *philosophy*, but can learn *to philosophize*—to his work with Plato; thus dialectical philosophizing is itself declared the goal of reading the work. Hence, the primary task was to eliminate the more obtrusive speculative notions that had emerged in the tradition and settled upon and obscured the texts, thus substantiating Kant’s suspicion of Plato’s *Schwärmerei*.

It is, then, just the philosophers of the Neo-Kantian schools, especially the Marburg School, above all Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) and Paul Natorp (1854–1924), who most impressively practiced this style of reading.

3 Kroner (1921), 36.

4 Wundt (1924), 428, f.

5 Cf. Bubner (1992a), 90, and Patt (1997).

6 Cf. Dilthey (1870), 59; and even still Heidegger (1992), 253–7.

7 “It was only with Schleiermacher that the transition began that led to the discovery of the true Plato” (Jaeger 1954, 131).

8 Dilthey (1870), 43.

1 Hermann Cohen

Cohen's reception of Plato is much less conspicuous than Natorp's. He wrote no Plato-monograph of his own, and we find more detailed treatments of Plato's writings only to in his early work. Nonetheless, Cohen's reading of Plato is symptomatic of his philosophical development up into his late period. Therefore our presentation will have to emphasize the early interpretations, and will only be able to provide sporadic sketches of their later effects within Cohen's work.

1.1 *The Psychological Paradigm*

The Marburg tradition reads not only Plato, but also other key historical figures of philosophical Idealism—e.g., especially Descartes or Leibniz—as witnesses to a kind of philosophizing that would eventually and with ineluctable necessity merge into Kant's transcendental philosophy. Hence, the reconstruction of a supposedly “original [*urkundlich*]” Kant was accompanied by a revival of Platonic thinking. It was no later than Cohen's first Kant book, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (*Kant's Theory of Experience*), that the Marburgers agreed always to develop their systematic philosophy under “the control and justification of history”.⁹ For this reason, any value that Cohen's early engagement with Plato might prove to have for his later systematic work cannot reside in its putative historical or philological worth *per se*; rather, it must be judged in view of that constant “operative perspective”¹⁰ that seeks above all to ground *systematic* theses in the authority of Plato.¹¹

Already in his 1865 Berlin dissertation,¹² Hermann Cohen developed key doctrinal pillars of his Plato-interpretation. In addition, his first longer publication in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (*Journal for the Psychology of Nations and Linguistics*) of 1866¹³ offers an interpretation of the theory of Forms. And as he began with Plato, so did he end: Cohen's last public lecture took place on 7 January 1918 in the Monday lecture series of the Berlin Institute for Jewish Studies (*Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*), treating of “The Social Ideal in Plato and the Prophets”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Cohen is above all regarded as a defender of the transcendental in philosophy, making not only his affinity with Plato surprising, but also

9 Görland (1912), 223.

10 Ollig (1979), 50.

11 Cf. Lembeck (1994), 15, ff.

12 *Philosophorum de antinomia necessitatis et contingentiae doctrinae* [Diss.].

13 “Die platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch entwickelt [PIP].”

14 Cohen (1924) Vol. I: 306, ff.

especially his familiarity with contemporary psychological discourse. Yet it is just this lineage that makes many seeming peculiarities of his later transcendental-philosophical approach to Plato more comprehensible.

Heymann Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus's so-called *Völkerpsychologie*, as well as J.F. Herbart's mathematical psychology deeply influenced Cohen's early understanding of Plato. Indeed, Cohen identifies the psychological motif as Plato's main advance over Socrates and the Pre-Socratics, for unlike the latter, Plato allegedly sought to derive the human "desire to know" from "psychic conditions".¹⁵ And Cohen wants to advance and elaborate this motif systematically, a point maybe most pithily put in one of the theses of his doctoral *Promotion*, viz., that "*omnem philosophiae prōgressum in psychologia constitutum esse* [all progress in philosophy is founded in psychology]".¹⁶ Cohen's psychological approach here confounds the form of scientific questioning with its content, for he construes the Platonic Form as a psychological category, the "genesis [*Entstehung*]" of which must for its part also be grasped psychologically.¹⁷

This psychological interpretation of the Platonic Forms is accompanied by Cohen's attempt to discover in Plato a unique concept of the *a priori*. To be able to give "a correct sense to Plato's doctrine of Forms", Cohen argues, it is necessary to "conceive that aprioric moment of intuitive synthesis that took up and combined the aposterioric elements of Pre-Socratic philosophy in a [new and] unique conception".¹⁸ Especially noticeable here is the conceptual pair, *a priori/a posteriori*, which is typical of the early Cohen and reflects the concept of the "relative *a priori*" of Steinthal's doctrine of apperception. Steinthal of course is referring to Kant when he distinguishes between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* factors—synthesis and analysis—in the process of cognition (*Erkenntnisprozess*), and relates the two to each other.¹⁹ Naturally, the transcendental character of the *a priori*, its necessary and absolute validity, gets overlooked so long as it is interpreted merely as an element in a psychological process of association. Here, the *a priori* moment of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is construed as an item of empirical origin. In each new instance of cognition, it represents the precondition for the apperception of some currently given datum (*a posteriori*). Combined with that datum, it then gives rise a new *a priori*, and so forth. This psychological reading of the *a priori* adopted by

15 Cf. *Diss.*, 18, f.

16 *Diss.*, 29.

17 Cf. *PIP*: 32, 54, 67.

18 *PIP*: 32.

19 Cf. Steinthal (1881), 14.

Cohen was certainly not to be derived from either Kantian or Platonic ideas. Yet it comes to govern not only Cohen's dynamic conception of the Platonic Forms, but also his later logic, and its distinctive doctrine of categorial genesis.

The relation in which the Platonic Form stands to human consciousness is that of intuition, for Plato's "discovery" purportedly consisted in discovering the basis of Socratic knowledge in "conceptual vision".²⁰ Plato's theory of Forms is fundamentally connected with this foundation of thinking in intuition. Cohen mainly buttresses this thesis with etymological arguments,²¹ attributing distinct meanings to the Greek terms, *idea* and *eidos*: "*eidos*" represents structure (*Gestalt*), picture, nature, as opposed to "*idea*", which just means vision (*Schau*), intuition (*Anschauung*), or foundational intuition (*Grundanschauung*).²² According to Cohen, this latter sense of the Platonic Form does not become explicit until Plato's later work.²³ Earlier, the Forms only appear in the *Theaetetus* as a "universal thought-unity [*allgemeine Gedankeneinheit*]".²⁴ Unlike the concept of *eidos*, the *idea* therefore has such indeterminate features in the early work that the Platonic Form may at this point still best be understood as the "living thought-activity of seeing [*Schauens*]",²⁵ for, on Cohen's view, this "activity" of thinking points to the "truly generative element in the Platonic Form"²⁶—that is, to speak with Kant, it points to *a priori* synthesis.

Certain standards are already laid down in these first attempts at a "generative [*schöpferischen*]" treatment of Plato. *Eidos*, interpreted as *being-a-structure* (*Gestaltsein*), is to be grounded by the *idea*, interpreted as *being-seen*. Of course, this line of argument is forced to ignore the ontological dimensions of the theory of Forms. Moreover, both concepts are supposed to stand in a relation of psychological explanation, viz., the shape or structure (*Gestalt*) being the result of (a psychological) shaping or forming (*Gestaltung*). Cohen bases this claim on rather controversial Platonic passages. If the *Theaetetus* allegedly develops an early version of the Forms, then according to Cohen, the late *Parmenides* presents the clearest formulation of the Forms as psychological entities. Cohen locates the chief evidence for this claim in the *Parmenides*:

20 Where vision (*Schauen*) is equivalent to intuition (*Anschauung*)—Tr.; *PIP*: 53.

21 Cf. Lembeck (1994), 31, f.

22 Cf. Lembeck (1994), 32, f., n. 49, for examples.

23 Cf. *PIP*: 66.

24 *PIP*: 62. Cohen considers the *Theaetetus* to be an early dialogue.

25 *PIP*: 61.

26 *PIP*: 60.

But, Parmenides, maybe each of these Forms [*eidōn*] is a thought [*noēma*], Socrates said, “and properly occurs only in souls [*en psychais*].”²⁷

In this passage, Cohen claims to discern Plato’s chief thesis, that Forms are “generated in the soul”. And if we are permitted to presuppose this, then other Platonic concepts, like *methexis* (participation) are immediately clear. For now one knows that Plato’s talk of “participation” by (particular) things in Forms means just this:

[that] things [sc. sensible particulars] are subject to the possibility of being viewed [*angesehen zu werden*]; of manifesting forms of intuition; of making the Forms [sensibly] manifest[.] [The particulars thus] fall under the category of the Form [*Kategorie der Idee*]; and since this category applies to everything—because the human being can intuit [*anschauen*] everything in his soul—this in turn simply implies: All is Form.²⁸

All this follows, on Cohen’s view, more or less from a single sentence in the *Parmenides*—from a sentence, moreover, that the dialogue’s protagonist, Parmenides believes to result in absurdity. Thus, Parmenides queries: If what is thought (*das Gedachte*) does after all exist, but only in thoughts (*im Gedanken*), i.e., in thinking, and hence “all is thoughts (*noēmata*)”—then *of what* is the thought a thought?²⁹ Socrates concedes: it “makes no sense”.³⁰ Therefore it is more likely that Plato here, with the aid of his Parmenides (and *against* a certain caricature of Socrates) wanted precisely to rule out such a radically psychological subjectivism. And this likely aim would in fact be much closer to the Marburgers’ program than Cohen’s own interpretation is. As is well known, the “validity problem [*Geltungsproblem*]” leads the Marburgers to a radical *anti*-psychologism incompatible with these early (Cohenian) theses.

On the other hand, Cohen considers his subjectivistic approach an effective means to counter the other tendency towards reifying the Forms, also discussed in the *Parmenides*. In particular, Cohen sees danger in hastily hypostatizing the highest Form, the Form of the Good, into an ontological or even theological being (*Gestalt*). On his view, this would be an error, since that

27 *Prm.* 132b, slightly modified from the Hackett translation by M.L. Gill and P. Ryan, in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997), 359–97.

28 *PIP*: 66, f.

29 Cf. Gill and Ryan’s translation: 366, n. 10.

30 *Prm.* 132c.

highest Form is only to be understood as the ultimate “foundational intuition [*Grundanschauung*]”, which seeks to unite the “totality of appearances” “according to a natural maxim of human reason”.³¹ And this highest unity is that of *purpose* [*Zweck*], “which must be the Good, pure and simple”.³² In the Form of Purpose, all the relatively more determinate Forms are unified; and in this Cohen sees Plato again in agreement with Kant.

1.2 *The Transcendental-philosophical Interpretation*

In the mid-1870s, the tenor of Cohen's Plato-interpretation undergoes a change, with the psychological motif supplanted by a transcendental-philosophical starting point. Thus, between the publication of *Kant's Theory of Experience* in 1871 and *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (*Kant's Grounding of Ethics*) of 1877, Cohen's concept of consciousness evolves accordingly, and with it, his interpretation of Plato's philosophy. In *Kant's Theory*, Cohen's discussion of the *a priori* still had recourse to the psychological subject, i.e., to the “fact of empirical consciousness”.³³ In *Kant's Grounding*, by contrast, the concept of consciousness is explicitly restricted to its transcendental sense, viz., of being a condition of experience. In this new transcendental framework, we can no longer pose the psycho-genetic question of how it is possible for *a priori* moments of experience to become effective.

The concept of purpose (*Zweck*) that had played such an important role in Cohen's discussion of Plato's Forms now continues to bear fruit in his treatment of Kant. Purposiveness (allegedly the “all-encompassing foundational intuition [*Grundanschauung*]” in Plato) accordingly has an exclusively “regulative” importance for “the reflecting power of judgment”.³⁴ It is clear that Cohen here underpins the Platonic Form with a frankly Kantian interpretive templet: originally, the Form is supposed to be a “regulative concept”, and have no “generative [*schöpferische*]” or constitutive function. Its function in guiding knowledge (*erkenntnisleitende*) falls under the regulative concept of purpose. This also applies to the relation of the Form to objects of knowledge. For its part, the Being (*Sein*) of the Form in itself is not thing-like (*dinghaft*), but lies beyond all thing-like-ness. For its Being is the Thinking of the things themselves; hence the Idea “exists” (*ist*) only in the *noētos topos*. Plato's description of the Form of the Good as “beyond Being [*epekeina tēs ousias*]”³⁵ becomes

31 *PIP*: 66.

32 *PIP*: 74.

33 Cohen (1871), 14.

34 *PIP*: 75.

35 *Rep.* 509b.

Cohen's motto: the Platonic Form describes no real entity (*kein Seiendes*), but rather the *function* of a unifying synthesis of appearances. The function's synthetic positing of unity is itself rooted in the concept of purpose, i.e., precisely how it is best for this or that thing to be.³⁶ Nevertheless, Plato's functional conception of Forms fell prey to the "common fate of human reason, [viz.] that this *regulative* thought [*Gedanke*] becomes a *constitutive* concept for the reflecting power of judgment"³⁷—a destiny that Kant attempts to overcome in the "Transcendental Dialectic".

Now when Cohen compares (his conception of) the Platonic Forms with Kant's "Ideas", he does not have in mind the regulative concepts of reason in the "Dialectic" of the first *Critique*. Rather he is thinking of the third *Critique*, in which Kant applies the term, "aesthetic Ideas", to representations that refer to intuition and that stand under a subjective principle of harmony among the powers of cognition. An aesthetic Idea is a pure representation (intuition) of the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and is not any kind of concept.³⁸ Therefore the aesthetic Idea is also itself no cognition (*Erkenntnis*), just as the pure Idea of reason (being a concept of reason without a corresponding intuition) is not a cognition.

With regards to cognition of nature (*Naturerkenntnis*), Kant identifies the transcendental concept of formal purposiveness (of nature) as the subjective principle (or maxim) under which these aesthetic (quasi-intuitive) Ideas stand. This concept has the function of "specifying" the universal laws of nature for the faculty of cognition (*Erkenntnisvermögen*). This highest Idea of purpose would, in the Kantian sense, accordingly be merely a maxim, i.e., a subjective principle of the reflecting power of judgment with respect to cognition of nature, and hence only a universal *a priori* condition under which things can become objects of knowledge (*Objekten der Erkenntnis*). Kant's transcendental Ideas of reason, by contrast, are determined "in accordance with an objective principle" of Reason,³⁹ that is, with respect to the constitution (*Beschaffenheit*) of the objects intended in them (*also von der Beschaffenheit der in ihnen gemeinten Objekte her*). These may be reduced to just three in number: World, Soul, and God. Yet it is only when the subjective principle of the purposiveness of nature is incorrectly considered to be an objective principle that it is hypostatized into a (constitutive) concept of reason, and its aesthetic Ideas

36 Cf. *Phaedo* 97c.

37 *PIP*: 79.

38 *CJ*: B 242.

39 *CJ*: B 239.

into transcendent objects. This “destiny” is what the “Dialectic of Teleological Judgment” seeks to unmask via critique.⁴⁰

Thus, when Cohen speaks of the comprehension (*Zusammenfassung*) of all intuitions in an ultimate “fundamental intuition [*Grundanschauung*]”,⁴¹ he is merely attributing to the Platonic Form the (Kantian) function of the power of judgment, which mediates between the Understanding and Reason. In essence, Cohen identifies Plato’s Form with Kant’s aesthetic Idea, though without discussing its relation to the transcendental Ideas of Reason. Hence it is also not surprising that Cohen in turn seeks to trace the principle of purposiveness from the *Critique of Judgment* (which there appears as the teleological expression of the philosophical question regarding the origin of the cognition of the world) back to Platonic Idealism. For the concept of nature explicated in Kant’s third *Critique* is, according to Cohen, related to Plato’s understanding of nature, as evidenced, say, by the critique of materialism in Book x of the *Laws*. There,⁴² Plato presents motion caused by something else as less originary than self-movement, viz., as the principle of life⁴³ or of the soul.⁴⁴ Compared with this principle, every non-self-caused motion is “secondary”.⁴⁵ And because this principle of the self-moving soul is the most original principle, all Being, insofar as it is moved, must be subordinate to it: “All soul looks after all that lacks a soul, and patrols all of heaven, taking different shapes at different times”.⁴⁶ In this way, reason and life may be attributed to the universe itself.⁴⁷

The concept of World is thus insufficiently determinable solely via the investigation of its two causes, the “natural-causal” (i.e., “necessary”, τὸ ἀναγκαῖον) and the “divine” causes;⁴⁸ rather, a further determination of the relationship between these two ideas is required. Hence, Plato’s cosmology is also not based on a simple mechanistic model, but makes the basic presupposition that, to speak with Kant, “everything in the world [...] is good for something; nothing [...] in it is for nothing”.⁴⁹ The *Sophist* determined the whole (*Inbegriff*) of reality as the mixture of Being and Non-Being. And already in the *Symposium*, Plato stressed the following point regarding this mixture:

40 *CJ*: 311, ff.

41 *PIP*: 73, ff.

42 *Laws* 894b, ff.

43 *Laws* 895c.

44 *Laws* 896a.

45 *Laws* 896b.

46 *Phdr.* 246b.

47 E.g., *Philebus* 28d; *Statesman* 269cd.

48 *Tim.* 68e–69a.

49 *CJ*: B 300.

After all, everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of *poiēsis*.⁵⁰

Thus generative purposive activity (*Zwecktätigkeit*) rules the entire cosmos as the World Soul, as the *Timaeus*-myth says. According to Cohen, it at this point that now the dialectical function of the Form of the Good becomes for the first time operative, viz., as the “Form of the highest Purpose”. The role of the concept of purpose (*Zweckidee*), already so central in (Cohen’s earlier) psychological approach, is now confirmed with a view to Kant.

It is interesting that this aspect of Cohen’s Plato-interpretation seems to have sparked discussion among Plato scholars, as one can see some forty years later in a controversy concerning the connection between the theory of Forms and the *Timaeus* myth. Briefly, Cohen’s interpretation is the following: the theory of Forms is indeed compatible with the myth of the *Timaeus* and its notion of the Demiurge, because the Form of the Good as the Idea of purpose forms the regulative principle for the systematic unity of the concepts of Nature and World, which is just what Plato’s image of the Demiurge represents. And in his later work, Cohen consistently follows through with this notion of the generative, creative *aitia* in his theorem of the generative power of thinking. Later Plato scholars take up this interpretive direction, and in the end even deploy it against the traditional interpretations of a Zeller or a Windelband. They stress the generative function of the Form of the Good, and justify the notion of the Demiurge with respect to its relation to the theory of Forms;⁵¹ nevertheless, they do not explicitly trace connections back to Cohen’s starting point.

Thus, the fusion of aesthetic and transcendental motifs is a characteristic aftereffect of Cohen’s psychological Plato-interpretation, so that the putative Platonic paradigm is almost nonchalantly applied to the assessment of Kant’s levels of cognition (*Erkenntnisstufen*). Yet in doing so, the epistemological emphasis gets shifted considerably, for the closer a cognition comes to the Idea, the more does Reason (according to Kant) fall prey to the logic of illusion. But for Plato, by contrast, the knowledge of the Forms corresponds to the highest

50 *Symp.* 205bc. In Lembeck’s original version, the quote came from Schleiermacher, but instead of Schleiermacher’s translation of *Dichtung* (“poetry”) for *poiēsis*, Lembeck has *Schöpfung* (“creation”). Nehamas and Woodruff’s translation (in Cooper and Hutchinson [1997], 506–56), quoted here, follows Schleiermacher’s use of “poetry” for *poiēsis*, but as they point out, “*poiēsis*, lit. ‘making’, ... can be used for any kind of production or creation” (Nehamas and Woodruff, n. 39). While I have left the Greek term untranslated, the idea of creation (*Schöpfung*) is dominant here. –Tr.

51 Cf., e.g., Wichmann (1920), 155–202, and, for an overview, Hoffmann (1922), 1098–1105. In agreement, see Cassirer (1925), esp. 118, ff.

possible level of insight.⁵² Nonetheless, Cohen argues that we must attribute a supreme “cognitive value [*Erkenntniswerth*]” to Kant’s transcendental Idea, which is why he believed it permissible to directly apply Kant’s terminology to Platonic concepts.⁵³ At the same time, it is impossible not to notice a change in this interpretive pattern. The interpretation of the Form as psychological category is supplanted by its determination in terms of validity (*Geltung*). If Cohen earlier still declared “all” to be Form, because, after all, everything is somehow “generated in the soul”,⁵⁴ his later engagement with Kant’s epistemology leads him to narrow the scope of the concept of Form: Forms (*Ideen*) are now understood as rules of synthesis, insofar as they represent “points of view”, with respect to which the synthetic unities of the Understanding are, for their part, connected into systematic unities. The fact that the Forms are no longer conceived as pure products (*Erzeugnisse*) of the power of imagination does not of course later prevent Cohen from continuing to conceive them as products of *thinking*, though not with an intuitive but rather a “dialogical” source.⁵⁵

All in all, Plato’s Forms seem increasingly to take over the function of the Kantian Categories in Cohen’s work. The synthetic power of the Understanding is everywhere derived from a spontaneous power of “foundational [*grundlegendem*]” character. The concept of “founding [*Grundlegung*]” becomes important for Cohen because, on the one hand, it stresses the spontaneous act of synthesis, and, on the other hand, it is reflected in the scientific method’s concept of hypothesis. For according to Cohen, the sense of the scientific “hypothesis” is rooted in the original meaning of Plato’s concept of *hypothesis* (ὑπόθεσις),⁵⁶ which is so central that it may be identified with the concept of the (Platonic) Form *tout court*. Although there may be many arguments against this view,⁵⁷ Cohen’s reasoning has a certain plausibility. For the Platonic *hypothesis* is of course not simply the *same thing* as hypothesis in the scientific sense.⁵⁸ The concept of hypothesis that Cohen extracts from Plato therefore has, as an initial orientation (*Orientierungsentwurf*), a virtually categorial significance for cognition (*Erkenntnis*). For without this *pre-sub-position* (*Voraus-Setzung*)

52 Cf. *Rep.* 505a.

53 Cohen’s attempt to read Plato’s Form of the Good as the principle of judgment is certainly unconventional; nevertheless, one still finds a similar idea e.g. in Wolfgang Wieland’s work, with special attention to central passages of the *Republic* (cf. Wieland 1982, 162–85).

54 *PIP*: 67.

55 Cohen (2014), 20.

56 Italicized “*hypothesis*” indicates the transliteration of the Greek term, “ὑπόθεσις”.

57 Cf. Lembeck (1994), 89–92.

58 Pace Gadamer (Gadamer 1978, 76); cf. Lembeck (1994), 94, ff.

in thinking, there would be nothing for cognition to deduce from or to connect to.⁵⁹ Sense-perception does indeed count as a “summoner [Wecker; cf. *Rep.* 523c, παρακαλῶντα]”, i.e., as the impulse to mathematical-scientific thinking, but it does not constitute its contents. For the true being (*ontōs on*) of things is only knowable through thinking.⁶⁰ This can be seen for example in geometry: the true Being of the triangle is not to be seen, only to be thought. And only because it is first thought can it also be ultimately constructed synthetically. The *a priori* of synthetic judgment accordingly lies in the *pre-sub-position* (*Voraus-Setzung*) which thinking gives to itself as the anticipated answer to the question of cognition. And it is upon this *pre-sub-position* alone that the right of the synthetic judgment is based: clinging to it, one must derive one's conclusions and check if they are consistent with each other or not. Thus the synthetic judgment turns into a quasi-analytic judgment.

The conception of the *a priori* whose “birth-hour” Cohen believed to have discovered has less the sense of a cognitive foundation (*Erkenntnisgrundlage*), and more that of a “founding posit [*Grundlegung*]”.⁶¹ The *a priori* of cognition (*der Erkenntnis*) in Plato is thus the Form, that is, the Hypothesis; and this hypothesis is itself in motion, a *genetic a priori*:

[T]he Forms, as the founding posits [*Grundlegungen* = “groundworks”] are what constitute the content of knowledge [*Erkenntnis*], the treasure that can forever be increased through new founding posits; although all new founding posits will reveal themselves as deeper developments of the older ones.⁶²

Already in *Kant's Theory of Experience*, Cohen had developed a broad concept of the *a priori* that went beyond Kant's theory: the apriority of forms of intuition and categories were now interpreted exclusively in light of their function as conditions of possibility of experience, and “the” *a priori* was declared to be the ultimate generative source of experience: it “generates [*erzeugt*]” its objects by itself.⁶³ On Cohen's view, it is completely defensible now, in this new context, to ascribe this same generative function to the Platonic Forms:

59 Cf. also Lembeck (1994), 113, ff.

60 Cohen (1878), 356.

61 Cf. “Introduction”, 17, f.

62 “Introduction”, 18.

63 Cohen (1871), 49.

It is thus no great leap from Plato to Kant, when Kant explains his *a priori* by saying that we only know that aspect of things that we ourselves place into them. If elsewhere Kant says, “what is *a priori*, that is the foundation [*liegt zu Grunde*]”, he here says: “we ourselves lay it down as a foundation”. And in Greek one expresses this idea as follows: “We make a hypothesis”. These two ideas are philosophically exactly congruent.⁶⁴

In this and other such places we can see that the identification of the *a priori* and the Platonic Form only becomes possible by detaching both of these concepts from their traditional contexts. On the one hand, it is true that now the *a priori* has become “de-psychologized”, while retaining its significance as an instrument of orientation solely with respect to the genesis of experience (construed as science). On the other hand, the Platonic Form gets a “subjective remainder” ascribed to it, which (allegedly) announces its ineradicable presence through the “conditioned-ness [*Bedingtheit*]” of Being through Thinking.⁶⁵ Indeed, the Platonic Form, Cohen claims, only gains its correct, scientific expression in its interpretation as *hypothesis* (ὑπόθεσις). Now, this *a priori* is no more Kantian than its corresponding Form is Platonic. Moreover, the latter also cannot be compared to Kant’s transcendental Idea, since it by no means possesses only regulative significance, but rather, like the (Cohenian) *a priori*, is supposed to be constitutive, i.e., generative.⁶⁶ Thus Cohen’s reduction of the Platonic Form down to its logical, cognition-guiding (*erkenntnisleitende*) function goes hand in hand with the valorization of this function-sense over its exclusively regulative character in Kant.⁶⁷

In sum, one may thus say that Cohen’s Plato-reception remains bold and daring in almost every respect, because it is obviously intended to stabilize his system, and that for just this reason, Cohen’s interpretation will strike Plato-scholars as largely unacceptable purely on philological grounds. For it tries to build philosophical-historical bridges where we have always only seen chasms.

2 Paul Natorp

Things are decidedly different in the case of Cohen’s younger colleague, Natorp, who always stressed the independence of his Plato-reception from

64 “Introduction”, 27.

65 Cohen (1878), 346, f.

66 Generative, that is, of (scientific) experience. –Tr.

67 Cf. Edel (1988), 252.

Cohen's. Natorp was especially skeptical of Cohen's manifestly arbitrary recourse to Plato. Unlike Cohen, who lacked philological training, Natorp was instead guided by the most up-to-date methods of philological research. As a student of Hermann Usener, a professor of Classics at the University of Bonn, Natorp not only took part in substantially determining the philosophical, but also the classical-philological discussion of Plato's work. Thus, in the controversy regarding the correct determination of the chronology of the Platonic dialogues, for example, Natorp took his bearings from the stylometric method developed from the 1860s to the 1880s by L. Campbell and W. Dittenberger. Nevertheless, because some of the stylometric results conflicted with Natorp's substantive understanding of the text, he was led to develop a mediating theory, whose intricate constructions often provoked the mockery of colleagues. The fact that his famous book on *Plato's Theory of Forms* (*Platos Ideenlehre* [*PI*,]) of 1903 almost completely dispensed with any discussion of contemporaneous literature did little to help regain the respect of those colleagues.

His philological seriousness also meant that Natorp—again unlike Cohen—actually studied the entire Platonic corpus, giving special attention to the inner development of his hero's thought. Natorp focused on the shifts in meaning of Plato's concept of "Form", viz., from a "static" up through a "dynamic-genetic" version in the late dialogues—a developmental nuance not explicitly respected by Cohen, who from the start had favored the genetic interpretation.

Last, Natorp's reading of Plato was not led astray from the outset by any fatal hermeneutic presuppositions, as befell Cohen due to his dependence on Steinthal and Lazarus's *völkerpsychologisch* theses. By contrast, Natorp stresses the radically anti-psychologistic and anti-subjectivistic character of his interpretation, which already dominates his earliest monographs.⁶⁸ Of course, one must admit that by this time Cohen, too, had fought some of the decisive battles on this topic, leading him from Kant to the anti-psychologism of his *The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method and Its History*, and which helped him overcome his early affinity for psychology. Thus, Cohen's development appeared to Natorp as a legacy, since if the latter in his early years appropriated anything at all from Cohen, it was certainly the objectivism of the so-called transcendental method.

To be sure, Natorp feels this method's supposedly necessary reliance upon the "*factum* of science" to be an intolerable constraint. And it is no exaggeration to see Natorp's Plato-interpretation as primarily responsible for this critique. Just as he "genetically" resolves Cohen's concept of the origin (*Ursprungsbegriff*) into the continuity of thought, so, too, Natorp proceeds with the concept of

68 Cf. esp. Lembeck (1994), 178, ff.

the fact (*factum*): it is not knowledge in its current *objective state* that presents a philosophical problem, but rather knowledge as method(ological) *progress* and *procedure* (*methodischer Fortgang*):

The *fieri* alone is the *factum*: all Being, that science seeks to ‘establish’ [*festzustellen*], must resolve itself once more into the streaming flow of Becoming. But it is of this Becoming—and ultimately *only* of it—that one may say: it *is*.⁶⁹

Thus the influence of Cohen’s way of reading Plato upon Natorp was relatively weak. Natorp’s testimony that it was Cohen who first “opened [his] eyes to Plato”,⁷⁰ must therefore be taken more as a friendly concession to his elder’s vanity. For it is truly remarkable that Natorp almost never mentions Cohen in his historical work on ancient philosophy; other impulses, e.g., his training at Bonn in classical philology, must have been more important to him.⁷¹

Natorp’s Plato-interpretations always lie in the shadow of his broader investigations into the ancient concept of knowledge (*Erkenntnisbegriff*).⁷² Thus, just as the Socratic and Pre-Socratic background determines his earlier interpretation of Plato, so, too, Plotinus’s Neo-Platonism determines the later. Hence, to a certain extent a “double Plato” is to be found in Natorp’s work, whose internal differences should also be read as an index of Natorp’s own philosophical development.

2.1 *The Systematic Claim of Natorp’s Plato-reading*

In his magisterial book, *Platos Ideenlehre* (*Plato’s Theory of Ideas*),⁷³ the exemplar of the Neo-Kantian reading of Plato, Natorp reads Plato above all as a theoretician of experience (*Erfahrungstheoretiker*).⁷⁴ The evidence for this position is found in the late dialogues. As ever, the logical significance of the theory of Forms for the cognition of the phenomenal world is at the center of the Neo-Kantian line of interpretation, for they were convinced that if the

69 Natorp (1910), 14.

70 *PI*₁: vii.

71 Cf. Cassirer (1925), 276.

72 For more details, see Lembeck (1994), §10, 178, ff.

73 Natorp’s book has been translated into English by Vasilis Politis and John Connolly as *Plato’s Theory of Ideas: An Introduction to Idealism* (Natorp 2004). However, all quotations from *Platos Ideenlehre* have been retranslated for this essay, and the page references are in every case to the German edition. –Tr.

74 This first changes in Natorp’s late philosophy, as attested in the “Metacritical Appendix” to the second edition (Leipzig, 1921 = *PI*₂).

theory of Forms were unable to ground the idea of constitution, it could serve no other purpose.⁷⁵

It is especially Plato's *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, and *Philebus* that offer themselves up for such a logical-epistemological interpretation. On Natorp's view, the hypotheses discussed in the *Parmenides* regarding the relation of the One to the Not-One and of Unity to Multiplicity evidence the necessary community (*Beziehungsgemeinschaft*) of the basic categorial concepts of thinking and their role as the condition of possibility of predicating judgments. Thus, Natorp interprets "the One" as the expression of the thought-function of synthetic unity, and hence "the Not-One" as the radically indeterminate matrix (*Fundus*) of relational determinations.⁷⁶ On this reading, "predicating judgment" means: to approximate the demand for unity through the delimitation of what is by its nature unlimited.

On the basis of such reflections, Natorp uses the *Sophist* to develop an entirely new logic as a "general theory of predication".⁷⁷ For in the section on the *koinōnia* of concepts—their original forms of interweaving and types of connection—what is at stake for Natorp is nothing less than the "problem of categories".⁷⁸ If the *Sophist* thus evidences the transcendental-philosophical notion that synthesis means "thinking as relating", thus grounding the process-character of thinking as such, then it is the *Philebus* that completes this idea in an "empirical-scientific direction".⁷⁹ The ontological significance of the theory of Forms is thus again dismissed in favor of its epistemological and scientific-theoretical importance. The insight into the originary correlation of the indeterminate and its determination now reappears in the guise of a research project, according to which the cognitions of the special sciences must trace a path of increasing specification and a correlative approximation of the empirical object.

Yet this scientific project is also directive for philosophy, since on Natorp's view philosophical knowledge walks the same path as science—albeit in the opposite direction. That is, the determinative function of reason is to be traced back to its ultimate logical unity, back to the law of the logical as such, which describes the form of thought's motion in both of the aforementioned directions.⁸⁰ Now above all, this law means that, according to the "modern insight of Plato", cognition (*Erkenntnis*), must ultimately be traced back to and

75 *PI*_I: 234.

76 Cf. *PI*_I: 238, ff.

77 *PI*_I: 285, ff.

78 *PI*_I: 287.

79 *PI*_I: 301.

80 Cf. Natorp (1911), 45.

so also grounded in the dynamic relation of the basic concepts of thinking, viz., *symplokē* and *diairesis*.⁸¹

Now in all this it is noteworthy that Natorp's systematizing appropriation of Plato's late philosophy comes to a head in the rather general question as to the true nature of "the philosopher" (for such is the opening question of the *Sophist*): what does such a person actually do, insofar as he philosophizes? This in turn is developed by Plato *ex negativo*, namely via the explication of what a *sophist* might be, insofar as he may be considered the *non-philosopher*. Such explication leads, in connection with the questions regarding Being and Non-Being, to a discussion of a doctrine of categories (i.e., the *megista genē*). Philosophizing thus amounts to busying oneself with the problems of the origin and validity of knowledge, by tracing back the process of constituting Being to "ever more fundamental presuppositions". These ultimately get encapsulated in that "law" of thinking, according to which all purported knowledge of Being is no more than a dynamic and ever-elusive process of relating in consciousness. Thus the "law of thinking"⁸² is grounded in a dialectical process, and so is itself understood as a living process (*Geschehen*), which for Natorp then finds its specifically scientific description not only in logic, but over and above it in psychology as the science of the *realization* of thinking (*Wissenschaft vom Denkvollzug*).⁸³

Now, the activity of determining the non-philosophical attitude of the sophist, and proving the function of the cognitive process in constituting Being (*seins-konstitutiven Funktion des Erkenntnisprozesses*), itself necessarily involves *philosophizing*. And this is the case just as much for Natorp's re-enactment of philosophizing as for Plato's original enactment of philosophizing. If, then, philosophizing, understood as the scientific striving towards knowledge, is a living process in a subject—then obviously this subject is that *in which philosophy takes place*. Alfred Görland's well-known statement (as memorable as it is modest) that the philosopher "is no more than the place [*Ort*] where philosophy takes place" may, in this light, also be understood as a statement that obscures instead of clarifying its point.⁸⁴ For perhaps the *Sophist* also discusses the question of the difference between the sophist as the non-philosopher, on the one hand, and the philosopher, on the other hand, precisely in order to clear up the question regarding the *what* of philosophy from the standpoint of the mode of its subjective achievement, i.e., from its *how*.—That such a *how*

81 Cf. Natorp (1912), 77.

82 Cf. *PI*₁: 33.

83 Cf. Natorp (1912).

84 Görland (1909), 395.

of course is not in turn merely the expression of a somehow motivated *decision* to philosophize, but rather bears the character itself of an “*event* of Being” does not become clear until Natorp’s later “systematic” phase. And it is just these developments in his late philosophy that exhibit the most striking differences with Cohen’s readings of Plato.

2.2 *Plato in Natorp’s Late Philosophy*

As is well known, Natorp’s late philosophy undergoes considerable systematic developments. These also have clear effects on his portrayal of Plato, in which Gadamer diagnoses an “astonishing convergence of [Natorp’s] Plato interpretation with Neo-Platonism”.⁸⁵ Gadamer’s remark may be explained on the basis of the metaphysical program of Natorp’s *General Logic* (*Allgemeine Logik*)⁸⁶ and his *Philosophical Systematics* (*Philosophische Systematik*), as well as by the noticeable intensification in Natorp’s engagement with Plotinus from 1905 onwards.⁸⁷

If we take the difference of Natorp’s new “systematics” from his older logic as a standard by which to measure the difference between the “new” and the “old” Plato, we may find a useful guidepost in one of the main aspects of this difference, viz., the change in Natorp’s concept of the “category”. Nicolai Hartmann considered the “basic ontological question of the doctrine of categories” to be a choice between two alternatives: are they “human modes of understanding [*Auffassungsweisen*]; or subsistent basic features of objects, independent of all understanding”? Hartmann draws a direct line to the medieval problem of universals, which already centered on the question of whether “the most fundamental essential elements of everything that is predicable [...] subsisted merely *in mente* or also *in rebus* (or even *ante res*)”.⁸⁸ If we take this thematic correspondence as our starting-point, then Natorp’s ontological modification of his conception of the categories would have to be reflected in a comparable change in his understanding of the Platonic conception of Form, i.e., in a new answer to the questions of whether the Forms subsist merely *in mente* or perhaps rather *ante res*; whether they are merely hypothetical posits (*Grundlegungen*) of thinking, as Cohen believed; or whether they have a proper ontological status of their own, more robust than that of a mere notional magnitude of temporary validity (*Geltung*).

85 Gadamer (1954), 63.

86 Natorp (1980).

87 Nonetheless, it is likely that his interest in Plotinus is rooted in Natorp’s systematic shifts, rather than the reverse; cf. Lembeck (1994), 323, f.

88 Hartmann, 1934: viii.

Now, in fact, Natorp's late systematic philosophy does present us with a concept of the Platonic Form going far beyond the bare methodological sense of his earlier period—yet one that still supposedly counts as Platonic. Natorp utilizes three different concepts of Platonic Form, incorporating them at key points into his systematic project.

A particular conception of Form corresponds to the conceptual planes of his *General Logic*, each of which deals with a distinct “phase” of the process of Being (*Seinsprozesses*). These phases of Being (*Seins-Phasen*) are distinguished according the genera of the modal categories, viz., Possibility, Necessity, and Reality (*Möglichkeit, Notwendigkeit, Wirklichkeit*).⁸⁹ “Possibility” here names the origin of the thinking of Being (*des Seins-Denkens*) taken purely as prior to all hypothetical diffraction into beings determined as “thus”; as “otherwise”; or in no way at all. “Reality” indicates the sublation or cancellation (*Aufhebung*) of this diffraction, the coincidence of the contradictions of what is determined thus and otherwise in the unity of the complete totality of Being. Between these two extremes lies the field of “Necessity”. In this field, Being is brought out of its Possibility into Reality, in that the original indeterminacy of the possible undergoes its hypothetical delimitation (*Limitation*) via the dialectical process of being determined thus- and otherwise. Hence “Being” expresses determinacy, i.e., being-able-to-be-thus-and-not-otherwise (*So-und-nicht-anders-sein-Können*). On this plane, “Being” means “being a determinate ‘what’ [*bestimmtes Was-Sein*]”; by contrast, on the plane of Possibility, “Being” means pure “being-the-case [*reines Dass-Sein*]” as the “beginning-less Beginning [*anfanglose {sic} Anfang*]”.⁹⁰ Finally, on the plane of Reality, “Being” means “being-the-case”, viz., as the unconditioned “*factum*” of the completed realization of all the initial demands of the Beginning[-phase].⁹¹

The concept of Form as Natorp first used it in his earlier logic in a *primary sense*, now again finds a place in his later systematics on the intermediate plane accorded to logical analysis. To wit, “[Platonic] Form” here primarily means “hypothesis”, “presumption of Being [*Seins-Unterstellung*]”, the boldness of assuming an “it is thus”, and a temporary manifestation of this “assumption” in (and as) law.⁹² Yet now, given the background of the new “systematic” doctrine of categories, his earlier methodological approach no longer seems to Natorp “exhaustively to express” the essence of the Form.⁹³ For if the

89 Cf. *PPh*, 11–22.

90 *PhS*, 79.

91 *PhS*, 110, f.

92 In other words, this is the plane of “Necessity”; see previous paragraph. –Tr.

93 *PhS*, 281.

hypothesis-function were already to represent Form's deepest sense, then one would never be able to speak of "probability" in an epistemic context: there would be "absolutely no standard for measuring a more or less of truth, for a coming closer to or getting further away from truth".⁹⁴ According to Natorp, Plato was already aware of this shortcoming, as is clear from *Republic* 533c, where he says "half mockingly" that the method of hypotheses, as indispensable as it may seem, must in fact always take its start from something, one knows not what; then pass through many equally unknown intermediate propositions; and finally reach a result which *a fortiori* one could not have known at the outset.⁹⁵ Hence, once the infinite task of laying down posits is viewed in isolation, it turns out to be a kind of self-deception, since its infinity is tacitly assumed to be a sort of potential finiteness. Therefore Cohen is *incorrect*: the *hypothesis* is not reason's "ultimate anchor".

Nevertheless, this does not in any way imply a disavowal of transcendental logic, for the plane of categorial determination of Being (the modality of Necessity) does, for its part, represent a *categorial* necessity. As one of the three "basic categories" of the process of Being, it represents an indispensable "mode of expressing [*Äußerungsweise*]" of the original *Ur-Being* itself.⁹⁶ The categories—the *Ur-categories* as well as their logical modes—are however only attempts to penetrate through the phenomena into the "center" of all (basic) patterns of logical relation themselves.⁹⁷ To this extent they have a "generative function":⁹⁸ in the process of determining an as yet undifferentiated potentiality into a "this" (i.e., into a determinate particular), the categories institute temporary orderings. Natorp identifies this function of his categories with Plato's Forms. Both are suited, like the light of Plato's Sun, to let beings become knowable;⁹⁹ yet neither is anything original in itself, but rather in both cases a "penultimate something" as which—just like the Sun's rays—merely point back to an ultimate Original.¹⁰⁰

Accordingly, Natorp's *Philosophical Systematics* is but a penultimate and open question without a final answer. As he writes, "philosophy is not the ultimate" but itself has "a lower and upper bound".¹⁰¹ If its lower bound is to be designated relatively simply by Kant's phrase as the "fruitful bathos of

94 *PhS*, 65.

95 Cf. *PhS*, 64, 168.

96 *PhS*, 194; *PPh*, 11, ff.

97 *PhS*, 194, 280.

98 *PhS*, 14.

99 The reference is to the Sun Analogy in *Rep.* VI, esp. 507e–508a. –Tr.

100 Cf. *PPh*, 9, f.; *PhS*, 194, f., 19.

101 *PhS*, 396.

experience”,¹⁰² marking the upper bound is rather more challenging. All one can know is that beyond the upper bound there must lie that Origin, that “ultimate” of which even the Forms (or Natorp’s so-called categories) are but the expression: the radically transcendent and other-worldly (*Jenseitige*)—Plato’s *epekeina*.¹⁰³ On the other hand, there is no question for Natorp that such an ultimate exists in the first place, since it is simply a “*factum*” that “it is [*Es ist*]”, i.e., that Reality exists. But *how* it is, the nature of its being—this remains unclarified, because *what* “it” is cannot be articulated.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Natorp’s late systematics—in light of the miracle that there is something and not nothing—subsides in the astonished silence of mysticism.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, it is on this higher plane of the absolute foundation (*des absoluten Grundes*) that the *second sense* of “Form” becomes quickened, now indicating the radical “beyond” of philosophy, the transfinite ground (*überendlichen Grund*) of all creation, which cannot be grasped conceptually, but in which one must “believe” in view of the aforementioned “*factum*”.¹⁰⁶ Hence, Natorp identifies this *epekeina* (“beyond”) with that highest Platonic Form in the *Republic*, the Form of the Good.¹⁰⁷ It is with reference to the essence of this *epekeina* that Plato’s metaphors is supposed finally to become comprehensible: “Only through an image, only starting with the penultimate, can one ever *speak* of that ultimate”.¹⁰⁸ Hence Natorp here considers the Neo-Platonic interpretation of the *epekeina* as *hyperousia* to be the most accurate reading.

The “systematic” ontologization of the origin-problem¹⁰⁹ clearly forces Natorp to revise certain earlier positions of his Plato-interpretation. The Form now loses its exclusive character as “law”, retaining only a correct and indispensable, but nonetheless secondary function. The simple logical-functional interpretation of the Form of the Good, by contrast, falls into the background, assuming once more the familiar features of traditional readings. Those very metaphors that Natorp had earlier often criticized now appear to him substantively grounded in view of this highest Form (the Good).

The Form accordingly means the creative, generative *Urgrund* (primal ground) proper to the first categorial plane of Being (Possibility). But even on Natorp’s earlier interpretation, it simultaneously suggests the logical function

102 Kant, *Proleg.*, A 204.

103 Cf. *PhS*, 181, 396, f.

104 Cf. *PhS*, 401, ff.

105 *PhS*, 194.

106 Cf. *PhS*, 403.

107 Cf. *PPh*, 119.

108 *PPh*, 10.

109 I.e., the question of the ultimate source and meaning of Being. –Tr.

of a “generation” or “creation” (*Schöpfung*) at one remove, as one may describe the constitution, via the logic of relations, of Being on the second categorial plane (Necessity). And lastly, a *third sense* of the Platonic Form, corresponding to the third categorial plane of Being (Reality), describes the ideal of the fulfillment of that requirement expressed on the (second) plane of relations as the “infinite task” of determining the indeterminate, and articulated as “hypothesis”. It is in this sense that Natorp compares (on the one hand) the relation of the second conception of Platonic Form to the third, with (on the other hand) the relation of the Kantian Idea-as-infinite-task to the “Ideal”.¹¹⁰ “Ideal” on Kant’s view, means an Idea conceived “not merely *in concreto*, but *in individuo*, i.e., as a single thing that is determinable or indeed determined through the Idea”.¹¹¹ The Ideal is an “object completely determined according to principles” which “exists solely in thoughts” (since such a thing cannot exist in reality).¹¹² Nonetheless, the Idea tends constantly towards the Ideal. Further, the Idea (*qua* Platonic *hypothesis*) presupposes a being, conceived as completely congruent with its (sc. the Idea’s) content. It is the fate of *poietic Reason* (*der poietischen Vernunft*) that such presuppositions must be forever disappointed because they are, in principle, only ever *penultimate*. For the late Natorp, “Idea” simply means this trinity: *epekeina*—*hypothesis*—*Ideal*. The *epekeina* justifies the hope and faith in an ultimate truth of all Being; the *hypothesis* indicates the trustful taking up of this infinite ground in finite, knowledge-generating activity (*fieri*); last, the *Ideal* represents the final goal of such activity as that “individuality [*Individuität*]” of Being which has been completely brought into knowledge.

On such occasions, seeking to express what actually cannot be said, Natorp adopts a lofty, even incantatory tone. He operates on the assumption that everything sayable is ultimately a speaking of what is in itself ineffable: the not-sayable is the ground and origin of all Being, as well as of all being-sayable (*Sagbar-Seins*)—this is Natorp’s thesis. It follows that in all assertions of Being (*in aller Seins-Aussage*), the ineffable *does* ultimately express itself.¹¹³ Thus, speaking of the ineffable is to be understood as itself a peculiar way in which the very ground of Being (*Seinsgrund*) reveals itself—its generative, creative “stepping-forth-out-of-itself”.¹¹⁴ In this way the function of philosophy is

110 Cf. *PhS*, 315.

111 *CPR*, B596.

112 Cf. *CPR*, B597, ff.

113 Cf. *PhS*, 386, f.

114 *PhS*, 387.

proved, in all its “*seinsgeschichtlich*” significance,¹¹⁵ as the *megiston mathēma* (greatest learning)—or to be more precise, as a doctrine of categories, i.e., the doctrine of the modes in which Being expresses itself.

Of course, finding actual evidence of such talk of the Idea’s (Form’s) “trinity” in Plato remains highly problematic. Let me offer a typical example, which nicely illustrates the systematically applied new manner of reading. According to Natorp, Plato in his old age tried “at least once” (namely in the *Philebus*) to circumscribe the Form of the Good as a conceptual triad,¹¹⁶ viz., measure (*to metron*; *hē symmetria*), beauty (*to kalon*; *to kallos*), and truth (*hē alētheia*; *to alēthes*).¹¹⁷ And Natorp’s interpretation seems somewhat forced, especially in view of the text’s relative thinness. On his view, *to agathon* (the Good), is the expression of the Form at the (second) level of logical interaction and systematic relationality, guaranteed by the law granting unity and subsistence.¹¹⁸ We already find this functional interpretation of the Good as Form in Cohen, and Natorp had previously shared it, and indeed he still now considers it to be correct, though limited solely to the (second) level of relation. *To alēthes* describes, in turn, the modal character of the Idea, reducing the significance of the original plane to a “minimal requirement” that it must meet, namely by being “sensible”, “reasonable”, or in a word, “true”.¹¹⁹ Last, *to kalon* expresses Idea in the sense of the category of individuality, meaning the perfect inner measure (*to metron*; *Maßhaftigkeit*)¹²⁰ of individuality (*Individuität*),¹²¹ i.e., the perfection of a concrete Something that “purely fulfills its essence, its determination, its Idea or Norm”¹²²—in short, the Ideal as Kant describes it.

One may notice a crucial shift in emphasis in the interpretation of this short passage, as soon as one compares this late interpretation with the earlier one in *Plato’s Theory*. There Natorp spoke of the *equal* value of the three expressions—measure (*Maß*), beauty, truth—as simply different ways of articulating scientific rationality, although if one insisted on naming a first among

115 Morphologically, “*seinsgeschichtlich*” cannot be rendered into English; semantically, the situation is not much better. It is the adjectival form of *Seinsgeschichte*, the “History of Being”, which may signify either the history of the *concept* of “being”, or, perhaps, the (onto-theological) unfolding of Being through time. Here the point seems to involve both senses: it is through philosophy’s logical analysis of the “categories” that the historical unfolding of Being is made comprehensible. –Tr.

116 *PhS*, 283, f.

117 *Phil.* 64a–65a.

118 *PhS*, 284.

119 *PhS*, 284.

120 Cf. *PhS*, 379.

121 *PhS*, 283.

122 *PhS*, 284.

equals, it would be measure (*Maß*) or lawfulness that by rights would occupy that place: “The sovereign method” forms the ultimate ground of all Being.¹²³ The late Natorp now disavows this earlier view. The sovereignty of method both loses and gains: it loses its place at the top of the categorial structure of Being, but through that very loss for the first time gains a new, now more profound ground than it could have laid down for itself. The *hypothesis* now truly is founded in an *anhypotheton*, which, however, Natorp can describe in as little detail as Plato could in his own day.

Natorp could never bring himself to overhaul the new, second edition of *Plato's Theory* (1921), promising instead a “reconstructive intervention” in a completely new book,¹²⁴ which, however, never materialized. Hence his first-edition text of 1903 was left basically unchanged, with only the *Sophist*-chapter showing some additions. The decisive expansion of the book is found in the so-called “Metacritical Appendix”, where Natorp tries to explain his “new position on Plato”.¹²⁵

From the standpoint of Natorp's later systematics, the functionalistic interpretation of the Forms, developed in the first edition of *Plato's Theory*, is, as we saw above, in no way considered to be wrong. Yet the “Metacritical Appendix” now provides noticeable additions that present the new Form-interpretation without questioning the old interpretation's *partial* right.¹²⁶ Three related themes guide the discussion: (a) the limited right of the logical interpretation of the Forms; (b) the function of *logos*, *psychē*, and *erōs*; and (a) and (b) with respect to (c), the Form (*Idee*) as *epekeina* (beyond).

(a) Natorp does not surrender the interpretation of Form as law, but rather seeks to ground it more deeply. On the plane of relational, justificatory, reason-giving thinking (i.e., considered categorically, on the [second] level of relations), the individual “Form” (*Einzel-Idee*) continues to signify “*hypothesis*”. The construal of hypothesis as “law” presupposes a relation of the phenomenon to an underlying, fundamental, eternally valid Being (*ewig gültiges Sein*).¹²⁷ The logical interpretation of the Form thus has its rightful place in the overall system. Indeed, it is even indispensable as a categorial “medium” in the generative process of the constitution of Being. But Natorp now believes himself to have identified a conceptual triad in Plato that helps to clarify the immediate relation of the function of this “medium”, viz., *logos—psychē—erōs*.

123 *PI*₁: 329, ff.

124 *PI*₂: 460.

125 *PI*₂: 514–34.

126 Cf. *PI*₂: 471.

127 *PI*₂: 469; cf. 474.

(b) Natorp already assumes a connection of *logos* and *psychē* in his 1912 work, *General Psychology* (*Allgemeine Psychologie*), insofar as he identifies logic and psychology as but two directions on one and the same path.¹²⁸ The dialectical progress to “the *logos* itself”, so Natorp argues, was already described by Plato as the ascent of the soul, e.g., in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*.¹²⁹ There is no logical process that is not grounded in the unity of a living consciousness, and no consciousness whose unity is not logical.¹³⁰ Of course “life” now signifies something “more” than mere thinking,¹³¹ but its “innermost power” remains the *logos*, either as discursive operations with hypothetical *logoi*, or as the permanent supposition of an eternal “*Logos* itself”.¹³² *Logos* remains for Natorp always equivalent with “*idea* [ἰδέα]”, both plural and singular.¹³³ Thus the connection becomes clear: consciousness (*psychē*) operates discursively, asking questions and expecting answers. However, its recourse to *logoi* as *hypotheses* (ὑποθέσεις) does not only signify a temporary positing of Being, but fundamentally presupposes the presence of a stable Meaning (*Sinns*), the complete grasping of which is the goal of object-generating thought: “For questioning means seeking meaning, lacking meaning. He who questions presupposes that the meaning exists”.¹³⁴ This thought, so reminiscent of Nicholas of Cusa,¹³⁵ makes the logical and psychological connection to the eternal *Ur-ground*, to the “ultimate possessor of sense [*das letzte Sinnhabende*—the last thing that may be given sense]” itself.¹³⁶

The profound effect that this expansion of the issue has on the particulars of Natorp’s Plato interpretation can be seen in his treatment of recollection (*anamnēsis*) and *erōs*. In Natorp’s 1903 version of *Plato’s Theory*, the method of *anamnēsis* was still interpreted entirely in the functional sense of a transcendental *apriori*;¹³⁷ now this notion undergoes a decisive change. The depths of the soul whence it calls forth its recollections now owe their being explicitly to the “miraculous fact, that everything to some extent is already there [even

128 Cf. Lembeck (1994), §14.

129 *PI*₂: 468.

130 Cf. *PI*₂: 499.

131 *PhS*, 125.

132 *PI*₂: 468.

133 *PI*₁: 190.

134 *PhS*, 21.

135 “Id quod in omni inquisitione praesupponitur est ipsum lumen, quod etiam ducit ad inquisitum [that which is presupposed by every investigation is light itself, which, as well, leads to what is being sought {trans., Hopkins}]” (Cusanus [1994] [h x/2A n. 4]); see D’Amico in this volume, esp. the bibliography.

136 *PhS*, 21.

137 *PI*₁: 174.

before] it gives itself up to be cognized".¹³⁸ But when it is in fact cognized, then this cognition (*Erkennen*) signifies a perception of "the divine light breaking forth within one's own soul".¹³⁹ Although knowledge (*Erkennen*) cannot for this reason dispense with justificatory thinking, yet it is the case that the very ground *anchoring* the justification is prior than knowledge, forming its ontological precondition; reaching back to it—"whether Plato meant this seriously or merely as metaphor"—is called "*anamnēsis*".¹⁴⁰

Just as the concept of *anamnēsis* thus undergoes a certain rehabilitation, so, too, does Natorp give the notion of *erōs* a new sense. Having robbed *logos* and *psychē* of their earlier, virtually self-sufficient character by demoting them, in accordance with his late-period categorial doctrine, down to the middle (second) plane, Natorp now supplements and rounds them off with the notion of *erōs*. This concept, which remained on the margins in the first edition of *Plato's Theory*, is now granted substantive importance: if the essence of *erōs* is *poiēsis*, i.e., creation (*Schöpfung*) or even (sexual) procreation (*Zeugung*),¹⁴¹ then Plato uses this term to denote a "living power, active in and among all things, in universal interaction", a power "more alive than all creation [*als alles Geschaffene*]".¹⁴² Its mediating position between God and human, its function of revealing the eternal to the human soul (*Symposium* 202c–203a), most immediately connects the *logoi* with the *Logos*, the *hypotheseis* with the *anhypotheton*, and the relative non-Being of the phenomena with the absolute Being of their ultimate ground. For, as Natorp is now convinced, Plato's metaphors are here no more arbitrary than they are coincidental: *erōs* represents the expression of a virtually religious relationship between God and human.¹⁴³ Compared to *logos* and *psychē*, *erōs* is able to show the more direct path to the "ultimate [*Letztletzten*]" the "cognition [*Erkenntnis*]" of which could only be achieved in a mystical vision, in order finally to come close to the highest goal of philosophy—of becoming godlike.

(c) That such mystical religiosity should henceforth be able to generate the "most positive" relation to the primal ground (*Urgrund*) already says much about its essence (*Wesen*). For his part, Plato describes this essence as the *epekeina* or "beyond-ness" of the highest Form, the Form of the Good. Natorp's self-critical corrections in the "Metacritical Appendix" aim above all at his

¹³⁸ *PhS*, 33.

¹³⁹ *PI*₂: 474.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *PI*₂: 474, ff.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Symposium* 205bc, 206be.

¹⁴² *PI*₂: 492, f.

¹⁴³ Cf. *PI*₂: 508, f.

deficient interpretation of this Platonic notion (sc. the *epekeina*) in the first edition of *Plato's Theory*. To understand the Form of the Good merely as “the highest concept of method”,¹⁴⁴ as the epitome and byword of the functional interpretation of the Forms—this now seems to have been an unacceptable abridgement of the full story. This abridgement is rooted in the artificial separation of Plato's logical and mystical intentions. According to his own testimony, it was only the redoubled search for the ultimate unity of the multiplicity of Forms that led Natorp to the insight that Plato's mysticism was in no wise just a “decorative dress” that had to be stripped away.¹⁴⁵ Rather, it is a first attempt to express in words the radical transfiniteness (*Überendlichkeit*) of the ground of Being—words that in their insufficiency concealed more than they could illuminate, but which for just this reason led to a preliminary stage of a kind of negative theology. Starting with the *Phaedrus* and moving through the *Phaedo* and *Symposium* to the *Republic*, we see the absolutely otherworldly expressed essentially through negative predicates.¹⁴⁶ This observation, according to Natorp, finally leads Plato to the famous claim in the *Seventh Letter*, according to which knowledge of the last things can no longer be formulated in words. So what Natorp had previously declared to be “inauthentic [*unecht*]” because, among other things, it seemed to deny philosophy's discursive nature, now receives recognition—for that very same reason.¹⁴⁷ For this reason, too, the Form of the Good is no longer a functional concept, but is read instead as the precursor of the Plotinian *hen* (τὸ ἓν; the “One”). It lies even further beyond the relationship of knowledge and object of knowledge (of *cognitiō* and *cognitum*).¹⁴⁸ The highest Form is now understood as a substantial principle, which of course must be preserved from any kind of reification (*Verdinglichung*): “One would therefore do better to leave it completely unnamed”.¹⁴⁹

2.3 *Logic or Metaphysics?*

It is likely an idle question, which of these two interpretive approaches to the Form of the Good is “correct”—the “logicistic” approach of the first edition, or the “henological” approach of the second edition of *Plato's Theory of Ideas*—since there is good reason to fear that both approaches in fact betray Plato's own intentions. Never mind Natorp's self-critique—the logical approach is

¹⁴⁴ *PI*₁: 194.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *PI*₂: 467.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *PI*₂: 487, 495.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *PI*₂: 488, f.

¹⁴⁸ *PI*₂: 532, f.

¹⁴⁹ *PI*₂: 534.

untenable, for it misconstrues the ontological and metaphysical sense of the highest Form in one-sided favor of its epistemological sense. One reason for this is the transference of the *hypothesis*-character of the (lower) individual Forms onto the notion of Form as such, and thus also onto the Form of the Good, so that—as was also the case for Cohen—even the *anhypotheton* remains hypothetical. Yet the *hypothesis*-approach already appears problematic for Cohen, since it has no firm basis in the Platonic texts. Natorp's explanations make the matter worse, because he, like Cohen before him, understands the *anhypotheton* not as a lamentable error on Plato's part, but on the contrary, as the discovery of the very concept of transcendental unity.

Thus the corrections undertaken in the “Metacritical Appendix” might seem to represent a certain advance. Yet the final judgment as to whether Plato's original intent has been discovered does not ultimately depend on whether or to what extent one considers Plotinus's Plato-interpretation to be correct on this point, which clearly and extensively influenced Natorp here. The displacement of the Form of the Good onto the plane of the Plotinian *hen* (One) corresponds after all to Plotinus's understanding of Plato, according to which the highest Form is supposed to represent the apex of the hierarchical pyramid of Being. The Form of the Good in Plato appears as a necessary condition for Forms simply to be, as well as for the existence of entities, insofar as these latter participate in the Forms. The Form of the Good, accordingly, signifies that a particular being is good, insofar as it conforms with its corresponding Form. There is no doubt that Plato conceived these relations not only logically but also ontologically; but what the highest Form might be over and beyond these determinations of Being—that is never anywhere stated by Plato. Plotinus by contrast does not try to assign the Form of the Good to the level of *Nous*, but shifts it even further back to the level of the One Itself. He does not even speak of a “Form” or *idea* of the Good, but of the Good *simpliciter*, the generation of which then is supposed to represent the entire realm of Forms. But in so doing, Plotinus reinterprets the Good as (only) a necessary condition of Being into a *necessary and sufficient* condition thereof. The former condition is in fact repeatedly emphasized by Plato, but the latter is nowhere to be found.

When Natorp interprets the *epekeina* or “beyond-ness” of the Form of the Good as the sole, ineffable source of Being from which all else flows, he monopolizes the condition of Being just as Plotinus had previously done. And he thereby aggravates a problem that we already find in Plotinus, namely that he pretends to know—despite the ineffability of the Ultimate—that this Ultimate is the utter ground of all other Being (*alles übrigen Seins*). But in doing so, he now presents as apodictic knowledge what Plato himself had only presented as merely personal “opinion” with the aid of all the familiar similes. In

this way the theory of Forms, which after all is itself a *hypothesis*,¹⁵⁰ is in danger of being replaced by a dogma, the foundation of which Natorp never reveals. Thus Walter Bröcker's polemical criticism of Plotinus seems also to apply to Natorp's late Plato reading, viz., that his interpretation of Plato suffers from the loss of the Socratic element, lacking any sensitivity for the true sense of "knowing that one does not know".¹⁵¹ The Neo-Kantian philosophy evidently cannot endure Socratic *aporia*.¹⁵²

Overall, in view of its undeniable systematizing tendency, the philosophical-historical appropriation of Plato in Neo-Kantianism smacks of attempted conquest and occupation. And this is indeed the most trenchant charge against such readings, especially intolerable for historicist scholars who take the history of philosophy to be a history of facts. But the Marburg Neo-Kantians were not guilty of that charge. Rather they identified certain "types" among the various protagonists of the history of philosophy—"types" of philosophers practicing a distinct "style of thinking [*Denkart*]" within the history of philosophical problematics. This style may periodically reappear and become active anew—and whose right is to be justified *systematically*, not historically. Thus the recourse to Plato seems certainly for the most part apologetic in nature: it is to be proved that the systematically grounded truth, explicitly or not, has always already been valid, and to this extent may be called "supra-historical". This is the "legitimizing" aspect of the apologetic project. But they also intended to defend the original Plato with a view to his contemporary "relevance", especially as part of a renewed confrontation with Aristotle, who had been rediscovered in the nineteenth century. Both motives ultimately justify the impression that one might still find Natorp's Plato-book fascinating even if it failed to contain a single Greek name or Greek word, and were merely limited to its subtitle: "An Introduction to Idealism". For this subtitle expresses the underlying idea of a *philosophia perennis*: in contrast to its hard core of systematic problems, the presentation of the living history of thinking and its "hermeneutic situation" can at best seem like a good novel, as Husserl once said of his own presentation of Plato.¹⁵³

150 *Ph.* 100b.

151 Bröcker (1966), 9–15.

152 Cf. Lembeck (1994), §§15, 16.

153 Husserl, *MS K III* 9: vi (Fall 1934–Summer 1935). See also Kim in this volume.

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Nietzsche and Plato

Richard Bett

A standard view of the relations between Nietzsche and Plato is that Nietzsche is vehemently anti-Platonic. Plato believes that there is a timeless realm of intelligible Forms that is the only true reality, the everyday world accessible to the senses being at best a pale imitation of this; for Nietzsche this is a dangerous illusion, dangerous in part because of its drastic devaluing of the here and now. Plato injects the ethical into the very fabric of reality, with the Good, at least in the *Republic*, being the supreme Form, and with the Forms that represent evaluative qualities being consistently among those in which he is most interested; for Nietzsche, on the other hand, “[t]here are no moral phenomena, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena”¹ and he would no doubt add that the particular interpretation projected on to the world by Plato is of the kind that he elsewhere calls “anti-natural”—that is, “against the instincts of life.”² And Plato had a major role in shaping the world-historical disaster that was Christianity.

It is always tempting to try to overturn conventional pictures of things. But in this case the conventional picture has much in its favor. Nevertheless, it is not the whole story, and there are numerous respects in which Nietzsche either explicitly admires Plato or would have good reason to regard him as in some way a positive force. It is also possible that the depth of his hostility to Plato is greater in some periods than in others, even though he is clearly thinking about him in almost all phases of his career.³ In what follows I shall first explore Nietzsche’s negative verdicts on Plato, and the reasons behind them,

1 BGE: 108. The translations of Nietzsche’s works that I use, and the abbreviations designating those works in citations, are listed in Section I of the Bibliography. Translations of material from the *Nachlass* that does not appear in *EN* or *LN* are my own; in all other cases I rely on translations by others. (My German is not particularly fluent; it is a fair assumption that anyone commissioned to translate a work from German has a better command of the language than I do.)

2 *TI*: “Morality as Anti-Nature”, 4.

3 Brobjer (2004), 241 says that Nietzsche mentions Plato more often than any other philosopher except Schopenhauer. A glance at the index in the final volume of *KSA* would seem to confirm this. Among other things, Plato figures very frequently in the *Nachlass* in lists of topics, plans of future works, etc.; clearly Nietzsche thinks of him as a crucial figure to take account of in a great many contexts.

and then consider how far this conception of Nietzsche's relation to Plato should be tempered by other, countervailing evidence. Although it would be impossible to discuss Plato in almost any context without some mention of Socrates, and this paper will be no exception, I shall avoid as much as possible the question of Nietzsche's relations with Socrates—a very large topic in its own right, about which a great deal has been written.⁴ Plato is at least enough for one paper. As we shall see, Nietzsche himself is sometimes eager to dissociate Plato from Socrates, and much of the time it is not hard to distinguish what he says about each of them.

I

We may start with an expression of concern about Plato's effect from the beginning of Nietzsche's career, and a remarkable echo of this at the very end. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Euripides is blamed for turning tragedy away from the delicate balance of the Apollinian and the Dionysian that had earlier defined it and marked its special contribution to Greek culture, making it far too rational and conscious and ensuring its demise. His collaborator in this project, according to Nietzsche, is Socrates, and Plato, as Socrates' disciple, then carried it on.⁵ Plato's dialogues owe a good deal to tragedy, despite the fact that Plato repudiates tragedy and art in general; indeed, the Platonic dialogues are described as "the barge on which the shipwrecked ancient poetry saved itself".⁶ But it is a salvation that comes at a great price, where poetry becomes "crowded into a narrow space and timidly submitting to the single pilot, Socrates"—that is, ancillary to philosophy rather an art form in its own right. Stylistically, Nietzsche says that the Platonic dialogue is "a mixture of all styles and forms", a trend taken still further by the Cynics; while his tone is by no means vituperative—it never is in *The Birth of Tragedy*—it is hard not to suppose that Nietzsche sees this as a debasement of these previous art forms.⁷ But his most direct objection to Plato's writing is that by means of it, "philosophic thought overgrows art". He associates the Platonic concentration on dialectic with the fundamentally optimistic Socratic maxims, "Virtue is knowledge; man

4 Book-length treatments are Schmidt (1969), Dannhauser (1974); briefer accounts can be found in, e.g., Kaufmann (1974), Ch. 13, Nehamas (1998), Ch. 5.

5 *BT*: 13, 14.

6 *BT*: 14.

7 In unpublished notes that are clearly preparatory for *BT* Nietzsche calls Plato's writing the "annihilation" (*Vernichtung*) of form (*KSA*: 7.12, 17); in both places the Cynics are again mentioned.

sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy”, and calls the optimism inherent in these “the death of tragedy”; he also suggests that such a mindset can only push tragedy, should it still exist, “to the death-leap into the bourgeois drama”.⁸

Plato, then, emerges as a central figure in the demise of something that Nietzsche regards as of immense cultural value. Since the history of Greek tragedy is his theme in this work, it is not surprising that his criticism of Plato does not extend further than this. However, late in his career Nietzsche picks up a theme from this discussion in *BT*, but broadens it into a much more comprehensive condemnation of Plato. In the final main section of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche somewhat unusually expresses a preference for Roman writing over Greek writing. He then imagines someone citing Plato as a case of the supremacy of Greek style, and embarks on a long tirade against Plato in response to this.⁹ He begins by disclaiming any admiration for Plato as an artist, and again mentions his mixing of many stylistic forms, here explicitly calling him “one of the first *décadents* in style” for this reason; he also repeats the stylistic link with the Cynics, this time without suggesting that Plato is any less bad than they. He then mentions the dialectic in the dialogues, as in *The Birth of Tragedy*, calling it “repulsively self-satisfied and childish”. This is still in part a stylistic point, Plato receiving low marks compared with some French authors; but it is also a segue into an attack on Plato’s ideas. And here all the themes that I mentioned in my opening paragraph make an appearance. Nietzsche objects in the strongest terms to Plato’s idealism (which I take to be, or at least to include, his postulation of supra-sensible Forms); to his being over-moralized, including his elevation of the concept of goodness to the highest rank; and to his proto-Christian attitudes and his role in the eventual dominance of Christianity.¹⁰

Moreover, as is typical in Nietzsche, the objections are not just to the ideas themselves, but to the kind of *person* of which those ideas are an expression. Plato is said to be woefully “divergent from all the fundamental instincts of the Hellenes” and to be “a coward in the face of reality”, which explains his positing a separate ideal realm. In both respects he is contrasted unfavorably with the historian Thucydides, and more generally with the “realist” culture of the Sophists, of whom Nietzsche considers Thucydides the supreme

8 *BT*: 14.

9 “What I Owe to the Ancients”, 2.

10 Compare an unpublished note from the fall of 1887: “Dialectic as the way to virtue (in Plato and Socrates: obviously, since Sophistic counted as a way to immorality)” (*KSA*: 12, 430). Unlike the *TI* passage, this explicitly connects dialectic and moralizing, and it alludes to a Platonic critique of the Sophists, rather than simply contrasting him with them. As we shall see, both themes make their appearance in *Daybreak* as well.

representative.¹¹ In distinction from them, Plato and the Socratic schools in general are guilty of a “moralistic and idealistic swindle”, and Greek philosophy as a whole (of which Plato seems to be regarded as the major engine) is called “the *décadence* of Greek instinct”.¹²

This passage is no doubt extreme in its level of animus towards Plato.¹³ But Nietzsche also compares Plato unfavorably with Thucydides some years earlier in *Daybreak* (168). Again Thucydides is situated in the milieu of the Sophists,¹⁴ and the culture that they represent is said to be one of impartiality. In his impartial depiction of human types, Nietzsche says, Thucydides “displays greater practical justice than Plato”, because “he does not revile or belittle those he does not like” (168). We are also told that the culture of the Sophists is very difficult for us to grasp, but that we are apt to “suspect that it must have been a very immoral culture, since a Plato and all the Socratic schools fought against it! Truth”, Nietzsche continues, “is here so tangled and twisted one does not like the idea of trying to sort it out”. But by this last remark, I take it he is encouraging us to try precisely that, and is suggesting at least the following things. First, that the impression of the Sophists’ immorality, which we derive above all from Plato—one thinks of figures such as Thrasymachus in *Republic* I and Callicles in the *Gorgias*—deserves to be taken with a large grain of salt. Second, that if we are to think in terms of the simple contrast, moral vs. immoral, it is arguably Plato who comes out worse than the Sophists, given his comparative lack of “practical justice”. But third, that since it was Plato himself who introduced the notion of the Sophists as immoral, and who set up the contrasting notion

11 In connecting Thucydides with the Sophists, I think Nietzsche is on to something important; on this see Bett (2002), especially Section IV.

12 This point also appears in a related note in the *Nachlass* from early 1888 headed “Philosophie als *décadence*” (KSA: 13, 292–3); after introducing this theme, philosophy (represented especially by Plato, as eventually becomes explicit) is immediately contrasted with the Sophists’ pioneering critique of morality—and again the Sophists, represented preeminently by Thucydides, are said to be an outgrowth of fundamental Greek instincts, as Plato emphatically is not. See also KSA: 13, 167–9 (= LN 237–238), “On the Critique of Greek Philosophy”, where the same set of ideas is connected more explicitly with “the preparation of the ground for Christianity”; also KSA: 11, 21.

13 See also the (pretty close) prototype for this passage in the *Nachlass* (KSA: 13.624–6).

14 This passage is a counter-example to Thomas Brobjer’s claim that Nietzsche was uninterested in the Sophists (and when he mentions them, generally critical) until 1888, when he read Victor Brochard’s *Les sceptiques grecs*, which treats them as important precursors to scepticism; see Brobjer (2004), 252–6, also Brobjer (2001) and Brochard (2002), Ch. 1. It is true, however, that the Sophists do not loom particularly large in Nietzsche writings. Brobjer is also right to object to any simple identification of Nietzsche’s own outlook with that of the Sophists Thrasymachus or Callicles (as depicted by Plato), despite my comment on them below.

of what a truly moral character would be like, we should be suspicious of this way of framing the issue in the first place. For a person's scheme of valuation is an expression of who that person is—Plato is in this respect no different, for Nietzsche, from anyone else—and Plato, as was suggested, is driven by a need to “revile or belittle” certain groups of people.¹⁵ And this, of course, is of a piece with the more general challenges to the presuppositions of morality that play a prominent role in this work (e.g., *Daybreak* 97–106).

Thus, although the *Daybreak* passage has much less to say explicitly about Plato's thought than the one from *Twilight*, it is not hard to see it as having implications concerning his philosophy that point in a similar direction. And the picture can be filled out by some other allusions to Plato in *Daybreak*. An earlier passage speaks of Plato's enthusiasm for dialectic (43). This is explained as deriving from contempt for the evil world shown us by the senses and a desire to abstract oneself from it; one therefore “revel[s] in pallid images of words and things”, and this engagement with “invisible, inaudible, impalpable beings”—the abstractions with which dialectic deals—leads to the belief in a higher, non-sensory realm; given its origin in the contempt for the sensory, dialectic also points to a conception of the *good* person as someone who inhabits this supposed higher realm. The tone is not explicitly critical—indeed, Plato's project is represented as a certain kind of success—although it is made clear that this is not a project that is any longer open to us. Much later in the same work, however, Plato's “desire to see things only in pallid mental pictures” is described as a flight from reality (448); and the Platonic notion that “[d]ialectics is the only way of attaining the divine being and getting behind the veil of appearance” is referred to as a simple illusion, “about a nothing” (474). In the first of these passages, interestingly, the flight from reality is said to be due to the fact that Plato was “full of sensibility” and was afraid that his senses would overwhelm his reason. To some extent this foreshadows another section of *Twilight*, where the decision by Socrates and then Plato to make reason a tyrant stems from a fear that one would otherwise be tyrannized by baser instincts. Here Plato's “moralism” and “admiration for dialectic” are both summed up in the equation “Reason=virtue=happiness”, and this condition is described as

15 I find it hard to reconcile this with the comment later in *Daybreak* (497) that Plato is an example of the truest type of geniuses, who are able to float free of themselves, who possess “the pure, purifying eye which seems not to have grown out of their temperament and character but, free from these ... looks down on the world as on a god and loves this god”. This is perhaps the strongest indication that *Daybreak's* critique of Plato, though along similar lines, is by no means as unequivocal as *Twilight's*; see below for other instances of this.

“pathological”.¹⁶ However, there is no suggestion of pathology in the *Daybreak* passage, and this is an important difference to which we shall return.

All the same, the overriding impression Nietzsche seems to give of Plato in these remarks is of someone who has naively accepted certain errors, and whose thought deserves to be treated with suspicion, as being, at the very least, no longer capable of being taken seriously. Elsewhere in *Daybreak*, Socrates and Plato are accused in the same vein of a cluster of errors concerning free will, moral responsibility and self-knowledge (themes that are to become important in Nietzsche’s unmasking of slave morality in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*); their denial of *akrasia* is called “that most fateful of prejudices, that profoundest of errors”, showing that they suffer from “the universal madness and presumption that there exists knowledge as to the essential nature of an action”.¹⁷ Nietzsche thinks that most people are still victim to this error, and this no doubt makes Plato’s authority all the more dangerous. Here too, on the other hand, there is a qualification to the negative verdict; despite this drastic error, Socrates and Plato are described as “great doubters and admirable innovators”. In Plato’s case, at least, this presumably alludes to the three-part soul in the *Republic* and elsewhere, which points to a more multi-faceted and less transparent picture of human motivation—one much more congenial to the picture Nietzsche himself pursues, including in this section and the immediately following sections of *Daybreak* (especially 119). We shall come back to this point as well.

So far I have concentrated on three works: one early, one middle, and one late. But the story can be continued with reference to other published works and also unpublished notes. Already in a note from 1875 the tragic worldview is connected with the notion of an unbiased attitude to life in the immediate pre-Platonic period, which seems to preview the reference to “impartiality” (and Plato’s lack of it) in *Daybreak*. Although here it is Empedocles and Democritus, rather than Thucydides, who are emblematic of this attitude,¹⁸ it is Socrates who closes it off, and this is connected with the ethical absolutism of his followers, Plato included; myths and tragedy are “much wiser than the ethics of Plato and Aristotle”, and the Socratics “have terrible abstractions, ‘the good’, ‘the just’, in their heads”.¹⁹ At various times in the notes Plato is described as a religious or a moral fanatic.²⁰ His black-and-white ethics is also faulted for

16 *TI*: “The Problem of Socrates”, 10.

17 *D*: 116.

18 Note, however, that Democritus is mentioned alongside Thucydides in *D*: 168.

19 *KSA*: 8, 107–8 = *EN*: 214–215.

20 *KSA*: 9, 262 (where being a religious fanatic is contrasted with being a philosopher—the implied stress, I think, being on the etymology of “philosopher”); *KSA*: 12, 560 = *LN*: 203; *KSA*: 13, 487.

resting on a naïve psychology. He fails to understand that the human virtues have at their core an element of “vanity and egoism”, which can also be seen as a failure to understand the “history of the moral sensations”;²¹ relatedly, he is accused of failing to understand the relation between reason and instinct, characteristically over-valuing reason and overestimating its power,²² and of deluding himself²³ into thinking that “the good, as he wanted it, was not the good of Plato but the good in itself”.²⁴

As for Plato’s belief in a higher, unchanging reality, as early as 1870–1 Nietzsche can say “My philosophy is an *inverted Platonism*: the further something is from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is”.²⁵ At this point, of course, he still adheres to a Schopenhauerian metaphysics, and so he does not call into question the very notion of “true being”; but at least he already shies away from a Platonic conception of what true being might be like. Much later, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, this conception—here called “the Christian faith, which was also Plato’s faith, that God is truth, that truth is divine” is implicated in the misguided attitude towards truth, referred to as “our longest lie”, from which science still suffers, and which makes it a continued instance of the ascetic ideal, despite apparently standing in opposition to that ideal.²⁶ And this is connected with the devastating six-step thumbnail sketch “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fiction” in *Twilight of the Idols*, where Plato is the first stage and Zarathustra the last, in which the idea of a separate “true world” is banished and the regular world around us is thereby rescued from the status of merely apparent. On the surface, at least, Plato does come out better here than the next stage, Christianity; his version is “relatively clever, simple, convincing”, as opposed to “more refined, more devious, more mystifying”. But in summing it up as “I, Plato, *am* the truth”, Nietzsche again points to a certain kind of naivety or self-deception on Plato’s part. For Plato, both in fact and in Nietzsche’s view of him, surely did not conceive of the

21 WS: 285. On Plato’s lack of historical sense—his lack of feel for “genealogy”, as Nietzsche might have thought of it—see also KSA: 11, 254.

22 KSA: 11, 431 = LN: 2.

23 Nietzsche is quite explicit that this is intentional on Plato’s part. But I take it he is thinking of a form of self-deception that does not operate at a fully conscious level.

24 KSA: 11, 612 = LN: 39.

25 KSA: 7, 199 = EN: 52.

26 GM: 3.24, quoting extensively from GS: 344. It is not entirely clear *what* the objectionable attitude towards truth is supposed to be. Nietzsche seems to combine the idea that truth is non-perspectival, the idea that truth is of overriding importance, and the idea that truth is about a realm of separate, higher beings; it is by no means obvious that any one of these ideas is necessarily connected with any other.

unchanging Forms as something in, or a reflection of something in, *himself*; he thought he was grasping something objective and independent.²⁷

Finally, in Nietzsche's early writings Plato is sometimes criticized as marking a decline for *philosophy*. Both in the introduction to his lectures *On the Pre-Platonic Philosophers* and in his unpublished study *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (2), Plato is described as the first "mixed character" in the history of philosophy; he combines Heraclitean, Pythagorean and Socratic elements, and this sort of "mixture" is a feature of philosophy from then on. By contrast, those preceding him—including Socrates, which is why Nietzsche prefers the term "Pre-Platonic" to "Presocratic"—are "pure and unmixed types". Those, then, are "genuine discoverers", marking fundamentally new paths for thought, whereas Plato's philosophy is not "an original conception"; as a result it "lacks something essential".²⁸ This is developed a little further in a note from 1872–3 on philosophical sects. Although the starting-point of sects is said to be the Pythagoreans, Plato is said to have learned from them; Nietzsche then says that "[t]he Academy sets the type" and that philosophical sects in general are "institutes of opposition to Hellenic life",²⁹ in contrast with the earlier philosophers, who are "isolations of individual drives of the Hellenic character". In consequence, Nietzsche can only bewail "[t]he superficiality of all post-Socratic ethics!" This theme does not seem to continue into the later writings; in part this may be because he later tends to think of philosophy itself as beginning with Plato, and hence, as we have seen, as inherently decadent (though note his praise of Heraclitus, here still counted among philosophers, in *TI*'s "'Reason' in Philosophy", 2). But it seems to tie in with his suspicion of Plato in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Plato has much responsibility for the demise of the profoundest aspects of earlier Greek culture; what is added here is that the earliest philosophers were representative of that earlier culture, and that here again, Plato marks a decisive, and a lamentable, break.

27 In fact Plato is often less confident about the extent to which this knowledge is attainable, even for the wise, than Nietzsche here makes it sound. In particular, Socrates in the *Republic* is notably diffident about claiming to have found access to the realm of Forms in any clarity or detail. The philosophers in the ideal state may be in a different position; but then, the feasibility of the ideal state itself is also something about which the *Republic* seems to vacillate. At no point, however, is there any suggestion that the Forms may be merely a reflection of our own sensibility.

28 This last quotation is from *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 2 (*KSA*: 1, 809–10); the others in this sentence and the last are from *On the Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, Introduction (p. 5 in Whitlock's translation).

29 *KSA*: 7, 438 = *EN*: III. Löb's translation in *EN* has the lower-case "academy"; but immediately following the mention of Plato, the reference is surely to Plato's Academy.

So Plato has a lot to answer for, in Nietzsche's view. In a letter to Overbeck from January 1887 Nietzsche exclaims: "It is all Plato's fault! He is still Europe's greatest misfortune!"³⁰ This thought has been occasioned by a reading of Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Handbook*, which typifies "the falsifying of everything by morality", "wretched psychology" and "the 'philosopher' reduced to the status of 'country parson'"; and Plato is at the back of all of this. The strident tone anticipates that of *Twilight*. But while Nietzsche's criticisms of Plato (as of Christianity and much else) are at their most shrill in his latest writings, they are criticisms that, in one form or another, go back to the beginning of his career. It is not too much to say that opposition to central parts of the Platonic outlook is one of the main driving forces of Nietzsche's own philosophy.

II

It is now time to turn the tables. Plato is not all bad, in Nietzsche's view of him; we already saw that in *Daybreak* the negative verdict on Plato is not unqualified, and this point can be extended considerably. I shall draw attention to a number of overlapping respects in which Nietzsche shows a much more favorable attitude towards Plato than the one we have seen so far—understandably, given his own preoccupations, just as in the case of the negative attitudes.

One of the matters on which Plato was given credit in *Daybreak* was his seeing past (even if only partially and intermittently) the fiction of a transparent human subject, the obvious basis for this being his postulation of a three-part soul. In the first part of *Beyond Good and Evil* a view of soul that is clearly reminiscent of this one, even though Plato is not mentioned by name, is interestingly contrasted with the Christian conception and proposed as a fruitful basis for further exploration (*BGE* 12). The Christian conception is labeled "soul atomism", that is, "the belief which regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*". Now, one might find traces of Plato here, too; the picture of soul in the *Phaedo*, in particular, seems to fit this description precisely—the indestructibility and indivisibility of the soul are here among the key arguments for its immortality, and it is by no means impossible that Nietzsche had this in mind. But he goes on to say that banishing this atomistic view of the soul does not mean that we should give up "the soul-hypothesis" altogether; and he goes on to mention "mortal soul", "soul as subjective multiplicity" and "soul as social structure of the drives

30 Letter 147 in *SL*.

and affects” as conceptions that ought to “have citizens’ rights in science” and that could be useful avenues to “*invention* and—who knows?—perhaps to discovery”. The first of these conceptions, of course, Nietzsche does not get from Plato; even in the dialogues that speak of a three-part soul, some or all of this soul is still conceived as immortal.³¹ But the second and, especially, the third, with its *Republic*-like evocation of the soul as a quasi-political community, could very well be exemplified by Plato’s three-part soul. It is natural to suppose that Nietzsche recognizes and intends the Platonic echo, particularly given the hint supplied in the *Daybreak* passage; and this plausible reading has recently served as an important component in a powerful new interpretation of *Beyond Good and Evil* as a whole.³² But at the very least, we can say that the approach to thought about the soul that Nietzsche advocates in this passage *should* have led him to think of Plato, in those dialogues that speak of a three-part soul, as a fellow-traveler.

To this we may add Nietzsche’s recognition that for Plato, to judge from the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* if not other works, philosophy itself is a kind of sublimated erotic expression. This is mentioned in *Twilight of the Idols*,³³ in what is by far the least critical mention of Plato in that work,³⁴ and also in two unpublished notes;³⁵ if we take it seriously, it again complicates any notion of the intellect as even potentially pure and unconnected with other drives or affects, and reinforces the sort of picture that Nietzsche approvingly labels “soul as subjective multiplicity”. The same might perhaps be said of Plato’s acceptance, again in the *Phaedrus*, of madness as a positive force in human affairs, alluded to in the course of a discussion in *Human, All Too Human* of the conditions for genius to flourish.³⁶

At least some of the time, then, Plato seems to score highly in Nietzsche’s eyes for his insight into the complexity of our psychology. It is also true that Nietzsche occasionally expresses interest in, and, I think, implied admiration for, the psychological complexity of Plato himself. Perhaps the most intriguing

31 The details seem to vary from one dialogue to another, but at least the rational part is consistently conceived as immortal; for specifics see Bett (1986), Section II.

32 Clark and Dudrick (2012); for their reading of Plato, see especially Ch. 6. For some doubts about Clark and Dudrick’s understanding of Nietzsche’s relation to Plato, see Janaway (2014); however, Janaway does not dispute the basic idea that Nietzsche is appealing to the Platonic model in *BGE* 12.

33 “Raids of an Untimely Man”, 22–3.

34 Nietzsche cannot resist adding to this account “assuming that you trust Plato at all in the first place” (23). But Plato is used here as a refutation of Schopenhauer, and the view itself seems to survive this apparently undercutting remark.

35 *KSA*: 9, 486, *KSA*: 11, 700 = *LN*: 51.

36 *H*: I.164.

example of this is his report of a story that under Plato's pillow when he died was found a copy of Aristophanes.³⁷ We have just been told that Aristophanes (among others) is untranslatable into German because of his "bold and merry tempo"; Aristophanes has also been described as "that transfiguring, complementary spirit for whose sake one *forgives* everything Hellenic for having existed". And commenting on the story, Nietzsche contrasts Aristophanes with the works *not* found under Plato's pillow: "no 'Bible', not anything Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic", and says "How could even Plato have endured life—a Greek life he repudiated—without an Aristophanes?" Plato, then, was not as whole-heartedly anti-Hellenic as Nietzsche elsewhere makes him out to be; maybe he did "repudiate" Greek life, but he also retained a deep affinity for it. And this makes him a multi-layered and elusive character, leading Nietzsche to refer to "Plato's secrecy and sphinx nature". While there is no explicit evaluation of Plato here, both psychological depth and identification with the Hellenic are traits that Nietzsche generally views in a positive light; this is not the dogmatic and one-dimensional character from which, in *Twilight*, he recoils in favor of Thucydides.³⁸ The point about depth becomes more direct in an unpublished note from 1885,³⁹ where the magic of Socrates is said to consist in his having a series of souls, one behind another; the image recalls Alcibiades' image in Plato's *Symposium*, of Socrates as like a statue of Silenus with lots of smaller statues inside.⁴⁰ Xenophon is said to have glimpsed only the first one, but Plato penetrated to the second and third—"but Plato with his own second soul. Plato himself", Nietzsche continues, "is a man with many back-hollows and foregrounds [*Hinterhöhlen und Vordergründen*]".⁴¹

A further dimension to this psychological complexity has to do with the explanation for Plato's rejection of the sensory realm as less than fully real. We saw in the previous section that in *Daybreak* this is accounted for by Plato's

37 BGE: 28. The story occurs in the biography of Plato at the beginning of Olympiodorus' commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades* (2.65–9). On Plato's alleged interest in Aristophanes more generally, see Riginos (1976), 176–179.

38 See also a roughly contemporary note (late 1885 or early 1886, KSA: 12, 47), where the story of Aristophanes under Plato's pillow is mentioned again, alongside allusions to the Dionysian, to dance and to merriment. The note is merely a series of phrases with question-marks appended, but it does again suggest that Nietzsche sees the story as linking Plato with his favorite aspects of Greek culture.

39 KSA: 11, 440.

40 *Symp.* 216d–217a.

41 Contrast an earlier note (KSA: 8, 327, September 1876), where Plato is said to be not enough of a dramatist to avoid portraying Socrates as a caricature, whereas Xenophon achieves a truthful portrait. This is more in keeping with the Plato of *BT*, the Plato who helped to kill tragedy.

having been “full of sensibility” and worried that his reason would be overwhelmed by it;⁴² I noted that whereas in *Twilight* this condition would have been described straightforwardly as a sickness, in *Daybreak* this is by no means so clear. In *The Gay Science* (372), Nietzsche goes further. Here philosophical idealism, understood rather broadly as a denigration of the senses in favor of a concentration on pure ideas, is described as generally an illness, but Nietzsche adds a remarkable qualification: “except where, as in Plato’s case, it was the caution of an overabundant and dangerous health; the fear of *overpowerful* senses; the shrewdness of a shrewd Socratic”. As in *Twilight*, the philosophical move is explained by the need to prevent some non-rational element in us taking control, but the polarity is precisely the reverse: it is a consequence of health rather than of sickness.⁴³ Nietzsche concludes the section by adding “Maybe we moderns are not healthy enough to *need* Plato’s idealism? And we don’t fear the senses because—”. The concluding sentence fragment is to be completed, I take it, by something like “because our senses are too etiolated and feeble for us to worry about their getting out of hand”.

This picture receives its fullest development in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in a section almost immediately following the one about the soul.⁴⁴ Here the Platonic way of thinking is contrasted with a typically modern attitude towards physics. Again it is suggested that those who followed the Platonic line may have been “men who enjoyed even stronger and more demanding senses than our contemporaries”, but they “knew how to find a higher triumph in remaining masters of their senses”, and they did this “by means of pale, cold, gray concept nets which they threw over the motley whirl of the senses—the mob of the senses [*Sinnen-Pöbel*], as Plato said”. Whereas physics is today felt to be convincing because it accords with what the senses tell us, the Platonic way of thinking “consisted precisely in *resistance* to obvious sense-evidence”. This is described as “a *noble* way of thinking”, in contrast to the “plebeian” mindset that values physics because of its fidelity to the senses; both Platonism and physics are interpretations of the world, but Platonism is also “an overcoming of the world”, which brings a distinctive kind of enjoyment no longer open to

42 D: 448.

43 That Nietzsche struggled with whether to think of it as healthy or sick is suggested by two unpublished notes from between autumn 1885 and autumn 1886—thus, around the same time as *BGE* is published (see the next paragraph) and this portion of *GS* is being written (see the next note). Here the same sorts of philosophical move are attributed to Plato’s “overexcitable sensuality and enthusiasm” (*KSA*: 12, 112 = *LN* 78) and his “too excitable and suffering sensibility” (*KSA*: 12, 116 = *LN* 81).

44 *BGE*: 14. This slightly precedes the passage of *GS* just considered, since the latter belongs in the fifth book, which was added to the original four books of *GS* after *BGE* was published.

us. The kind of psychological control, amid complexity and powerfully opposing psychic forces, that Nietzsche alludes to here is strikingly reminiscent of the language he elsewhere uses of those he regards as the greatest human beings, such as Goethe in *Twilight of the Idols*⁴⁵ or, later in this work, Julius Caesar.⁴⁶

This does not prevent Nietzsche from regarding Plato's philosophy as an error, and a pernicious one. But in *Beyond Good and Evil*—which, as I hope is becoming clear, is probably the most nuanced of all Nietzsche's works when it comes to Plato—this too is put in a context that, consistently with the passage we have just considered, reveals Plato as far from a merely destructive force.⁴⁷ In the Preface to this work, Nietzsche calls "Plato's invention of the pure spirit [*Geist*] and the good as such"—perhaps "intellect" would be a better translation here than "spirit"—"the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors". It was "a dogmatist's error"; that is to say, it laid down as truths about reality in itself what were in fact merely projections of "very narrow, very personal, very human, all too human facts"; thus "it meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective*, the basic condition of all life". Despite all this, Nietzsche tells us not to be ungrateful for this error: he also calls Plato "the most beautiful growth of antiquity", and he calls philosophical dogmatism in general—although Plato's is the version to which he gives by far the most attention—"only a promise across millennia". In calling it a promise, he seems to be implying that it has a potential payoff that is yet to be fulfilled; in calling it "*only* a promise", he implies that its real value is different from, and no doubt lesser than, what its proponents imagined—namely, that of having captured the ultimate nature of reality. But since the attempt to do that is a fool's errand in Nietzsche's opinion, there is no reason to think we need be discontented with what it does have to offer.

What this is gets suggested towards the end of the Preface. "The fight against Plato", says Nietzsche—or against the popularized version of Plato that is Christianity—"has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth; with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals". We are now in a position to transcend Platonism and Christianity and achieve a higher type of humanity. What this might look like is never made entirely clear; working it out is, I think, one of the many unfinished tasks of Nietzsche's later career—something that he himself

45 "Raids of an Untimely Man", 49.

46 *BGE*: 200.

47 In my understanding of *BGE*'s picture of Plato, I have learned a great deal from Lampert (2004). Though I will not pursue this here, I find persuasive Lampert's claim that Nietzsche here thinks of Plato as a genuine philosopher, rather than a "philosophical laborer", to use the language of *BGE*: 211.

refers to in the final sentence of the Preface as a task and a goal rather than any kind of thought-through conception. But his talk of the *Übermensch*, his often-expressed project of a “revaluation of all values”, and again, his sketches of the few truly superior human beings who have yet existed, give us some sense of the directions in which his thinking was going. The important point for our purposes is that an essential ingredient in this potentially so productive “tension of the spirit” is the Platonic-Christian outlook that, after all these centuries, is deeply embedded in the European psyche. We may need to go beyond this, but we could not do so without having gone through it first. The thought is not developed in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, but it becomes a recurring theme in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Here we are told that to possess in oneself both of the opposed value systems “good/bad” and “good/evil” is the most “decisive mark of the ‘higher nature’, of the more spiritual nature”, and that the conflict between the two has itself “become ever deeper, ever more spiritual”.⁴⁸ We are also told that with the bad conscience, which is clearly associated with the good/evil system of valuation, we have “the appearance on earth of an animal turned against itself, taking sides against itself”, and that this—far from being merely contemptible, as one might have expected the Nietzsche of *Twilight* to say—is “something so new, deep, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and full of future ... that the appearance of the earth was thereby essentially changed”.⁴⁹ Plato does not make much of an appearance in *Genealogy*.⁵⁰ But if Plato is at the back of the Christian world-view, as the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* has it, then this makes Plato one of the most vitally creative figures in the history of thought—even if his truly productive effect is delayed by millennia (in fact, is not yet properly realized), and even if this is very different from what he himself might have imagined or hoped for.

One other element of the Preface is worth attending to. Nietzsche asks how Plato, “the most beautiful growth of antiquity”, could have succumbed to the anti-perspectival error of “the pure spirit and the good as such”. His suggestion is that maybe he was corrupted by Socrates, who maybe “deserve[d] his hemlock” after all. This is not asserted, merely posed in the form of questions; but the idea of a distinction between Socrates and Plato is thereby opened up. This is then pursued in two later sections of *Beyond Good and Evil* (190, 191), where Plato is presented as accepting certain Socratic ideas despite himself, but transforming them in a way that reflects himself rather than Socrates. In the first of these sections, Nietzsche says that the Socratic denial of *akrasia*,

48 *GM*: 1.16.

49 *GM*: 2.16.

50 Although see again *GM*: 3.24.

on the basis that no one wants to harm themselves and the bad is necessarily harmful, is an inference that “smells of the *rabble*”, with its crudely utilitarian conception of good and bad; and this is said to be an aspect of the morality of Plato “that does not really belong to Plato”, that is present “in spite of Plato”, who was “really too noble” for this kind of thinking.⁵¹ He adds that “Plato did everything he could in order to read something refined and noble into the proposition of his teacher—above all, himself”; thus Plato spun a whole series of variations on the Socrates that he found (the metaphor is that of a set of musical variations on a theme), acting as “the most audacious of interpreters” and transforming Socrates into “all of his own masks and multiplicities”. Again we have the idea of Plato as a complex and elusive soul; but it is not yet clear what this transformation and ennobling is supposed to consist in.

A little more light is shed on this in the following section. Here the question is whether our values do or should—it is not quite clear which of these Nietzsche has in mind—derive from reason or from instinct. Socrates is said to have “initially sided with reason”, but to have ultimately “seen through the irrational element in moral judgments” and to have enlisted reason in the service of the instincts; in this, he “got his conscience to be satisfied with a kind of self-trickery”—presumably because he continued, on the surface, to elevate reason above all else. Plato is said to be “more innocent in such matters and lacking the craftiness of the plebeian”. Yet he too is in effect accused of a kind of “self-trickery”; for he “wanted to employ all his strength—the greatest strength any philosopher has so far had at his disposal—to prove to himself that reason and instinct of themselves tend toward one goal, the good, ‘God’”.⁵² Here we have the elevation of goodness to the pinnacle of reality, which in Platonic terms means a super-sensible reality; and we have reason, here understood as co-equal with instinct instead of in service to it, capable of penetrating to this higher reality. That instinct tends in the same direction—that is, that we are all naturally oriented towards the good before even starting to reason about it—suggests a teleological optimism of which one can certainly find signs in Plato (for example, in the notion that learning is recollection). It goes against the idea that one finds in *Twilight* that Socrates and Plato chose to be “absurdly rational” in order to fight the instincts;⁵³ and since that is part of a generally demeaning picture of their psychology, this difference perhaps works to Plato’s benefit. In any case, what Plato has added to Socratic moralizing is a metaphysical superstructure; as we have seen, this is regarded elsewhere in

51 BGE: 190.

52 BGE: 191.

53 TI: “The Problem of Socrates”, 10.

Beyond Good and Evil as a dangerous error, but one that is also an expression of nobility.⁵⁴ Hence I find it plausible that this is at least a key component in how Plato manages, in Nietzsche's opinion, to transform Socrates' "plebeian" moral thinking into something more reflective of himself.

The desire to separate Plato from Socrates, to Plato's credit, did not come to Nietzsche for the first time in writing *Beyond Good and Evil*. As early as 1875 he speculates about what Plato might have been like had he not met Socrates. Greek culture, he suggests, was in need, and was felt to be in need, of a reformation, but this did not happen. Plato might have achieved this, but was "distracted by Socrates"; he then attempts "a characterization of Plato *without* Socrates", which goes as follows. "Tragedy—profound conception of love—pure nature—no fanatical turning away: obviously the Greeks were *about to find an even higher type of man than the previous ones*".⁵⁵ Of course, this is very sketchy. But the last comment, at least, which is where the comparative ranking really comes in, is echoed in *Human, All Too Human*, in the course of a wide-ranging discussion of earlier Greek culture.⁵⁶ Socrates is here represented as a destructive force in Greek culture, and this prompts Nietzsche to wonder "whether, if he had not come under the spell of Socrates, Plato might not have discovered an even higher type of philosophical man who is now lost to us for ever". There is a limit to what one can do with these speculative remarks; but they do suggest that Nietzsche had a long-standing suspicion that Plato was in important ways hampered rather than helped by his association with Socrates.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, though not in the passages I have just drawn attention to, the separation of Plato and Socrates is an aspect of what we might call Nietzsche's appreciation for Plato's aristocratic side. We can end our survey

54 Laurence Lampert's phrase for this is felicitous—"Socratic moralizing rooted in an impossible transcendence" (Lampert 2004, 216). My one serious reservation about Lampert's reading is that he thinks that, on Nietzsche's interpretation, Plato was *aware* that he was perpetrating a fiction (for the good of humanity, who at this stage needed something of the kind); the "noble lie", as Lampert sees it, goes much further than the specific context in which it is actually mentioned in *Republic* III—namely, the need to persuade people in the ideal city that they are literally children of the land on which the city and its environs stand, and that their natures suit them to belong to the classes to which they assigned (415a–c). The language in *BGE*: 191, that the idea of a transcendent realm is something Plato needed to "prove to himself", seems to me to go against this reading. To be sure, there is an element of self-deception imputed to Plato here; we saw something of this occasionally in the previous section as well. But self-deception implies that at a surface level, at least, the subject actually believes what he or she is saying, and I take it that this is how Nietzsche sees Plato. The straightforward reference to Platonism as an "error" in *BGE*'s Preface (rather than, say, a subtle stratagem) points in the same direction.

55 *KSA*: 8, 105 = *EN*: 213.

56 *H*: 1.261.

of Nietzsche's more favorable estimate of Plato by pursuing this theme a little further. Another aspect of it is his approval of Plato's contempt for pity,⁵⁷ for compassion,⁵⁸ and for giving vent to "expressions of pain, of tears, complaints, reproaches, gestures of rage or of humiliation".⁵⁹ He does not say where in Plato he finds these valuations, but the most obvious is perhaps the descriptions of the guardian class, and the education needed to mold their characters, in *Republic* II and III. In the last case, Nietzsche asks whether the objectionable attitudes, which he associates with his own time, qualify as "belonging to the 'rabble'"; an affirmative answer seems to be at least suggested. In the other two passages, too, it is the less fortunate for whom such attitudes are said to be appropriate, while higher specimens of humanity should keep their distance from them.⁶⁰

It is also possible to find Nietzsche approving of the rank-ordering that belongs to the three-class structure of the ideal city in Plato's *Republic*. Towards the end of *The Antichrist* (57) he distinguishes, as a matter of "natural order", "the predominantly spiritual type, the predominantly muscular and temperamental type, and the third type ..., the mediocre type". The first type deals in knowledge and "They rule not because they want to but because they *are*; they are not free to be second in rank". The second type "are the executives [*die Exekutive*] of the most spiritual order", and the third type engage in "the crafts, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greater part of art, in a word the entire compass of *professional* activity". Plato is not actually mentioned in this section; it is instead presented as a description of the Laws of Manu. But the parallel with Plato's ruling class of philosophers, who are *unwilling* to rule,⁶¹ the auxiliary class who enacts the decisions of the rulers, and the third class who performs all the mundane but necessary functions of society, is too close for coincidence, and Nietzsche must be aware of what he is echoing. Further confirmation of this is that Plato was mentioned just before (end of 55) as one of those who, along with the Laws of Manu and Christianity among others, engages in a "holy lie". The intervening section explores the idea that "Ultimately the point is to what *end* a lie is told",⁶² and Christianity is lambasted for telling lies to wholly bad ends. By contrast, a "holy lie" can be valuable and worthwhile when put

57 *H*: 1.50.

58 *GM*: Preface 5.

59 *D*: 157.

60 In *H*: 1.50 it is "people of the commonality"; in the Preface to *GM* it is modern philosophers, who have succumbed to the life-denying sickness characteristic of modern times, and later associated with the ascetic ideal.

61 See especially *Rep.* 519c–521b.

62 *A*: 56.

to good ends, and one possible good end is to convey some fundamental truth in such a way that it is viewed as an inviolable command—something that a set of rules by itself would not be sufficiently authoritative to achieve.⁶³ This point is then explored with reference to the Laws of Manu,⁶⁴ and Nietzsche refers again to the “holy lie”, having made clear that it admits of a positive use, immediately before the mention of the threefold ranking of humanity. Finally, a contemporary letter of Nietzsche to Peter Gast⁶⁵ explicitly brings together Manu and Plato in connection with the idea of castes.

It is important not to misconstrue the significance of this. Nietzsche is not a political thinker in any but the most rarefied sense.⁶⁶ The highest type referred to in the *Antichrist* passage do not literally rule; the clearest indication of this is that “the king” is cited as the quintessential example of the *second* type of human. What the highest type do, in Nietzsche’s description, is simply act out their nature as perfect human beings; they “rule” simply in the sense of being supreme specimens of humanity (as in the contemporary English slang, “you rule!”). A passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* (61) also seems to divide humanity into three types,⁶⁷ and here philosophers, as Nietzsche ideally imagines them, are again at the highest ranks. But while he does speak here of these people’s “ability to rule”, it is clear that the kind of “rule” he has in mind is that of leading humanity to a higher level. While they are said to make use of the political and economic conditions in which they find themselves, their

63 This, incidentally, seems faithful to Plato’s original intentions in devising his “noble lie”. That people are naturally suited to belong in different positions in society is profoundly true, in his opinion. The lie resides simply in the mechanics of the story—that we were born from the ground and that we each have a certain kind of metal inside us that reveals our true nature. Nietzsche has a number of other things to say about the noble lie; some appear consistent with the present passage, some not, and some unclear in their attitude. It would be too much to try to sort this all through in the space available; see *U*: 2.10 (pp. 118–19 in Breazeale’s translation), *GM*: 3.19, *TI*: “On Those Who ‘Improve’ Humanity 5, *KSA*: 7, 476 = *EN*: 144, *KSA*: 7, 488 = *EN*: 152, *KSA*: 11, 189, *KSA*: 12, 15 = *LN*: 55, *KSA*: 13, 390, *KSA*: 13, 434.

64 A: 57.

65 31 May 1888; letter 170 in *SL*.

66 This point is well made by Brobjer (2004), 250–2. However, Brobjer seems oblivious to the clearly laudatory tone of the *Antichrist* passage. He cites a passage from the *Nachlass*, also from 1888, which seems much more critical of both Manu and Plato (*KSA*: 13, 439–40). The difference (which Brobjer attempts to minimize) is striking, and no doubt testifies to mixed feelings. Still, the critical tone of the note does not detract from the approving tone of the published passage; and this approval is more easily understood if one does not try to read the published passage as literally about politics, as Brobjer seems to do.

67 This is not, however, as close to Plato’s three-class scheme as in the *Antichrist* passage (*contra* Young 2010, 424–5). The second class seems to consist of those who aspire to ascend above their current status; this is quite at odds with Plato’s rigid structure.

project is “the overall development of man” (a goal very different, incidentally, from that of the Plato of the *Republic*, for whom “development” was a dirty word). Nietzsche does mention the Brahmins as one example of such people, and says that they nominated the kings of the people. But this is just a way of emphasizing that “they kept themselves apart and outside, as men of higher and supra-royal tasks”. It is true that in an early unpublished discussion originally intended for *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche expresses a more straightforward admiration for Plato’s ideal state as a political arrangement.⁶⁸ However, by the time of *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche is already decrying Plato as a socialist,⁶⁹ and after that he seems to show little or no interest in Plato as a political thinker. The passages from the *Antichrist* and *Beyond Good and Evil* that I have referred to are, I suggest, no exception to this. Both channel, to varying degrees, a Platonic conception of the ranking of human beings. Nietzsche approves of this because he too thinks there are higher and lower specimens of humanity—this is no news, even if his conception of “higher” is importantly different from Plato’s—and not because he finds something attractive in Plato’s political thought.⁷⁰

III

Nietzsche once wrote that his portrait of Plato was a caricature,⁷¹ and the caricature he had in mind was probably not unlike the “standard view” that I mentioned at the start of this paper. But he was not really being fair to himself. One can certainly think of passages that might justify this verdict; the

68 KSA: 7, 348–9 = EN: 76–7. Cf. KSA: 7, 140, where the ideal state is again praised, but interestingly, the place of *philosophy* in these arrangements is singled out as the one point worthy of criticism.

69 H: 1.473.

70 Hence the view of Young (2010), 425, that “Nietzsche’s ideas on the *structure* of society ... have not altered at all since 1871”, seems wide of the mark. Young is right that Plato’s philosophers, too, are “big picture” political thinkers, not executives. But there is still a crucial difference, for them, between engaging in the business of ruling—which is, at least considered in itself, unwelcome to them—and engaging in unfettered philosophy, which is what, if no other considerations were in play, they would prefer to be doing all the time. In the two passages of Nietzsche that we have considered, there is no hint of such a division between political and apolitical sides of the highest humans’ activity. One can consider all that they do as political in a sense; but this is, as I suggested, only a very extended sense, somewhat as in the contemporary slogan “the personal is political”. By contrast, Plato clearly conceives of the rulers in his ideal city as doing something akin to what actual rulers in current societies do, even if they will do it much better (*Rep.* 520c–d).

71 KSA: 12, 521 = LN: 194.

passage of *Twilight* with which I began is perhaps the clearest example. But the totality of his writings on Plato reveals a more multi-faceted, less single-minded and perhaps less consistent picture. A more apt way to consider his view or views of Plato would be by way of his reflections in *Genealogy* about perspective. “There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival ‘knowing’; and *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter, *the more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to bring to bear one and the same matter, that much more complete will our ‘concept’ of this matter, our ‘objectivity’ be”.⁷² Nietzsche brought multiple “affects” and “eyes” to bear on Plato. For such a gigantic figure in the history of thought, and especially such a protean one as Plato was, this is surely just as it should be.

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Phenomenological Platonism: Husserl and Plato

Alan Kim

ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτὸν

HERACLITUS



1 Introduction

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was the founder of phenomenology. He busied himself with the bases of knowledge; the relation of philosophy to the sciences; the correlation of ideal and experience; and the defense of logic against psychologism.¹ The term, “phenomenology”, here eludes strict definition, comprising an ensemble of idealistic strategies and insights. It names the procedure of gaining cognitions of absolute apodicticity, but also, more broadly, the system of such cognitions themselves. Because of their apodicticity, he says, such cognitions ground all other sciences, for they clearly and distinctly exhibit the ideal norms of all possible cognition. Similarly, the phenomenological method itself embodies the ideal norm of scientific investigation.² Because its ultimate objects are ideal, apodictic, and thus *a priori*, they can serve as a bulwark against psychologism, which seeks to reduce logic (and the *a priori* in general) to a function of the empirical.

The most famous move in the phenomenological method is the ἐποχή, the ancient Skeptics’ term for suspending judgment so as to attain tranquility. Husserl also uses “*epoché*” to mean suspension of judgment, specifically, the judgment that percepts represent actual things in a real world.³ Thus, “*epoché*” for him means the “bracketing of reality”, not with the practical goal of equanimity, but with the scientific aim of draining phenomena of all but epistemic

¹ *Proleg.*; *CM*, §61: 148; *FTL*: 133, ff.

² Cf. *CM*: 16, ff. De Muralt (1974), 27.

³ *CM*: 20. While “actual” is a better translation for “*wirklich*”, “real” suits the Cartesian context here.

interest. For although the real existence and nature of the things that appear to me are always subject to doubt and hesitation, yet *qua* phenomena, they appear with absolute apodicticity. It is this manifestation that the *epoché* enables.⁴ The meditator thus enters into a purely phenomenal realm of consciousness, that is, the realm of pure consciousness. Here he goes to work as a phenomenologist, giving accounts of the appearances *as such*, not just describing them in detail, but also uncovering their logical relationships.

Husserl calls the *epoché* “transcendental” in two senses. (a) The logical relationships among phenomena amount to nothing less than the temple of all *possible* appearances to consciousness.⁵ But this means (b) that the *epoché ipso facto* reveals the conditions of possibility of consciousness, i.e., the structures of the “transcendental ego.”⁶ Or at least it does so incipiently, for these structures must, of course, be worked over and brought out in full clarity by the reflecting meditator. Such work ultimately yields the crystallized forms of consciousness that Husserl, harking back to Plato, calls “*eidē*” (plural of “*eidos*”).⁷ Since Husserl speaks of such *eidē* as the *eidos* of “red”⁸ or of “tone,”⁹ it would seem that an *eidos* is the essence of a thing or quality that has, via the *epoché*, been reduced to a mere phenomenon, and thence to a phenomenal essence—the “what it is to be (apparent) red”, “what-it-is-to-be-(an apparent)-tone”, and so forth. However, since all the phenomena are, thanks to the *epoché*, phenomena in and for consciousness, the *eidē* are in fact the possible forms that the phenomena in question can take: they are, in other words, the structures of transcendental consciousness itself.

Despite such allusions to Plato and the Skeptics, Husserl seemingly develops his ideas and methods ahistorically. Indeed, the phenomenological slogan—*Zu den Sachen selbst!*—expresses the desire to extricate philosophy from tradition and start afresh with nothing more than what we can ascertain in pure evidence, a desire that is itself an evergreen aspect of the *philosophia perennis*, as Husserl is well aware. In the introduction to the *Cartesian Meditations*, he points to Descartes’ aboriginal rejection of his teachers, and identifies Descartes’ resolution to think for himself as phenomenology’s driving motive.¹⁰ This tension—between historical consciousness, on the one hand, and the phenomenological imperative to see things for oneself, on the other—is

4 CM, §12: 29–30.

5 *Ideen* I: 21, l. 35; 194, ll. 16, ff.

6 CM, §8: 25. *Ideen* I: 214–5.

7 *Ideen* I: 9.

8 Cf. Husserl, *Proleg.*: xv.

9 *Ideen* I: 13; 16–17; *EU*: 412.

10 Cf. *EP* II: 4; *Crisis*, §§14–21; 43.

especially acute in Husserl's attitude towards Plato. As is well known, he vigorously denies charges of "Platonism", i.e., that his philosophy is somehow metaphysical.¹¹ As is less well known, however, he places Plato at the very heart of his, Husserl's own thought. In a letter to the Plato-scholar, Julius Stenzel, for example, Husserl calls himself a "phenomenological Platonist [*Platoniker*]" who "wrestles (and wrestled, long before [I] knew Plato [my]self) with Platonic problems".¹²

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explain the "bad" Platonism Husserl rejected, and to contrast it against the "good", Platonic (as opposed to Platonistic) spirit that he saw as characteristic of his own thought. I argue that while Husserl does not attempt a full-fledged reconstruction of Plato's thought, his productive appropriation of Plato into phenomenology adumbrates a new approach to Plato's theory of forms, avoiding metaphysics and mysticism while maintaining the forms' normative superiority to the sensible world. At the same time, this phenomenological interpretation of *Plato's* forms allows us to address the common criticism of Husserl's talk of eidetic intuition, as well as to clarify the generative power of the *eidē*.¹³

2 Platonism and Anti-Platonism

The charge of Platonism arises in the context of Husserl's notorious term, *Wesensschau*: "eidetic intuition" or, literally, "viewing of essences (*eidē*; *Wesen*)". Of course, "*eidē*" and "*ideal*" (sg. "*idea*") are the terms, rooted in Greek verbs of vision, that Plato uses to name his so-called forms. The *Republic* and *Phaedo* epitomize the classical theory of forms, presenting them as singular, immutable, exemplary, individual substances that cause the ever-changing plurality of imitative, and therefore defective particulars.¹⁴ These latter come to be and perish in the sensible world, whereas the forms exist eternally beyond it in a separate intelligible realm.¹⁵ According to the Cave Allegory, the soul comes to see the forms after dialectical catharsis.¹⁶ "Platonism", then, names (a) this realistic attribution of separate existence to the forms as substances, what Husserl

11 *Ideen* I, §22: 48, ff. Cf. e.g. de Muralt (1974), 39–40, 96.

12 Husserl (1994d), 427. To avoid confusion, I will not call Husserl a Platonist at all, but speak simply of the "Platonic" dimension of his thought. Cf. esp. Husserl (1970), 393–4.

13 Cf. de Muralt (1974), 41–2.

14 Cf. *Rep.* V, 476a, ff.; *Ph.* 73, ff., 100d–101b.

15 *Rep.* 508c1, 509d2, 517b5.

16 Cf. esp. *Phaedr.* 247c–250c.

calls the “static” Platonism of “hypostatized” ideas;¹⁷ and (b) the concomitant intellectual intuition in which the *psychē* “sees” these ideas as such.

Now, just as the separation of the realms of intelligible Being and visible Becoming suggests an outmoded metaphysical dualism, so, too, does intellectual intuition smack of mysticism. But in a letter to Brentano Husserl “stress[es his] complete rejection of all mystical-metaphysical exploitation of ‘ideas’, ideal possibilities, etc.”¹⁸ Moreover, he attacks the “obscure prejudices” that block critics from recognizing both a non-Platonistic sense of “ideas” and a non-mystical way of grasping them. He insists that to speak of ideas as objects is just to point out an obvious feature of both philosophical and everyday cognition.¹⁹ He writes: before “all theory and ... all ‘epistemology’,

everyone is a “Platonist” in a naïve way, namely everyone who, unconcerned with philosophical explainings-away, makes ideal-scientific judgments, just as everyone is in a naïve way an “empiricist” who in the same sense makes real-scientific judgments, say, judgments about plants, tables, and the like.²⁰

We thus face two questions: first, what are *eidē*, if not super-sensible substances? Second, if they are not substances, then how might one “intuit” (*schauen*) them? A provisional answer: “*eidos*” names what-it-is-to-be-*X*, the “*X* as such”, i.e., the essence of *X*.²¹ The *eidos* of “cat” or “red” is “what it is to be (a) cat”, “what it is to be red”, respectively. “Eidetic intuition” means, accordingly, grasping this *what-ness* as such.²² Although a thing’s *eidos* is a new kind object (of thought),²³ grasping it *qua* object of thought in *Wesensschau* does not require a special faculty of intellectual intuition. It is nothing more than understanding the meaning of “as such” with respect to a given *X*.²⁴ Let us now more closely examine these claims in light of Husserl’s reading of Plato. As we will see, it is his special conception of what-ness (*eidos*) that ultimately secures him against the charge of Platonism.

17 *Ideen* 1: 48, ff. Husserl (2002), 282.

18 Husserl (1994b), 39; cf. *EU*: 411.

19 Husserl (2002), 283.

20 Husserl (2002), 283; cf. esp. 299–300.

21 *EU*: 411.

22 See esp. *Ideen* 1, §3: 13.

23 *Ideen* 1, §3: 14.

24 Cf. *CM*: 17.

3 *Eidē* and Eidetic Intuition²⁵

The positive sciences, which comprise all the actual sciences, strive to know what is actually the case in the real world: the facts.²⁶ These sciences operate with “empirical universals”, i.e., empirical concepts. On Husserl’s traditional view, concepts are formed by collecting a number of individuals, comparing them, and abstracting their common features; the conjunction of these similarities is their concept.²⁷ Now as “universal”, such concepts seem to have unlimited applicability, not just to the finite class of facts whence they were derived, but to any number of possible facts—indeed, it is just in this that the epistemic utility of such concepts consists.²⁸ However, because empirical concepts are derived by abstraction from contingent facts, the concepts, too, remain infected by the possibility that a limit to such applicability, and hence to the universality of the concept could arise.²⁹

The *idea*³⁰ of true or genuine science is not, however, of contingent, relative knowledge; indeed, for Husserl, the very phrase, “contingent knowledge”, would seem a contradiction in terms.³¹ Since science—*epistēmē*, *Wissenschaft*—in the full, ideal sense is a *a priori* knowledge of necessary truths, any “science” operating solely with empirical concepts fails to fulfill its implicit ideal.³² The *eidos*, then, is the ideal object of such authentic knowledge, as opposed to the *fact*, which is the empirical object of the sciences, as they actually exist. And it was Plato, Husserl writes, who was the first to see “authentic knowledge, authentic theory and science and—embracing them all—authentic philosophy ... as the philosophically most important (because most fundamental)

25 Cf. esp. de Muralt (1974), 35, ff.

26 Husserl (1995), 156–7. *Ideen* 1, §§7–8. “Tatsachenwissenschaften und Erfahrungswissenschaften [sind] äquivalente Begriffe” (*Ideen* 1, §7: 21, ll. 32–3). Cf. *Crisis*, §2. Husserl’s conception of empirical science is contestable to the extent that “knowing” the facts remains ambiguous, i.e., between gathering data, on the one hand, and bringing it under general laws, on the other. Natorp would agree that all sciences in their very nature as *Wissenschaften* seek to “know”, i.e., *understand* “facts”, which they achieve not through data-collection as such, but by interpreting them with respect to a law. For Natorp, the Platonic “*idea*” signifies just such a *law*. See Lembeck in this volume.

27 *EU*, §80. Cf. *CM*, §4: 10; Sokolowski (1974), §19.

28 *EU*: 409.

29 *EU*: 410; cf. esp. 417.

30 In the Kantian sense: *Ideen* 1: 9.

31 Cf. esp. *Proleg.* §65: 236, f.

32 *CM*, §5: 13–14.

themes of research”.³³ This kind of “absolute and rational science” is phenomenological science, “i.e., science in the full sense of the original idea as Plato envisioned it”, in which “the ideals of complete and global *comprehensibility* and *rationality* are unified”.³⁴

The impression might arise, then, that an unbridgeable abyss—between necessity and contingency, apriority and experience—separates *eidē* from facts, as well as the absolute knowledge of “authentic philosophy” from the positive sciences.³⁵ Indeed, just such an ontological and epistemological separation seems implicit in the charge of Platonism. It is therefore crucial to remember that for Husserl, “*eidos*” is always *correlative* with “fact [*Tatsache*]”.³⁶ Thus, an empirical, contingent thing like this white hare or that pocket watch are “factual [*faktisch*]”,³⁷ but each has a correlative *eidos*, i.e., an essential type (*Wesen*) of which it is an instance: “Hare”, “Pocket Watch”. Although correlative, yet *eidos* and fact are not symmetric, for the *eidos*, as necessary and *a priori*, “prescribes the rules to all empirical particulars [*Einzelheiten*]”.³⁸ Moreover, as I will argue, as a law of particulars, the *eidos* constitutes the being of its factual instances or “cases”. Clearly, then, both eidetic and empirical universals only have meaning with respect to facts, though in different ways. On the one hand, the empirical concept derives from facts as their precipitate; on the other hand, the *eidos* governs facts as their rule. Similarly, whereas positive sciences have their data given to them, the *eidē* must first be gained by phenomenological science. Once it has seen and secured³⁹ these eidetic rules, the absolute science will in turn function as a norm of the positive sciences.⁴⁰

The Divided Line and Allegory of the Cave offer a framework for mapping not only the mind’s movement from fact to essence, but, more importantly for our purposes, the surprising parallels between Plato and Husserl’s philosophies.⁴¹ Where the Divided Line pictures various psychic conditions,⁴² the Allegory describes the soul’s movement along the Line. If the cave itself

33 *EP* I: 12–13; cf. *EP* II: 356, 361–2. Husserl is most likely thinking of the end of *Rep.* VI, where Plato contrasts the hypothetical nature of all sciences [ταῖς ... ἀδελφαῖς τέχναις] with the ideal, unhypothetical, i.e., absolute status of a dialectical eidology (*Rep.* 511b1–2).

34 *EP* II: 362. See esp. *Proleg.* §§65–66.

35 Cf. esp. de Muralt (1974), 33.

36 *Ideen* I, §2.

37 *Ideen* I: 21.

38 *EU*: 410.

39 Cf. *CM*: 11.

40 Cf. esp. Husserl (1995), 157; Husserl (1950), §8.

41 See my (2004) and (2010).

42 *pathēmata* (*Rep.* 511d7); cf. 508e2: *tēn dunamin*. The Line is vertical, as at Grube (1997), 1130, n. 12.

comprises the two lowest, sensible segments, then the shadows correspond to the “images [*eikones*]” of the bottom-most segment, namely “shadows [and] reflections [*phantasmata*] in water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny [*phana*] materials, and everything of that sort”.⁴³ The artifacts carried by the puppeteers⁴⁴ in turn correspond to the “originals of these images, namely the animals all around us, all the plants, and the whole class of manufactured things”.⁴⁵ To the first shadow-stage of “likenesses” corresponds the intentional state Plato calls *eikasia* or “imagination”; to the second stage of “real things”, the intentional state he calls *pistis* or “belief”.

Plato’s acute distinction of *eikasia* and *pistis* reflects the phenomenological insight that that natural attitude⁴⁶ itself may be analyzed into separate phenomenal and (onto-) logical moments. We⁴⁷ are *naturally* captive to the phenomenal quality of (sensible) things, rather than these things themselves, our minds gliding across their apparent (*phanos*)⁴⁸ surfaces without concern for the question of their being. Just this natural attitude is ruptured when the prisoner is released and for the first time is forced to discriminate between the bodily givenness of the statues and what he now recognizes as the derivative, purely phenomenal nature of their shadows. The prisoner’s radical turn is tantamount to what Husserl calls the “phenomenological-transcendental reduction”:⁴⁹ “phenomenological”, insofar as the apparent reality of the shadows is “bracketed”, so that the beings of everyday life now appear as *mere* appearances; “transcendental”, insofar as the mind is turned towards the ontological conditions of those (mere) appearances. And it is a “reduction” in a double sense: first, by leaving behind the “spatio-temporal reality” that it shares and accepts along with all other human beings,⁵⁰ the mind is “led back” to the conditions of its prior experience; second, that prior experience is as it were boiled off, its conditions boiled down into a pure concentrate.

However, because the prisoner performs his “transcendental” turn under duress and after glimpsing the statuettes wants to return to the natural attitude, his frame of mind cannot count as genuine knowledge, for he trusts⁵¹ the statues much as he previously believed in the shadows, and refuses to

43 *Rep.* 509e1–510a2.

44 *Rep.* 514b8–515a3.

45 *Rep.* 510a5–6.

46 Cf. *Ideen* I: 53 (§30).

47 ὁμοίους ἡμῖν (*Rep.* 515a5).

48 Cf. *Rep.* 510a2: φαννά.

49 Cf. *EP* II: 362, l. 33, ff.

50 *Ideen* I, §30: 63.

51 Cf. “*Glaubenssetzung*” at *DR*, §43 (151, ff.); *EU*: 382.

investigate them. Hence, he must be held back from returning to the natural attitude and “dragged” up and away to safety, that is, to the pure evident being of the surface.⁵² “*Epoché*”—which stems from the Greek verb, ἐπέχω, “to hold back”—just is this “holding back” and re-direction of the ego’s ray,⁵³ and the concomitant “neutralization [*Ausschaltung*]” or “bracketing [*Einklammerung*]” of the *apparent* vividness of things in their sensible particularity. Thus, the released (but not yet truly free) prisoner’s ascent into the realm of forms parallels the Husserlian passage from the initial phenomenological-transcendental reduction to the self-evident apodicticity of eidetic intuition. On the one hand, for Husserl as for Plato, *maintaining* the neutral detachment of the *epoché* is an act “belong[ing] to the realm of our *perfect freedom*.”⁵⁴ For while the shadows on the wall (the phenomena of normal experience) may be explicable by reference to their originals within the cave, i.e., in the still realistic terms of natural science, such explication will always remain tethered to hypotheses and so remain *doxa*. By contrast, the *epoché* reveals a “peculiar and unique region of being” appearing as a “phenomenological residuum.”⁵⁵ This is the realm of consciousness, of the so-called transcendental ego. What does this mysterious term mean, and in what sense is it a “realm of perfect freedom”?

The transcendental realm determines the ground of the possibility of all actuality; it is what conditions—not what is conditioned. Hence, the knowledge *of* that realm is absolute, not relative, and the “objects” and “structures” that the self-contemplating ego perceives must perforce also be absolute. These, then, are the *eidē*, Plato’s forms that are *of* the very things that the prisoner saw back in the cave; alternatively, in Husserlian terms: they are the essences that are *of* the things the ego in the natural attitude was conscious of in the actual spatio-temporal world. But those things indicated their forms or essences only as *ab-geschattet*—“adumbrated”, shaded, or *shadowed-off*. The *eidē* are, then, the pure logical “residua” revealed by the *epoché*; they are the intelligible, essential meanings that had always been co-intended in my aesthetic grasp of the phenomenon as actual thing, but which had been, as it were, eclipsed by the glare of “reality”.

The (now) bracketed phenomena of course still appear to the mind; but *as* bracketed, the mind takes them purely as mental, as the objects of its thinking, or, in phenomenological parlance, as “intentional objects”. The mind may now consider or “meditate” upon these intentional objects in their relations just to

52 *Rep.* 515e6.

53 Cf. *Ideen* 1: 231, 294, *et passim*.

54 *Ideen* 1, §31: 64.

55 *Ideen* 1, §33: 72.

each other as well as to the “ego-pole [*Ich-Pol*]”.⁵⁶ Since the “actuality” of the real (spatio-temporal) world has been bracketed, this peculiar region of being, then, is the realm of pure possibility, the *transcendental structure* of intentionality that underlies and grounds the actual or *transcendent* world “beyond” the ego. It is this transcendental structure that allows the phenomena (bracketed or not) to appear to me *as* something, *as* anything more than sheer glaring appearance. As I will show, although Husserl, like Plato, speaks of “seeing” this structure with the mind’s eye, yet the means of this so-called seeing is entirely logical—it is the account or *logos* of the particular phenomenon’s form that lies within the soul. Thus, Husserl’s turn to consciousness may be read as an inward turning of the soul into itself, opening up a “phenomenological world” “unknown, indeed unimagined” to all those trapped in the natural attitude.⁵⁷ Here, because it is exploring only itself, and only on and in its own terms, the mind can be “perfectly free”.

Where Husserl contrasts empirical facts against essences, Plato opposes the sensible (visible) realm of particulars against that of the forms or *eidē*. He considers the former not to be knowable as such, but, at most, “opinable”. In fact, as the *Republic* and *Phaedo* tell us, sensible phenomena, shining forth are, precisely in their sensible dazzle, less illuminating than blinding.⁵⁸ That is, the *apparent-ness* of the phenomenon, i.e., its sensible qualities, is, as such, indefinite or ambiguous. What makes “a” phenomenon appear as distinct from another within the sensible manifold is its logical structure, that is, a conceptual framework which, when projected or imposed upon said manifold determines and thus reveals individual *phanera*, i.e., visible, manifest, conspicuous, and “shining” *beings*. Their conspicuousness, in virtue of which they stand forth distinctly in the manifold, just *is* this *logos*, so that their apparentness is now no longer due to the obvious shining of sensibility, but to the logical outlines running through it like “lines barely visible, like spiders’ webs”, as Augustine puts it. These demark the phenomenon as an “*on*” (*ens*, entity), whose *ontic* apparentness is due to its distinctness, not its sensible radiance. Indeed, as the mind looks away from the phenomenon’s qualitative density to consider its form, the phenomenon as a thing becomes clarified: the most distinct object of thought is therefore also the clearest, purified of all *sensible* appearance. What is this clear being, then, other than what is purely thought rather than sensed? The true being of the phenomenon is its intelligible nature, which, in its clarity

56 CM: 69; 67–8. This does not imply a turn to psychology, which, for Husserl, is a *Tatsachenwissenschaft* not operating within the freeing constraints of the *epoché*.

57 *Ideen* I: 73.

58 *Rep.* 516–518; esp. *Ph.* 99de.

and distinctness is now revealed as indeed most apparent or evident. These logical structures are what Plato calls the *ideai* or *eidē*, i.e., the so-called forms.

And so the term, “phenomenon”, has been turned on its head.⁵⁹ Although the sense-perceptible thing *seems* most apparent in virtue of its sensual vividness, reflection reveals the *eidos* to be what is most distinct and thus most apparent to the mind. Indeed, strictly *qua phanera*, the sensible “phenomena” are no things, no *entities* (*onta*) at all: their ontological determination is entirely supplied by the *eidos*. Thus, mind’s knowledge of the *eidē* may be described as a seeing of the forms in their unique clarity and (self-) evidence: *they*, the *eidē*, are now the “phenomena” in the strict sense. Thus, when Plato characterizes pure dialectic as a rational procedure that makes no “use of anything sensible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms [*eidē*]”,⁶⁰ he is in effect describing an *eidology*, or, in Husserlian terms, an eidetic phenomenology, in which the object apparent to the soul’s eye is the intelligible form by which all else has its being.

Of course, this eidology has an important, if secondary function: the isolation, identification, or explanation of the sensible particular.⁶¹ The “absolute” independence of the *eidē* need not, however, again imply metaphysical Platonism, but may simply be taken to mean that the *eidē* form a coherent, objective system that reason can freely explore without reference to empirical fact. Nevertheless, as the both Line and Cave suggest, the intelligible and visible realms form a continuum. It is the light of the former that illuminates the latter, since it is the implicit, co-intended *eidē* that covertly constitute and differentiate the factual phenomena. This is why the ex-prisoner on his return is now able to “know each image [*eidōlon*] for what it is and also that of which it is the image”.⁶² In short, I can contemplate only the originals, if I choose; but if I look at shadows instead, I see that they are constituted by the originals. For it is only in terms of the distinctness of this actual cat and chair, say, that I may distinguish the cat’s shadow from the chair’s shadow, “copies” that I might, just in virtue of their likeness, then call “cat” and “chair”.⁶³ Just as the cat casts its shadow, so, too, the *eidos* constitutes its respective *eidōlon*: the former is both connected to and independent of the latter.

For both Husserl and Plato, then, the *eidos* stands over against the sensible particular or *Tatsache*. The *eidos* moreover is essentially “of” the particulars,

59 The Good is now τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον, “the brightest thing that is” (*Rep.* 518c9).

60 *Rep.* 511c1–2.

61 Which, again, we are mistakenly *accustomed* to calling the “phenomenon” *tout court*, as opposed to a *noumenon* or *noēma*. Cf. esp. *EP* 11: 361–2; *CM*, §34: 74.

62 *Rep.* 520c4–5.

63 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A6 987b8–10.

i.e., correlated with them, such that in grasping an *eidos*, *F*, the many factual, sensible *f*'s are rendered clear and distinct as *beings*—so far as is possible—making a kind of science (*epistēmē*) of the empirical world possible. Insofar as, for Plato, the *eidos* determines the being of the *onta*, it is their *ousia*; and this corresponds precisely to the nature of the Husserlian *eidos* as “what-ness” or essence of the factual. Finally, for Plato and Husserl, it is not the insight into this or that individual *eidos* that constitutes knowledge or *Wissenschaft*, but rather the development of a *system* of *eidē*. Such an eidetic science, for both thinkers, amounts to the paradigmatic, rigorous science called “philosophy”.

Now, since the *eidos* is not literally “seen”, for either Plato or Husserl, what “mental phenomenon” are they metaphorically trying to capture with such phrases as “τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα [the eye of the soul],”⁶⁴ “*Wesensschauung*,”⁶⁵ “*Wesensanschauung*,”⁶⁶ or “*Wesenserschauung*,”⁶⁷ i.e., an “eidetic intuition”? It can only be this: *understanding* the *F*-ness of the many *f*'s, which in English, too, we call “grasping” or “seeing”, as in the phrases, “I get it”, “I see”.⁶⁸ To intuit an *eidos* is simply this: to “get” *what* a given *f* is, i.e., getting or “seeing” its what-ness, i.e., its essence. Put this way, knowledge, *qua* seeing an essence, might seem a simple matter. And in a sense, it is—provided the mind is clear of factual static. That is, attaining a vision of the *eidē* is not a matter of learning anything *new*, “putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes”.⁶⁹ Rather, everyone has an inherent *dynamis* with which he *καταμανθάνει*, i.e., “understands, perceives, observes with the mind”.⁷⁰

For Husserl, then, the phenomenological *method* just is the process by which such intuitions may be attained, namely by purging the mind of factual intentions and directing the mind's ray solely at the essential, a process reminiscent of the dialectical purification of soul that Plato calls *anamnēsis*.⁷¹ I therefore turn to two passages in which Husserl describes a “method of variation” for attaining eidetic intuition. The first comes from his 1907 lectures published as *Thing and Space* (*Ding und Raum* [DR]); the second from the posthumously

64 *Rep.* 533d2; cf. “ἡ... τῆς διανοίας ὁψις [the (power of) vision of *dianoia* (thinking)]” (*Symp.* 219a2–3).

65 *Ideen* I: 14.

66 *Ideen* I: 14.

67 *Ideen* I: §3: 13, *et passim*; *EU*: 410, ff., 421.

68 Cf. *EP* II: 360–1.

69 *Rep.* 518bc.

70 *LSJ*. Thus I prefer Waterfield's “understanding” and Wiegand's “*erkennt*” to Cornford and Grube's “learning.” The point is that this power is not one of acquiring (“learning”) knowledge, but of immediately and naturally perceiving, i.e., understanding or re-cognizing (*erkennen*).

71 Cf. Sokolowski (1974), 247.

published book, *Experience and Judgment* (*Erfahrung und Urteil* [EU]). Despite the many years intervening between *DR* and *EU*, both accounts reveal the Platonic spirit of Husserl's method, and serve to clarify just what a Husserlian *eidos* is.

Although the phenomenologist seeks to attain "*die Sachen selbst*", i.e., the apodictically, purely evident *eidē*, yet he cannot but begin with the *Tat-Sachen*, the facts. For these latter are, as Aristotle puts it, "evident to us". Nevertheless, they may often strike us as ambiguous, obscure, and perplexing, which is precisely why we are prompted to seek what is evident "without qualification" i.e., the facts' ἀρχαί (an insight Aristotle ascribes to Plato).⁷² That is, he wants to *understand* the facts by discovering *what* they are "in essence".⁷³ In *DR*, Husserl accordingly begins with a given factual particular, a six-faced solid ("*Hexaeder* [hexahedron]"), like a cube.

1) Consider this cube, with left side *L*, right side *R*, front *F*, back *B*, top *T* and bottom *b*. If we begin with *F* directly in front of us, then *L* (and all other sides) will be hidden from view. Rotating *L* into view, we notice that if first appears merely as intimation, an "unclear, 'unfulfilled' presentation".⁷⁴

The further the rotation proceeds, the clearer and more complete the presentation, [until] finally a maximal peak is reached, at which moment of rotation [*Veränderungsrichtung*] the square presents itself "best", viz., such that any further changes lead again to a diminution of the presentation's completeness, continuing on to the least intimation and finally its complete disappearance[.]

i.e., at the very moment that *B* comes into full view.⁷⁵ In this example, we can discern several distinct types of "adumbration [*Abschattung*]": a) each side, as it turns into view, adumbrates a maximally clear presentation of itself, which, once passed, makes each subsequent adumbration seem dimmer and less satisfying; b) the limited number of actual presentations intimate an infinite continuum of potential aspects;⁷⁶ c) finally, the ideal synthesis of that infinite series adumbrates a single object of which the many aspects are presented.⁷⁷ In all these cases, however, we are dealing with a sensible particular, and the fulfillment of sensible intentions and anticipations.

⁷² NE 1095a32–33.

⁷³ Cf. EU: 411.

⁷⁴ DR: 106.

⁷⁵ DR: 106.

⁷⁶ DR: 106.

⁷⁷ DR: 135, ff.

2) We can now extend our thought-experiment by positing a number of different cubes. Their multiplicity allows us to perform what Husserl calls “eidetic variation”: by contemplating the many instances, a certain common form comes into view, i.e., the “*determinate* look” or *eidos* of “Cube”.⁷⁸ In (1), the fulfillment of the intention was itself sensible (the maximal clarity and distinctness of the sensed side), whereas in (2) even the clearest sensible presentation of several cubes will fail to present *the eidos*, “Cube”, for at best such a presentation will give limited *aspects* of Cube. Hence, the cubes collectively as well as individually adumbrate or intimate the *noetic*, i.e., purely intelligible *eidos*, “Cube”, which, for its part, can only be perceived by the intellect looking *through* the sensible phenomenality of the particulars at their common form.

These two cases from *DR* offer numerous points of comparison with Plato. First, the individual cube in (1) offers a sensible analogy for the intelligible *eidos*. In Greek, “*eidos*” originally means “look” of a thing, its “bodily appearance”.⁷⁹ In this sense, each presentation (*Darstellung*) of the cube’s sides is a quasi-*eidos*, both insofar as it is in its own right a “look” of the side (not of the cube), and insofar as it intimates a fully evident vision—the side’s *true* look.⁸⁰ Further, if we take the “presented side” as a (quasi-) *eidos*, then our example of the particular cube also illustrates the possibility of nested and implicated *eidē*. For the *eidos*-as-“side” (of a cube; of a polyhedron) necessarily points beyond itself to a tacitly co-intended look of this cube as a whole. And if it co-intends this *cube*, then it necessarily also co-intends five other sides, since a cube is a “hexahedron”.⁸¹ Considering only these looks, it is clear that even in contemplating a *sensible* object, one can move (quasi-) eidetically, that is, by regarding looks as distinct from immediate sensation.

Although the phenomenological interest in (1) is chiefly in the sensible object and sense perception, yet we have already gone beyond them—unavoidably

78 *DR*: 125.

79 Cf. Cooper’s note to *Euthyphro*, in Plato (2002), 6, n. 7. Both ἰδέα (form, semblance, kind, nature [*LSJ*]) and εἶδος (that which is seen: form, shape; class, kind [*LSJ*]) connote sight. ἰδέα comes from the verb ἰδεῖν, the aorist of ὁράω, “to see, look”; εἶδος from the verb *εἶδω, “to see”. *εἶδω never appears in the present tense, for which instead the verb ὁράω is used. Interestingly, the perfect of *εἶδω is οἶδα, which has the *present* sense of “to know”; i.e., “I have seen” (= “I have found out” [Smyth 1984, 434, #1946]) means, “I know” (cf. Buck 1949, 1041). All three roots, i.e., ἰδ-, εἶδ-, οἶδ-, share the same root, √ἰδ- (Smyth 1984, 700; cf. esp. Smyth 1984, 169, #529.2 and 170, #529.6; and 217, #794), linking them to Latin “*videō* [I see]” (Smyth 1984, 217, #794); German *Witz*, *weise*, *wissen* (equivalent to English “wit”, “wise”, and “know”; and Sanskrit *vid-*, *vēda* (know); *vindāmi* (find); *vēda* (sacred book) (Lewis and Short 1879, “*vidēō*”). Cf. my (2004), 16, n. 2, and esp. Brommer (1940).

80 *DR*: 106, l. 24.

81 Cf. *DR*: 106, l. 9.

so, because this phenomenological investigation takes place with the *epoché* in force, and thus operates at a transcendental level. Thus, we might say that at the basic sensible level, there is no reason why the full-on view of *L* should be considered “the best”⁸² of all possible views of *L*, or why these should be compared to each other at all: *L*₁ is perfectly *L*₁; *L*₂ is fully *L*₂, and so forth. But indeed when it “fully” faces us as a square, we are satisfied that this “look” cannot be further amplified, that it is has reached its maximal givenness. This is only possible in light of the implicit reference of the side to the *noēma*, “Cube”, i.e., the meaning or *Sinn*,⁸³ e.g., “symmetrical three-dimensional shape, either solid or hollow, contained by six equal *squares*”.⁸⁴ By the same token, when we said that the quasi-*eidos* implied this sensible cube, and thus five other (quasi-) *eidē*, these co-intentions implicit even in the simple sense perception of “this side *L*” are only possible via the intelligible *noēma*, “Cube”. Thus, too, an implicit task is given to the phenomenological inquirer: the bringing of this *noēma* itself to explicit givenness as an *eidos* in the true phenomenological sense. The determinate view definitively concludes the task.⁸⁵

This basic idea—of a noematic form implicitly governing the coherence of sense experience—has two Platonic antecedents that I will now discuss. The first is the image of the “summoners” in *Republic* VII. After the Allegory of the Cave, Socrates describes a series of studies by which a soul may be led from naive immersion in the sensible world to a view of the forms, or, correlatively, from mathematical analysis to dialectic, the power of eidetic discernment. In the first stage, arithmetic, Plato explains how the study of number and calculation⁸⁶ leads towards understanding (*noēsis*) and being (*ousia*).⁸⁷ He argues that some sense perceptions (*aisthēseis*) do not “summon *noēsis* to look into them, because the judgment of sense perception is itself *adequate*”, whereas others “encourage it in every way to look into them, because sense perception seems to produce no sound result”.⁸⁸ Instead of a cube, he asks us to consider the little finger, the ring finger, and the middle finger.⁸⁹ *Qua* fingers, they are all alike, so that the mere sight of them does not compel the soul to ask *noēsis* what a finger is.⁹⁰ But regarding their size with respect to each other

82 DR: 106, l. 16.

83 *Ideen* I, §§87, ff.

84 *Oxford American Dictionary*.

85 Cf. esp. DR: 130.

86 *Rep.* 522c.

87 *Rep.* 523a1, 3.

88 *Rep.* 523a10–b4.

89 *Rep.* 523c.

90 *Rep.* 523d4–5; cf. *EU*: 381.

(i.e., their arithmetical relation), sight (*opsis*) does not see them “adequately”⁹¹ (nor do the other senses “reveal such things clearly and adequately”),⁹² for the ring finger will appear to sight as both big and small at the same time: big and small, as *apparent*, are “mixed up together”.⁹³ Hence, *noēsis* is “compelled to see the big and the small not as mixed up together, but as separate—the opposite way from sight”; only in this way can the soul “clear” the matter up.⁹⁴ Just such an inner tension is furnished by “the one”, since “we see the same thing to be both one and an unlimited number at the same time”;⁹⁵ thus the study of number, arithmetic, will lead us to truth by forcing us to consider “numbers themselves, never permitting anyone to propose for discussion numbers attached to visible or tangible bodies”.⁹⁶

Here Plato presents the mixing of big and small or of one and many as an essential feature of sensibility. But precisely the recognition of these opposites as mixed indicates their antecedent distinction, which, however, for now remains unclear and inadequate. Because they can never be separated while immanent⁹⁷ in the sensible, *noēsis* is summoned and roused into action. The mixed big-and-small adumbrates the distinct *eidē*, “Big” and “Small”; the mixed one-and-many foreshadows the distinct *eidē*, “One” and “Many”. Sight *per se* may not care to investigate this mixture further, for as we saw in the case of the cube, *L*₁ is perfectly, adequately *L*₁; only *noēsis*, the intellectual discernment of meaning, is aroused by the noematic conflict in what was given to *opsis*.

A similar example may be found in the *Phaedo*’s Recollection Argument. According to Socrates, the phenomenon called “recollection” occurs when one “sees or hears or in some other way perceives one thing and not only knows that thing but also thinks of another thing of which the knowledge is not the same but different”: the seen thing reminds me of something else, which latter I “recollect”.⁹⁸ Now, when recollection is “occasioned by similar things” (say, when I recollect Simmias himself on seeing a picture of Simmias),⁹⁹ we necessarily “consider whether the similarity to that which one recollects is deficient in any respect or complete”.¹⁰⁰ Like Husserl, Socrates states: “there is something

91 *Rep.* 523e3–4.

92 *Rep.* 523e7.

93 *Rep.* 524c4.

94 *Rep.* 524c6–8.

95 *Rep.* 525a4–5.

96 *Rep.* 525d5–8.

97 Again, see Cooper, Plato (2002), 6, n. 7. In the Socratic dialogues, the mixture that requires separation is of virtue and vice, e.g., of piety and impiety at *Eu.* 8ab; cf. *Prot.* 357ab.

98 *Ph.* 73c.

99 *Ph.* 73e.

100 *Ph.* 74a.

that is equal”—“not a stick equal to a stick or a stone to a stone, or anything of that [sensible] kind, but something else beyond all these, the Equal itself”.¹⁰¹ This *eidos*, the Equal, Socrates and Simmias agree, “we know”. Yet where and when can we have gained our knowledge of it? From the sensible equal *things*, like sticks and stones.¹⁰² But how—by abstraction? If by abstraction we mean a “stripping-away” of impertinent *qualia*, then this would be impossible, since it would mean finding something more in the sensible equals than was actually given.¹⁰³ “Something more” because the sensible equals do not “appear [*phainetai*] to us to be equal in the same sense as what is Equal itself”: instead, there is “some deficiency in their being such as the Equal”.¹⁰⁴ The deficiency (and hence difference from the Equal) mentioned is that the sensible equal things will “sometimes, while remaining the same, appear to one [observer] to be equal and to another to be unequal”, whereas “the equals themselves ... [have never] appeared unequal, [nor] Equality to be Inequality”.¹⁰⁵ However:

whenever someone, on seeing something, realizes that that which he now sees *wants to be like* some other reality but falls short and cannot be like that other since it is inferior, [then] we agree that the one who thinks this must have prior knowledge of that to which he says it is like, but deficiently so.¹⁰⁶

Since this discrepancy is evident in comparing our sensation of the equal things and the Equal itself, we must “possess knowledge of the Equal before that time when we first saw the equal objects and realized that all these objects *strive to be like* the Equal but are deficient in this”.¹⁰⁷

It is crucial to note that Socrates nevertheless argues that our eidetic conception “derives from seeing or touching or some other sense perception, and cannot come into our mind in any other way”.¹⁰⁸ It is our sense perceptions themselves that “make us realize that all that we perceive through them is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it”.¹⁰⁹ This role ascribed to the senses amounts to the “summoning” of our previous example. For the

¹⁰¹ *Ph.* 74a.

¹⁰² *Ph.* 74c.

¹⁰³ Cf. esp. *CM*: 10–11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ph.* 74d5–7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ph.* 74b7–c3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ph.* 74de; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ *Ph.* 74e–75a; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ *Ph.* 75a.

¹⁰⁹ *Ph.* 75b.

deficiency that they bring to light lies again in a mixing of opposites in the self-same phenomenon, i.e., its tendency to appear to one as equal and to another as unequal. Again, the mere fact that you and I might disagree that these two sticks here are equal shows that we are implicitly referring them to a common standard, which, however, is not itself seen: the *eidos*, “Equality”.

This much of the Recollection Argument, then, like the image of the summoners, offers striking parallels to our earlier discussion of adumbration in Husserl. Instead of understanding an *eidos* as simply an empirical abstraction from a set of similar things, both Husserl and Plato paint a much more complex picture. First, like Husserl, Plato brackets the natural attitude. In the *Republic*, the mathematical sciences are introduced for a purpose identical to Husserl’s *epoché*, namely to free the mind from its immersion in the phenomenal, and thus to separate out the intelligible sense from its sensible substrate. The Recollection Argument, too, effectively takes place within brackets, for the sensible things are not considered immediately, but from a transcendental perspective in which the being of the *eidē* is taken for granted.¹¹⁰ Second, for both philosophers, a similar structure appears once the phenomenon is held at arm’s length. Bracketed, the phenomenon appears as not simply existing, but quivering with an inner tension. It appears-to-be both *X* and not-*X*; hence only similar to *X*; and because merely similar, also dissimilar. Either way, the flickering of (not-) *X* adumbrates *X*, that is, it summons *nous* to recollect *X* in a clear, evident, distinct, and determinate way, as an *eidos*, itself by itself. This is the *X* that the quasi-*X*’s, in adumbrating it, were all along wanting or striving to be. Conversely, once the *eidos* of *X* is noetically grasped, it appears in fullness and purity: it is perfectly and only *X*. Thus it reveals itself as the standard with respect to which its sensible instantiations seemed defective, i.e., mere adumbrations. It is therefore not a wan abstraction, a bloodless ghost of the full sensible phenomenon, but rather the constitutive, genetic, transcendental condition of possibility of such being as a sensible phenomenon had to begin with. It is its life-giving *logos*.

The above passage from *Ding und Raum* has elucidated the *eidos* as an invariant common to many particulars; as a *norm* that the particulars somehow fall short of, but just in so doing point towards or “*meinen*” that norm; and as somehow a *Sinn* or “sense” that lends the particular whatever being it may be said to have, namely as something *of* such and such a kind, *as* which it may be seen or understood. However, our passage has not yet made clear just what this common, sense-giving norm *is*. Indeed, although both Husserl and Plato are at pains to distinguish sensible sight from intellectual insight, their

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ph.* 74a.

very examples and analogies obscure that same distinction, for in both cases, the object of intellection is described as a kind of pattern or paradigm against which the sensible particulars are compared and found wanting, but which nonetheless imperfectly shimmers through all of them. It is in the second text under examination, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, that we find an account of variation that, despite the continued role of imagination,¹¹¹ offers a clearer account of eidetic insight as the logical—i.e., purely noetic—grasp of a prescriptive, generative rule of particulars (or so I shall argue). In other words, beginning with the factual particulars provisionally more perspicuous “to us”, we ascend to explicit perception of the rule according to which those same particulars were constituted—in short, to the transcendental, *a priori* ground of their being.

Now since, as we have seen, abstraction takes the facts for granted, it can only lead to *a posteriori* concepts, and therefore cannot be the method for bringing the *eidē* to immediate self-evidence.¹¹² Instead, Husserl describes a method of “free variation”: beginning with an arbitrarily chosen empirical individual,¹¹³ release it from the presumption of reality, treating it solely as a phenomenological example or instance.¹¹⁴ It can now serve as the starting point for “generating an open, infinite manifold of variants”.¹¹⁵ Transmute this paradigm (*Vorbild*) in the imagination, generating ever new, similar images (*Bilder*) as imaginary copies (*Nachbilder*; *Phantasiebilder*).¹¹⁶ Holding this imaginary manifold before the mind, you will necessarily see “a unity [*Einheit*]” running through it, “an invariant, preserved as the *necessary universal form*”, without which anything like the initially chosen “example of its kind would be utterly unthinkable”.¹¹⁷ This is the “absolutely [self-] identical content [*Gehalt*]” the “invariable ‘What’”: the “universal essence”, “the *eidōs*, the *ἰδέα* in the Platonic sense, but taken purely and free of all metaphysical interpretations”.¹¹⁸ In short, we move from an arbitrary paradigm (*Vorbild*) through arbitrarily varied copies (*Nachbilder*) in order to elicit an invariant *eidōs*. This *eidōs*, then, reveals itself as the true transcendental principle (*Urbild*), *F*, of which the initial example

111 Sokolowski rightly points to imagination's key role in eidetic variation, but I disagree that imagination *per se* allows us to overcome the contingency of specific instances (Sokolowski 1974, 66). Imagination allows us to exercise and so discover the generative, *rational* rule of the instances—in this case, the specific, *arbitrarily imagined f*. For the same reason, I diverge from Ricoeur (1967), 91.

112 Cf. *EU*: 417.

113 *EU*: 411. Cf. esp. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.4 73b33, ff.

114 *EU*: 421. This is tantamount to subjecting it to the phenomenological reduction.

115 *EU*: 411.

116 *EU*: 411.

117 *EU*: 411.

118 *EU*: 411; emphasis added.

now is seen as having all along been a likeness (*Abbild*)¹¹⁹ (namely as one member, f_o , of the sequence of variations, " $f_1, f_2, f_3, \dots$ ").¹²⁰

Now this method of eidetic sighting is not immediately perspicuous, despite Husserl's plain description. One might especially wonder how seeing an invariant unity running through variations differs from collecting similarities from a set of particular facts to form an empirical concept: are they not both examples of what Husserl calls "*hen epi pollōn* [one over many]"? To address this question, let me point to two peculiarities of the method of variation: the choice of a *single* example, and the *arbitrary* variation on that example. By varying my chosen example and only it, all the variations are guaranteed to have a common source (the example). No collection of many facts—e.g., fishes—can offer this guarantee; precisely because the sought-for *eidos*, the "rule of fishness", is as yet hidden, such collections would only be putatively similar.

The uniqueness of the initial example is connected with the arbitrariness of the method. Because no concept can be abstracted from a single empirical individual, the empirical concept-maker is at the mercy of the contingent collection of several putatively similar individuals. In Husserl's method, by contrast, the initial example is itself arbitrarily chosen,¹²¹ and then arbitrarily varied.¹²² Thus, at every stage *I* am in control. Why is this important? Because it means that as I vary f_o (but always as an "*F*!"), I am myself implicitly *applying* the necessary rule of *F*-ness in constituting $f_1, f_2, f_3, \dots$. This differs fundamentally from empirical concept formation, in which no generative rule is applied, only a conjunction of contingent features derived. But as we saw, on Husserl's definition the *eidos* prescribes rules.¹²³ Through free variation, I come to see just this constant, invariant rule at work in the variations *I* have produced, recognizing

119 Cf. Natorp (1994), 144–5.

120 This is my elaboration of Husserl's discussion at *EU*: 413–4.

121 *EU*: 410.

122 *EU*: 411–13. Husserl also calls this imaginary manipulation, "*fingieren*" (e.g., *CM*, §34: 74; *EU*: 413–4). We must not be misled into thinking of the *fingierte f*'s as "fictional"; "*fingō*" here does mean "imagine", but in the following semantic context: "to form mentally, represent in thought, *imagine*, conceive, think", etc. (Lewis 1995). Since on my account, Husserl wants to stress spontaneous activity, the terms, "fiction" and "imagination", suggest a *lawlessness* of eidetic thinking and so betray Husserl's intention. The following sentence indicates the idea of scientificity towards which philosophy must strive: "Nirgend ist ja wissenschaftliches Lernen ein passives Aufnehmen geistesfremder Stoffe, überall beruht es auf *Selbsttätigkeit*, auf einem inneren *Nacherzeugen* der von den schöpferischen Geistern gewonnenen *Vernunftseinsichten*, nach Gründen und Folgen" Husserl (1911), 290; emphasis added; cf. esp. *Proleg.*, §66: 240, and *Ideen* I, §23, "Spontaneität der Ideation, Wesen und Fiktum."

123 *EU*: 409–10.

it to be necessary, and therefore *a priori*. In other words, it is in the products¹²⁴ of my own free activity¹²⁵ that I can “see”, reconstruct—indeed, *recollect*—the transcendental rule I must have been applying in producing variations of the example *as an example of F-ness*, and not of, say, *G-ness*. What I see in recollecting, recognizing¹²⁶ the rule just is the *eidos*, the essence, *F*, of *any and all f*’s, real or imaginary, actual or possible. These latter, Husserl writes, “stand in a relation of ‘participation’—*to speak Platonically* [*platonisch gesprochen*]”.¹²⁷

4 *Eidos, logos, Law*

So, for both Husserl and Plato, *eidos* turns out not to be separate in the Platonistic sense, for it is always already operative in the particular *f*’s very existence as what it is—but this constitutive function is only manifest after the *eidos* has been sighted “itself by itself” by the *psychē* “itself by itself”, or, in Husserlian terms, by the ego solely as rationality (*Logos*).¹²⁸ The *eidos* remains the true “look” of the thing, viz., what I always already was seeing along with its sensible (dis)guise. And it was this look that I all along “meant” in calling it by its name.¹²⁹ For both Husserl and Plato, the *eidos* is not peeled off the sensible particular like a dead husk. Rather, it is the living source, clearer and more knowable by nature, that generates the thing-as-a-particular-*f*.¹³⁰ Still, this sounds obscure. Is there a sober interpretation of: “logically grasping an essence that constitutes phenomena”? Yes—and Husserl himself looks to Plato for the very model of eidetic constitution.

Eidetic sighting, on my argument, boils down to “getting” the rule that makes a particular *f* an *f*, i.e., an instance of *F-ness*. We begin with a factual particular (even if only in the imagination) and ascend to its functional condition of possibility, and hence the condition of any possible *f* whatever. But as a generative rule, the *eidos F* is not itself a particular *f*. Rather, it is a *Vorbild* or paradigm, not

124 “Leistungen”, “achievements”; cf. e.g. *EP* II, 361.

125 Cf. Husserl (1970b), 302.

126 Cf. *CM*: 11: “Vermöge dieser Freiheit der Wiederverwirklichung der dabei als die eine und selbe bewußten Wahrheit ist sie ein bleibender Erwerb oder Besitz und heißt als das eine Erkenntnis.”

127 *EU*: 423; emphasis added.

128 Phenomenological science “knows that everything objective is subjectively constituted” (*EP* II, 362. *Logos*, reason, “*Vernunft*” is the name “for a universal, essential structure [*wesensmäßige Strukturform*] of transcendental subjectivity as such” (*CM*, §23: 58).

129 See *EP* II: 360.

130 Husserl’s view of their constitutive “activity” may profitably be compared to Natorp and Cassirer’s notions of conceptual “functions.” Cf. esp. Natorp (1994) and Cassirer (2000).

in the sense of a perfect instance of F (which would again be an f), but in the way “ F -ness” could name a rule for making f ’s (and so, for being-an- f), a rule to which the many f ’s then more or less closely conform. F is the f ’s “what-ness”, insofar as it is by conforming to the rule,¹³¹ F , that this or that f is an “ f ” at all. As I argued regarding the variations on a cube in *DR*, Husserl’s account has several implicit Platonic parallels; remarkably, Husserl explicitly draws our attention to these parallels in *EU*.

Nevertheless, it is this reference to “participation” that might again elicit doubts about my interpretation, for if I am correct about Husserl, it would mean that he must have thought that Plato’s “forms”, too, are correctly (i.e., non-metaphysically, non-mystically) interpreted as “rules”. Did Husserl in fact think so? And can Plato’s forms legitimately be so interpreted? In this section, I argue that such a “logical” interpretation of the *eidē* is not implausible and that, regardless of its plausibility, Husserl did in fact hold such a view about Plato’s forms. Thus, as I conclude in Section 5, Husserl understands his own *eidē* on a “functional” (as opposed to a “static”) model of the Platonic forms.

Although it may seem the *locus classicus* of metaphysical Platonism, it is in fact the *Republic* that provides a clue to the relation of *eidos* and *logos*, that is, of a “logical” interpretation of “eidetic vision”. In Section 3, we discussed the two lower segments of the Divided Line, *eikasia* and *pistis*, and how the prisoner’s turn is tantamount to the phenomenological-transcendental reduction. Let us now consider more closely the two upper, intelligible segments. The lower intelligible segment is *dianoia* (thought) and its correlative objects, viz., both visible diagrams and the intelligible (geometric) objects they mean to represent. The upper intelligible segment, and thus the highest of all the soul’s *pathēmata*, is *noēsis* (understanding) and its objects, the forms (*eidē*, *ideai*). Although *dianoia* explicitly intends non-visible mathematical objects, yet its essential dependence upon visible diagrams prevents it from attaining the absolute status of *noēsis*. By contrast, Plato directly equates *noēsis* with *Logos*,¹³² which “grasps” the eidetic section of the Line “by the power of dialectic”.¹³³

We can form a clearer idea of this understanding in two ways: first, by turning to Plato’s description of pure dialectic in the *Phaedrus*; second, by considering the accomplished dialectician’s activity upon returning to the cave.¹³⁴ In the *Phaedrus*, Plato calls dialectic¹³⁵ the power of collection and division,¹³⁶

¹³¹ But *not* to an (imagined) “pattern.”

¹³² Comparing *Rep.* 511b4 and 511d8.

¹³³ *Rep.* 511b3–4.

¹³⁴ *Rep.* 520.

¹³⁵ *Phdr.* 266c1.

¹³⁶ *Phdr.* 266b4.

i.e., first, “seeing together [*sunorōnta*] things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them into one kind [*idea*], so that by defining each thing we can make clear the subject of any instruction we wish to give”;¹³⁷ second, “cutting up each kind according to its species [*kat’eidē*] along its natural joints”.¹³⁸ In other words, it is by collecting and dividing eidetically that the former prisoner is now able to think clearly, distinctly, definitively.¹³⁹ In Husserlian terms, this amounts to the soul’s activity at the transcendental level, noetically perceiving the *eidos F* as its correlative *noēma*,¹⁴⁰ i.e., as the now definite, determinate meaning¹⁴¹ that grants phenomenal entities (*aisthēta*) individual being by demarking their natural joints. At the very same time, the soul becomes aware of its own generative insight or power by which those same logical joints had *already* been seen-into the manifold, thereby revealing it as an ontic matrix—an ordered world of things—in the first place.

Having dialectically contemplated the *eidē*, the now fully autonomous prisoner returns into the Husserlian “sphere of darkness [*Dunkelheitssphäre*]”¹⁴² of the cave, in order to free his former companions, as well. Although now he only speaks the idiom of the free thinker, dialectic, yet he must adapt it to his new goal: not to contemplate truth, but to refute falsehood. This mode of dialectic is the “*elenchus*”,¹⁴³ which elicits hidden contradictions in those beliefs, and usually ends in apparent failure, *aporia*, “perplexity”. Nevertheless, in such aporetic dialogues as *Euthyphro*, *Meno*, or *Hippias Major*, we can discern the conditions of the ideal knowledge to which Socrates’ interlocutors falsely lay claim.¹⁴⁴ That is, they believe at first that they know *what* “piety”, “virtue”, or

137 *Phdr.* 265d3–5.

138 *Phdr.* 265e1–2.

139 *Rep.* 511b8: *epi teleutēn*. Compare this to the notion of “adequacy” at *Rep.* 523b, ff. The point is that the eidetic vision of *noēsis* is adequate and “final” just because its objects, the eidetic *noēmata* are fully evident, that is, clear, distinct, and in this sense “defined”. Cf. *Rep.* 511c1–2.

140 Cf. esp. de Muralt (1974), 12, n. 1; 310–311.

141 Cf. esp. *DR*: 124–5.

142 *Ideen* I, 160.

143 A close connection between the *elenchus* and *epochē* comes into view. “*Elenchus*”, the Platonic mechanism by which the phenomenological reduction is effected, stems from the ancient Greek verb, “ἐλέγχω”, “to refute, to confute”; its modern form, “ελέγχω”, has the expanded sense of “to control, check, monitor, audit”. Now the root verb of “*epochē*”, “ἐπέχω”, not only means “to hold back” (as we saw above), but also “to keep in check” (*LSJ*). Thus, one might say that the *epochē* is the maintenance of the initial “check” imposed by the *elenchus*.

144 In the *Meno*’s slave-boy episode, the boy’s *aporia* is successfully overcome. As such, this mathematical passage provides a model for dialectical *Erschauung* of an *eidos*. For with Socrates’ *logical* help, the boy transcends the immediately sensible features of the

“the fine”, respectively, *are*. But when Socrates demands *logoi* or definitions, his interlocutors first respond by pointing to putative, particular cases of piety, virtue, and fineness. He then corrects them by asking for the one thread uniting all those particulars under a single head, what he calls their common *eidos* or *idea*.¹⁴⁵ Like Husserl, Socrates does not mean an “empirical universal” abstracted from a collection of pious or virtuous “things”, but rather “that *eidos* that makes [*hō(i)*] all pious actions pious”,¹⁴⁶ i.e., the “form [*idea*] itself”—“so that looking upon [*apoblepōn*] it and using it as a model [*paradeigmati*],” he may identify “any action of yours or another’s that is of that kind [as] pious” (*Eu.* 6e5–7). In other words, in seeking to “look upon” the *eidos* (“*F*”), Socrates has in mind exactly what Husserl calls the *apriori* norm determining (“prescribing rules to”) the particular cases (the *f*’s). Typically, his interlocutors manage to offer eidetic candidates, but each is shown in turn to be defective. Thus, they are compelled to advance beyond the first, ostensive definitions and enter the ideal realm; for example, a *logos* of piety like “that which all the gods love” is treated entirely on a logical, not a factual level. Nevertheless, these dialogues all end in *aporia* because the clear, distinct, and logically invariant *eidos* refuses to come into view—as a definition, i.e., a *logos*.

Our two examples make clear that successful sighting of an *eidos* by the power of *noēsis* may be rendered in purely rational, not “mystical” terms. The soul intends or “sees” an *eidos* by clearly and distinctly articulating the *logos*, the invariant rule of “*F*-ness” which “makes” the many *f*’s “*F*”. Seeing *F*-ness is nothing other than articulating this rule *oneself*, thus “rationalizing the transcendental, assigning [*zueignet*] its *Logos* to it”.¹⁴⁷ The *eidos* is exhausted by “its” *logos*: better, it just *is* its *logos*, and can be nothing more beyond it, “*an sich*”, since the maximally clear object of our maximally perspicacious faculty (*Logos, ratiō, Vernunft*) just *is* a true *logos* (“account”), and “*eidos*” just designates the intentional correlate of that faculty. This in turn means that no *eidos* can be grasped in isolation, but only as interwoven in a system of *eidē*.¹⁴⁸ for no *logos* can be stated “in a word”, but only ever as a determinate relation.¹⁴⁹ Put another way, the “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) enjoyed by reason can only ever take the form of a scientific system, what Husserl calls “absolute and rational

diagram, first to an “invisible” line (the δάμετρον, 85b4), and thence to the universal rule for constructing a square with an area twice as large as that of a given square.

145 *Eu.* 6de.

146 *Eu.* 6d10–11.

147 *EP* 11, 361; cf. esp. *EU*: 421.

148 *Soph.* 259e; “[D]as Reich der Verständnisszusammenhänge” (*EP* 11, 362).

149 In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates suggests as much after the attempt to define Piety directly has failed, and he proposes defining it instead in relation to Justice. Cf. *Soph.* 259e.

science—science in the full sense of the original idea as it appeared to *Plato*.¹⁵⁰ Thus, eidetic variation is the method of logical “re-collection” of the principle of the particulars; “getting” this principle is cognition (*Erkenntnis*);¹⁵¹ and the systematic nexus of such gotten, grasped cognitions is science (*Wissenschaft*), viz., in the form of an eidology. In this way, as the “science of science, and science of the object in complete universality, phenomenology perfectly realizes the ideal of the Platonic dialectic—as Husserl likes to emphasize.”¹⁵²

If the foregoing shows how Plato’s *eidē* may be plausibly read as transcendental-logical rules that “cause”—i.e., “constitute”—empirical particulars, it remains, finally, to show that Husserl in fact interpreted them in this way, and that this interpretation underlies his self-conception as a *Platoniker*. Fortunately, we have documentary evidence. In 1905 Husserl writes to Brentano of the “strong effect ... Lotze’s reinterpretation of Plato’s doctrine of ideas”¹⁵³ had on him in the early 1890s.¹⁵⁴ That

ingenious interpretation ignited a first bright light, and determined all [my] further studies. Already Lotze spoke of truths in themselves, and so it was a small step to transfer all of mathematics and a large part of traditional logic into the realm of ideality.¹⁵⁵

Husserl is here referring to Hermann Lotze’s argument that we fatally misconstrue Plato’s forms by attributing “being” to them.¹⁵⁶ Given Plato’s insistence that the *ideai* are what *really is*, Lotze’s thesis sounds absurd. But he argues as follows: what we affirm as being the case or “real [*wirklich*]” has three mutually irreducible senses: the being or existence (*Sein*) of things; the happening or coming-to-be (*Geschehen*) of events; and the “holding”, “obtaining”, or “being valid” (*Gelten*) of propositions, propositional contents, and their relations.¹⁵⁷ Now what Plato meant when he spoke of forms like Piety or Justice just is a conceptual content that has a certain “reality”, whether or not it is predicated of an actually existing thing. The “reality” of such content, then, as a *possible* predicate of a proposition, is validity (*Geltung*): it neither *exists* nor *occurs*, but rather *holds* of the subject of which it is predicated. Moreover, Lotze

¹⁵⁰ *EP* II, 362; emphasis in the original; cf. 363.

¹⁵¹ *CM*: II.

¹⁵² De Muralt (1974), 107. De Muralt refers to *FTL*, §98 a), 198.

¹⁵³ Husserl (1994a), 39.

¹⁵⁴ Husserl (2002), 414–5.

¹⁵⁵ Husserl (2002), 297.

¹⁵⁶ In Book III of Lotze’s *Logik*, entitled “Vom Erkennen [Concerning Knowledge].”

¹⁵⁷ Lotze (1989), 510–12; cf. Husserl (1974), 149; and Natorp (1994), 201.

argues, such contents stand in eternally valid, lawful relations towards each other, which system Plato regarded as the true object of science.¹⁵⁸ It was this type of reality, then, that Plato was forced, by the limitations of Greek, to call “*ontōs on*”—“being-ly being” (i.e., “really real”). Hence the tradition, from Aristotle on, unwittingly commits a category error in claiming that Plato attributes *thing-ly existence* (*Sein* or *Dasein*) to the forms, i.e., to ideal propositional contents.¹⁵⁹

In Lotze’s reading, then, Husserl discerns a “completely pure idealism or ‘Platonism’”, the basis of his earliest notion of “the *a priori* as essence and essential law [*Wesensgesetz*]”.¹⁶⁰ “Essence” just means: *Denkbedeutung* or conceptual content; “essential law”: the eternal, logical relations among these contents; and “*Einsehen*” or insight: the grasping of such essences and relations. It was Lotze’s interpretation that “first gave [Husserl] the courage to get serious about this, and thus treat *Ideen* as *Gegenstände* [i.e., real objects]”.¹⁶¹ Thus we see him assert in the *Logical Investigations* the “innate right of the eidetic ... against the spirit of the age that reacted so strongly against ‘Platonism’ and ‘Logicism’”.¹⁶² not metaphysical entities susceptible to the mystic gaze, but true meanings (equivalent to the Stoic *lekta*) of our words and their logical relations.¹⁶³

5 Conclusion

The main goal of this chapter was to explain in what Husserl’s paradoxical, self-declared Platonism consists. “Paradoxical”, because at the same time Husserl called himself a “*Platoniker*” and spoke “*platonisch*”, he also fended off accusations of “Platonism”, where this apparent insult carried “metaphysical” undertones of separate, intelligible substances, on the one hand, and “mystical” overtones of a super-sensible power of intellectual intuition, on the other. In short, this chapter’s twofold task was to explain (a) how Husserl could conceive of essences and our knowledge of them in a way that avoided these charges; and (b) how he must have interpreted Plato’s forms not just that these would be consistent with Husserl’s own *eidē*, but that he could reasonably consider himself as a philosopher in (such) a non-metaphysical Platonic mold.

¹⁵⁸ Lotze (1989), 509.

¹⁵⁹ Lotze (1989), 513.

¹⁶⁰ Husserl (2002), 415; cf. 416; also *EP* II: 360.

¹⁶¹ Husserl (2002), 430; cf. esp. Husserl (1974), 267.

¹⁶² *Ideen* I: 146.

¹⁶³ *EP* I: 18–19; 21.

I argued that Husserl's key insight is that what he calls *Wesen* (*eidē*) are *rules* (*Wesensgesetze*).¹⁶⁴ More precisely, an *eidōs* is a (single) universal rule, *F*, for generating an indefinite plurality of particular individual *f*'s, be these empirical or imaginary. Once this is admitted, the parallels between Husserlian and Platonic *eidē* fall into place. First, for both, the *eidē* are asymmetric norms of the particulars, though not in the sense of a pattern that the particular must "match", but of a single invariant rule to which they must conform. Such a rule is not itself an *f*-thing; it is an intelligible *logos*. Moreover, it is *prior* to and *constitutive* of the "visible" (or imaginable) *f*'s. As a *logos*, it is more clear and distinct to the mind than sub-eidetic, and especially sense-perceptual representations. Hence, insofar as "clarity" and "distinctness" simply connote intelligibility, so, too, "eidetic intuition [*Wesenserschauung*, etc.]" names the correlative *intellektion*—i.e., "understanding"—of those (*eidē*) *logoi*. Last, the system of these *logoi* by which the mind can move entirely among *eidē*, constitutes the science of sciences, both substantively—for its "subject" is the transcendental logic of all objectivity whatsoever—and formally, since in its rigor and necessity it sets the norm for all other positive sciences. Here again, Husserl's conception of phenomenology as a rigorous *a priori* science of *eidē* parallels Plato's conception of dialectical *noēsis* of the forms as providing the unhypothetical foundation of all other forms of inquiry.¹⁶⁵

Husserl's "Platonism" therefore operates with a functional interpretation of *eidē*, the kind of genetic idealism more closely associated with his friend and correspondent, Natorp.¹⁶⁶ But on Husserl's own telling, the inspiration for his peculiar interpretation and appropriation of Plato came from Lotze. Thus, for all three—Lotze, Natorp, Husserl—Plato was not a Platonist in the usual metaphysical-mystical sense, but it is Husserl alone, perhaps because of his focus on intentionality, who clings to the often ambiguous discourse of *Wesensschau*. If, however, the functional interpretation of his *eidē* is kept clearly in mind, then his phenomenology suggests a non-Platonistic theory of Platonic forms, viz., as ideal intentional correlates towards which other phases of intentionality "tend" by approximation, and which, conversely, rule those phases as norms—at least in the self-reflective life of the philosopher.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. esp. *LU* VI: 203 ("Zusatz").

¹⁶⁵ *Rep.* 510b–511c.

¹⁶⁶ See esp. Husserl (1994c).

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Heidegger's Ambiguous and Unfinished Confrontation with Plato

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Before the publication during the last couple of decades of his lecture courses and seminars, Heidegger's engagement with Plato appeared severely limited in scope, occasional and, judged by the absence of any detailed reading of Plato's texts, superficial. We had only the short essay, *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*,¹ and scattered discussions of Plato in other texts, mostly very brief and passing, though more substantial in the case of the discussion of the notions of art and beauty in *Republic* x and the *Phaedrus* from the 1936/37 Nietzsche lectures.² Judging from these texts, Heidegger's interpretation of Plato was simply his interpretation of the history of metaphysics as nihilism.³ Today, however, we can see that Heidegger's engagement with Plato was much more extensive, both in scope and in depth. He dedicated three entire lecture courses and two seminars to the detailed reading of Platonic dialogues and continually returned to Plato in his other courses and seminars. Furthermore, as I will attempt to show here through a general overview, the Plato that emerges from this intensive engagement is quite different from the Plato who lends his name to Heidegger's history of metaphysics as nihilism; indeed, the Plato that emerges proves *an exception* to this history.

1 The 1924/25 Course on Plato's *Sophist*

In the course on the *Sophist* from 1924/1925,⁴ we find a claim that captures how Heidegger understands Plato during this period, i.e., the claim "that the

1 *Platos Lehre von der Wahrheit* (*Plato's Doctrine of Truth* [PD]) (Heidegger, 1978).

2 *Nietzsche* I, 189–231.

3 This could not be stated more explicitly than it is in *Nietzsche* II: "Das Wesen des Nihilismus ist geschichtlich als die Metaphysik, die Metaphysik Platons ist nicht weniger nihilistisch als die Metaphysik Nietzsches. In jener bleibt das Wesen des Nihilismus nur verborgen, in dieser kommt es voll zum Erscheinen" (*Nietzsche* II: 343).

4 *Platon: Sophistes. Gesamtausgabe* [GA] 19. Translations have been taken from Heidegger (1997), trans. Rojcewicz and Schuwer, except where otherwise indicated.

question of λόγος resides in the central questions of Plato's thinking, indeed is even identical with them".⁵ After a phenomenological exhibition of the many appearances of the sophist through the initial set of divisions, the dialogue locates the entire existence of the sophist in *logos*.⁶ But Plato's positive appropriation of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* shows that for him *legein* also represents "a concern of human existence".⁷ Plato can be critical of *logos* in the *Phaedrus* itself and in the *Seventh Letter*⁸ only on account of its tendency to close itself upon itself, to become an end in itself, and thus what Heidegger calls *idle talk*.⁹ What is essential therefore to the genuine speaking that Plato calls dialectic is *seeing*.¹⁰ Here, of course, we encounter the philosopher.

The Eleatic Stranger's discussion of the purification of the soul in the context of the sixth definition of the sophist gives Heidegger the opportunity to identify what it is about human existence that makes *logos* and dialectic so essential to it. The ugliness of the soul lies in its disproportion, where this disproportion means that it misses its goal. But it can "miss" this goal, which turns out to be the truth, only if it by nature has a positive tendency towards it (ὁρμή). Heidegger therefore finds here a recognition of "Dasein's being-underway towards what is to be uncovered",¹¹ something he identifies with the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. Though Heidegger does not explicitly say so here, this is clearly the existential basis of dialectic understood as directed towards a seeing. Dialectic, in opposition to the omniscience claimed by the sophist, recognizes that

[t]he Being of man, insofar as it is oriented towards knowledge, is as such *underway*. Its uncovering of beings, ἐπίστασθαι, is never finished.¹²

When the Stranger describes the sophist as an imitator concerned only with appearances, Heidegger insists that this imitation is, no less than dialectic, a letting-be-seen, even if it lets things be seen in the way they are not. The problem the sophist presents for Plato is therefore the problem of falsehood understood as "a letting be seen that conceals" or "an opening up that

5 GA 19: 307.

6 GA 19: 301.

7 GA 19: 319; my trans.

8 GA 19: 320.

9 GA 19: 340.

10 Das ὄρᾶν; GA 19: 349; see also, 409, f.

11 GA 19: 369.

12 GA 19: 389.

occludes".¹³ But this in turn poses the problem of how we can speak of "what is not", given Plato's recognition of what Heidegger calls "intentionality", i.e., that every speaking (and also every seeing) is *of something*.¹⁴ Heidegger insists that Plato in confronting this problem breaks with tradition (Parmenides) in favor of the phenomena and that, if he brings this *Sachforschung* only so far, what is most positive in Plato is "what is not well-rounded, what is fragmentary, what remains underway".¹⁵

The important question is whether Plato's treatment of the problem involves a transformation in what Heidegger has characterized earlier in the course as the naive Greek conception of being. It was in the context of discussing the Stranger's characterization of productive *technē* as *agein eis tēn ousian* that Heidegger introduced a central thesis that guides his interpretation: interpreting the phrase as meaning "*to conduce into availability for everyday life*, in short: *to produce*";¹⁶ he found here an interpretation of being as "*to be produced*" (*Hergestelltsein*).¹⁷ This is for Heidegger an interpretation of being guided by the world of everyday use and concerns. His critique of the Greeks in general and of Plato in particular is that they naively identified this understanding of being with the meaning of "being as such",¹⁸ thereby making *poiēsis* their ontological guideline.¹⁹ Heidegger is aware that the Stranger goes on to speak of another form of *technē* that is acquisitive rather than productive and he even insists that the Greeks understood *logos* not as a relation of production, but rather as one of appropriating what is present at hand (*vorhanden*) in such a way that it can remain what it is.²⁰ He furthermore claims that this second *eidos* of *technē* has priority over the first in that production itself depends on appropriating what is already present at hand (i.e., the materials) as well as what is to be made (the form). But what this shows is that the understanding of being as being-produced ultimately takes us back to a conception of being as being-present. As Heidegger later claims, "... for the Greeks, Being means precisely to be present, to be in the present [*Anwesend-sein, Gegenwärtig-sein*]]."²¹ This naïveté in the conception of being clearly goes hand in hand with what Heidegger explicitly claims to be the naïveté of Plato's method: as a method of

13 GA 19: 407.

14 GA 19: 424, f.

15 GA 19: 412, f.; see also, 498.

16 GA 19: 269.

17 GA 19: 270.

18 GA 19: 270.

19 GA 19: 271.

20 GA 19: 275.

21 GA 19: 398.

dividing objects that are simply present at hand in the world, it is then applied to being itself and its structures, as if being were itself a thing present-at-hand.²²

However, in the Stranger's statement that "what is not" *must, in a way, be*, Heidegger finds "a modification of the meaning of Being in general".²³ Furthermore, Heidegger finds in Plato's critique of his predecessors for only counting beings and describing their properties the recognition of what he will call the "ontological difference".²⁴ What Plato opposes to the earlier accounts of "manifold beings" is "a manifold in Being itself".²⁵ Furthermore, what Plato seeks to show is that in every speaking of beings something else comes to expression: being itself.²⁶ If I say, "Two things are", what comes to speech is not only these two things, but *their being*. The affinity with Heidegger's own project is evident in his choice to begin *Being and Time* with the Stranger's question, "What do you intend to signify when you utter this word 'being'?"²⁷

Yet when he turns to the Stranger's criticism that Parmenides, in saying that "Being is one" is saying at least *two* things, Heidegger reveals what he considers to be the failure of Plato's ontological project:

... that even here a truly precise concept of Being versus beings has not been worked out, that instead this whole investigation still pursues its course in the indifference between the ontological and the ontic, not only here, but finally up to the very end of the dialogue, so that the genuine difficulty in understanding the dialogue lies in this abiding unclarity in Plato himself.²⁸

But what is the evidence of this? In turning to the *gigantomachia*,²⁹ Heidegger notes that both the giants and the gods simply identify the kind of being that they see as best corresponding to their conception of being without bringing this conception of being itself into question.³⁰ But what is true of the gods and giants is presumably not true of Plato, as the latter attempts through the Stranger precisely to overcome the opposition between them, by clarifying

22 GA 19: 287.

23 GA 19: 434.

24 GA 19: 439; see also, 441.

25 GA 19: 444; my trans.

26 GA 19: 446.

27 *Soph.* 244a4.

28 GA 19: 453; my trans.

29 *Soph.* 246, ff.

30 GA 19: 466.

the meaning of being. Indeed, the definition of being as *dunamis*³¹ that the Stranger makes both giants and gods accept is claimed by Heidegger to be neither provisional nor ad hominem, but a considered position that will only be further developed and defended in what follows.³² This is because the definition of being as the *dunamis* to act or be acted upon is the basis for the central importance given later to the notion of *koinōnia*,³³ introduced first as the *koinōnia* between the soul and beings and then as the *koinōnia* among beings themselves. That being is the capability of acting and being acted upon is interpreted as meaning that being is the capability of being-with.³⁴

But if we are tempted to think that we have here a conception of being that no longer understands it as *being-produced* and *presence*, Heidegger pre-empted such a conclusion by summarizing the outcome of the discussion in a way that interprets *dunamis* in Plato as just another form of being-present: “δύναμις, as the possibility of the co-presence with something, in short δύναμις κοινωνίας, or in a fuller determination, παρουσία δυνάμεως κοινωνίας, the presence-at-hand of the possibility of being with one another”.³⁵ Such an inversion of Plato’s definition appears arbitrary and indefensible.³⁶ Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this sentence captures the *violence* with which Heidegger imposes on Plato a conception of being as presence in the face of his own discovery, here and elsewhere, of another conception of being in Plato.

We might also want to see a recognition of the ontological difference in the Stranger’s argument that if both motion and rest *are*, being itself cannot be understood as either in motion or at rest. But it soon becomes clear that in the very idea of *koinōnia* or *sumploke*³⁷ Heidegger sees an erasure of this difference. The dialogue is concerned with understanding how being and not-being are combined in *logos*, how rest and motion are combined with being, how *logos* itself is combined with being; but Heidegger claims that none of these types of combination are fundamentally distinguished, so that even the relation between *logos* and being is understood as simply a relation between two beings.³⁸ In the argument that not everything can be combined with

31 *Soph.* 247d8.

32 For my own defense of the importance of this definition, see my (2011).

33 “[C]ommunion, association, partnership”.

34 *GA* 19: 479.

35 *GA* 19: 486; my emphasis and modified translation.

36 A flaw of Niall Keane’s otherwise perceptive and helpful analysis of Heidegger’s reading of the *Sophist* is that he simply follows Heidegger in reducing Plato’s *dunamis* of acting and suffering to the *being-present* of a *dunamis* of *being-present-together* (Keane 2010, 181–182).

37 “[I]ntertwining”.

38 *GA* 19: 508.

everything because motion and rest are completely opposed to one another, Heidegger sees a purely ontic understanding of motion and rest.³⁹ So Plato's dialectic fails to distinguish ontological speaking from ontic speaking,⁴⁰ presumably because it is still guided by a conception of being as presence. But Heidegger himself will claim that what is presupposed by Plato's dialectic is "that Being means nothing else than δύναμις, δύναμις of κοινῶνειν, being-possible as being-together".⁴¹ Does not this understanding of being as *dunamis* go beyond an understanding of being as presence? Heidegger's view seems to be that Plato did not fully understand his own insight.⁴²

If Heidegger sees the discussion of the five "greatest kinds" as seeking only to uncover what is already present in our speaking, he appears to think that this focus on seeing what is present prevents Plato from distinguishing the ontological structures he seeks to uncover from the purely ontic. Thus, in turning to the discussion of the *genos* of the "other" (*heteron*), Heidegger sees Plato as failing to keep distinct three different meanings: 1) "an other"; 2) "being-other-than"; 3) "otherness".⁴³ Heidegger indeed claims that "[w]hat is specifically Platonic in this ontological investigation is the confusion of these three meanings".⁴⁴

Is this borne out by the discussion of the five greatest kinds and by the account of not-being as being-other? In a way not, as Heidegger himself must recognize. For example, in claiming that motion is other (than anything other than itself), while yet being other than otherness, the Stranger is clearly acknowledging the differences between what is other, being-other and otherness itself.⁴⁵ Or what of the claim that motion *is* while being *other than being*? Or that being itself is other than motion? Are these not forms of what Heidegger would call "ontological speaking" that therefore make no sense interpreted ontically?⁴⁶ If we object that being is still treated here as just one kind among others, Heidegger himself is aware that the entire account of the *koinōnia* of kinds, as well as the account of being as being-other, is guided by that understanding of being as *dunamis* articulated by the Stranger earlier,⁴⁷

39 GA 19: 516; see also, 552, f.

40 GA 19: 530.

41 GA 19: 533; my trans.

42 GA 19: 533.

43 GA 19: 543.

44 GA 19: 543.

45 GA 19: 553.

46 Thus Alan Kim finds in the *Sophist* "a revision of the 'absolute' presence and fixity of the *eidē* in favor of the dynamics of interweaving" (Kim 2010, 259).

47 GA 19: 558.

an understanding that makes being nothing other and nothing less than the relation between all the kinds (the "*pros ti*"⁴⁸).

When the dialogue turns to the relation between *logos* and not-being, Heidegger reiterates that *logos* has been at the forefront throughout the entire dialogue. We must recall that the kinds of motion and rest were introduced into the discussion only because both were seen as required for knowing and therefore for *legein*.⁴⁹ If motion in particular plays such a central role in the discussion, that is because "the dialectical consideration properly focuses on the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$, and specifically on the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ in its basic comportment of $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu$, and further, on this $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu$ of the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ *qua* $\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$..."⁵⁰ As for *stasis*, it is presented as the character of the being disclosed by *logos*, that which makes knowledge possible.⁵¹ As such it refers to the "always-being" and should be translated as "permanence [*Ständigkeit*]".⁵² In this "*Ständigkeit*" Heidegger sees present, though unexpressed, "the phenomenon of time".⁵³ This last point is crucial, as it suggests that if being is interpreted as what is always present, this implicates a particular conception of time. But here it needs to be recalled, even if Heidegger himself does not, that being cannot be identified with this "permanence"; being is neither *kinēsis* nor *stasis* but the *power that enables* their interweaving, just as the being of the soul itself, and of the *legein* that defines its essence, is to be identified not with motion *per se*, but rather with the *power* to be moved or affected by what does not itself move or change.

We in any case see how the investigation into the essence of the sophist has illuminated the nature of *logos* and thereby the nature of the philosopher as well. Explaining how the sophist can produce false images in speech has shown that *logos* both is intentional (always *of* something) and has its essence in seeing. This in turn leads to the recognition of multiplicity in being itself when being is defined as the power of the interweaving that occurs both between the soul and beings and among beings themselves. Thereby the nature of the philosopher as *dialectician* is exhibited. Heidegger in conclusion thus reiterates a point he has made throughout the course: Plato never wrote a dialogue entitled *The Philosopher* because philosophy can be made transparent only on the way of concrete philosophizing, as it is in this examination of the sophist.⁵⁴

48 On the importance of this notion, see Le Moli (2002), 44–50.

49 GA 19: 578.

50 GA 19: 578.

51 GA 19: 579.

52 GA 19: 579.

53 GA 19: 579.

54 GA 19: 610; see also, 245.

In this intensive engagement with the *Sophist* we already witness a tension that will always characterize Heidegger's reading of Plato. On the one hand, he uncovers in Plato's text a profound affinity with his own attempt to think being in relation to our own being and thus dynamically (recall that in *Being and Time* Dasein's being comes to be characterized as a *being-possible*). On the other hand, Heidegger repeatedly attempts to confine Plato to the interpretation of being as presence, with all that follows from this: that being is the *object* of *logos*; that, given the disclosive character of *logos*, being is a *look* (*eidos*) that as such exists only for a seeing; that, as will be argued when Heidegger turns to a focus on truth as unconcealment, truth is reduced to the correspondence to such a look. While it is this latter reading of Plato that becomes in some sense Heidegger's official doctrine in the years that follow, the other reading continues to assert itself and, if anything, becomes even more radical.

2 The "Official" Interpretation of Plato

2.1 *Plato's Dialectic as "a Philosophical Embarrassment"*

Given the seemingly sympathetic treatment of Plato's dialectic in the interpretation of the *Sophist*, we might be surprised by Heidegger's claim in *Being and Time*, unexplained and unjustified there, that with the progress of ontology

"Dialectic", which was a genuine philosophical embarrassment, becomes superfluous. Aristotle "no longer has any understanding" of it, for this reason, that he places it on a more radical foundation and transcends it [*aufhob*].⁵⁵

Yet this is a claim already made and explained in the *Sophist* course itself, when Heidegger asserts: "The fact that Plato did not advance far enough so as ultimately to see beings themselves and in a certain sense to overcome dialectic is a deficiency included in his own dialectical procedure ...".⁵⁶ He therefore proceeds to defend Aristotle's critique of dialectic in exactly the same terms used in *Being and Time*.⁵⁷ As the context makes clear, the problem with dialectic in Heidegger's view is that while it seeks to break through what is spoken in everyday discourse in the attempt to see the things themselves, it fails to achieve this. In its attempt to break through *Gerede* it in the end does no more

55 SZ: 25.

56 GA 19: 198.

57 GA 19: 199.

than oppose what is said to something else that is said, thus remaining on the level of beings as merely expressed in speech, and failing to let them show themselves as they are. If dialectic attempts to be phenomenology, it fails so badly as to become the greatest enemy of phenomenology.

This view of dialectic indeed explains why the *Sophist* course begins with a lengthy discussion of *alētheuein* in Aristotle, with the justification that only from this starting point can we understand what Plato's dialectic is attempting to achieve *and why it fails*. The opposition between dialectic and phenomenology will remain a constant in Heidegger's official position vis-à-vis Plato up until the final seminar in Zähringen, in which he will repeat and endorse the characterization of dialectic in *Being and Time* as a sign of "philosophical embarrassment";⁵⁸ dialectic is the confession of a failure to address the things themselves. Yet it is hard to square with this critique the characterization of dialectic we already saw emerge from Heidegger's detailed reading of the *Sophist*, according to which its "underway" character is only a reflection of our own being as always on the way towards the truth, and the central importance dialectic grants *logos* is due to its not understanding *logos* as assertion, but rather as our way of being in the world. A clear indication of this tension is that in his critiques of Plato's dialectic Heidegger makes no effort to distinguish it from Hegel's,⁵⁹ while in the *Sophist* course he insists on their incompatibility.⁶⁰

2.2 *Truth is Transformed in Plato from Unconcealment to Correctness*

It is clear from the above analysis that for Heidegger in 1924/25 the conception of truth operative in Plato's dialectic is truth as *unconcealment*. This changes during the 1930s. First it is striking that at this period Plato's thought becomes completely identified with a doctrine on the nature of truth. In the 1931–32 course, *On the Essence of Truth*, a course devoted to the interpretation of Plato's Cave Allegory and the *Theaetetus*, Heidegger asserts that Plato's philosophy "is indeed nothing but a battle between these two conceptions of truth,"⁶¹ an assertion that is repeated in the 1933/34 version of the same course.⁶² This is something never so much as hinted at during the 1920s. Furthermore, this is the only interpretation of Plato that Heidegger chose to present to the world during his lifetime with the publication of *Plato's Doctrine of Truth* in 1942, an essay he claims to be the final distillation of the courses of the 1930s.

⁵⁸ Heidegger (1977), 138.

⁵⁹ See my (2009), 264–267.

⁶⁰ GA 19: 449.

⁶¹ *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*. GA 34: 46.

⁶² *Sein und Wahrheit*. GA 36/37: 124, 127.

In *Plato's Doctrine*, Plato's philosophy is not only a battle between a conception of truth as unconcealment and a conception of truth as correctness, but the *victory* of the latter over the former. The thesis is that in Plato, truth as unconcealment is ultimately subordinated to, and even identified with, the "Idea" it makes possible, which Heidegger insists on interpreting according to its etymology as a "look" that exists for a seeing: "So is the unconcealed conceived in advance and only as what is perceived in the perceiving of the *ἰδέα*, as what is known (*γινωσκόμενον*) in knowing (*γινώσκειν*)".⁶³ Truth accordingly ceases to be unconcealment and becomes only the correspondence of one's "vision" to the "look" of the Idea:

So from this priority of the *ἰδέα* and the *ἰδεῖν* over *ἀλήθεια* arises a transformation in the essence of truth. Truth becomes *ὀρθότης*, correctness of perceiving and speaking.⁶⁴

With this reduction of truth to correctness thus goes hand in hand an identification of being with the Idea and thus with a being, the highest being (we have here, according to Heidegger, the beginning of onto-theology); furthermore, the implied conception of being that makes this reduction possible is being as *presence*.

I have argued at length elsewhere⁶⁵ that this interpretation of Plato is not only a serious misinterpretation of the text of the *Republic* (in the Sun Analogy, rather than truth being subordinate to the Ideas, the exact opposite occurs and there is no "yoking" of truth under the Ideas), but is even shockingly reductive vis-à-vis the courses from which it supposedly stems and in which we

63 PD: 223. Thomas Sheehan gives a very different translation: "This unhidden is grasped antecedently and by itself as that which is apprehended in apprehending the *ἰδέα*, as that which is known (*γινωσκόμενον*) in the act of knowing (*γινώσκειν*)" (Heidegger 1998, 173). But even if this translation is grammatically possible, the unhidden is precisely *not* grasped *by itself* when it is apprehended in the *ἰδέα*. And the "only" here is key. In the 1935 *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [Introduction to Metaphysics], Heidegger argues that the interpretation of being as *ἰδέα* is Greek because it arises from, rather than contradicting, the experience of being as *φύσις*; the problem is when this consequence is elevated to the first position, when the *ἰδέα* imposes itself as the only [*die einzige*] and definitive interpretation of being (GA 40: 190, f.). So the question is not whether Plato interpreted the objects of thought as *εἶδη*; that is undeniable, though it leaves open the difficult question of what he understood by *εἶδη* (see the detailed discussion in Le Moli 2002, 65–117). The question is rather if Plato reduced the meaning of being and truth to the *ἰδέα*; the 1942 essay argues he did, *whereas Heidegger's own detailed readings of the dialogues show he did not*.

64 PD: 228.

65 See Ch. 3 of my (2009). See also Ralkowski (2009), Ch. 4.

find Heidegger himself recognizing the dominant role a conception of truth as unconcealment continues to play in Plato. Furthermore, this interpretation seems incompatible with the conception of being that emerges on Heidegger's own reading of the *Sophist*; even once we allow for Heidegger's attempt to transform Plato's *dunamis* into a kind of presence, we are still far from the gazing at static looks to which Plato's thought is reduced here.⁶⁶

2.2.1 Plato as the Beginning of the End

In the 1942 official position on Plato, the Idea of the Good is given special importance. What is emphasized is not its transcendence "beyond being", but rather its being both an Idea itself and the highest Idea in the sense of the condition of possibility for the other Ideas. Here Heidegger sees an anticipation of Nietzsche's understanding of "value" as a condition for life and thus the beginning of nihilism, which allows him to call Nietzsche the "most unbridled of Platonists".⁶⁷ In being reduced to what is merely present, being must be *given value*. Such value, of course, is relative to the human being who posits it: so we have in Plato the beginning of metaphysics as humanism.

I call this the "official" interpretation of Plato because it is the only one Heidegger sought to publish during his lifetime and because his posthumously published lecture courses and seminars show that Heidegger had a very different view of Plato when he was actively engaged in the reading of his dialogues. If we saw this already in the case of the *Sophist* course, we will, surprisingly and ironically, see it even more in seminars from the 1930s.

2.3 *The Parmenides Seminar of 1930/31: Plato's Own Critique of Being as Eidos and Time as Presence*

Perhaps the most striking example of this alternative reading is a seminar Heidegger gave on Plato's *Parmenides* from 1930 to 1931. Heidegger's own dense and cryptic notes for this seminar have been made available only recently.⁶⁸ Heidegger sees the first half of the dialogue as resulting in "a seismic shock for philosophy [*Erschütterung der Philosophie*]," but one in which genuine questions arise and with which genuine philosophizing can begin.⁶⁹ What gets

66 Thus Alan Kim rightly asks how it is possible "given Heidegger's own detailed analysis of the interweaving of forms in the *Sophist*, that he could then in 'Platos Lehre' again ascribe to Plato the same dogmatic view of the *ideai* that the *Sophist* had overcome?" (Kim 2010, 281).

67 PD: 227.

68 GA 83: 25–37. Translations are my own.

69 GA 83: 28.

shaken up is first the unity of the *eidos*.⁷⁰ Parmenides' arguments show how different characterizations of the *eidos* destroy its unity, either by parceling it out among the things that "participate" in it, or by generating an infinite regress of *eidē*. Secondly, the very εἶδος-character of the one is undermined,⁷¹ as is most clearly shown by the fourth aporia in which the transcendence of the *eidos* in the sense of its separation from particulars is shown to make it unknowable. What is shaken up, in sum, is that kind of philosophy that identifies being with *eidos* and thereby what Heidegger describes as "*The constant leveling to what is present at hand*".⁷² The unity of being must therefore be interpreted anew from the ground up.⁷³ This is the task of the γυμνάσιον of the second half which Heidegger insists is "*not a test and preliminary, superficial training for something else, but is itself philosophizing—taking-up*".⁷⁴

Before turning to this second half, it is worth noting that in Heidegger's description of the γυμνάσιον we recognize his positive account of Plato's dialectic in the *Sophist* course. The "gymnastic" here has nothing to do with learning logical rules; it is not a question of logic at all.⁷⁵ Furthermore, it is opposed to "the universal-vulgar chattering-away and talking past" (*Drauflos und Darüber-weg-reden*).⁷⁶ It is rather a matter of gaining the right disposition and forming an inner way of seeing. Furthermore, what this "gymnastic" dialectic will bring to view is nothing less than the most hidden structure of being. To this Heidegger contrasts the dialectic of the first half that identifies being with εἶδος, that interprets the ontological difference as a logical-eidetic difference,⁷⁷ that understands self-sameness as constant presence and disposability (*Beständige Anwesenheit, Verfügbarkeit*).⁷⁸ But then we have here, even more explicitly than in the *Sophist*, a transformation of this naive, ontic dialectic into a very different ontological training.

For Heidegger, the unity of the two halves of the dialogue is not even a question, since the project of the entire dialogue is to reconceive the unity of being in a way that makes it at the same time in itself *many*.⁷⁹ He locates the turning point in what is usually considered only an addendum to the first and sec-

⁷⁰ GA 83: 30–31.

⁷¹ GA 83: 31.

⁷² GA 83: 31.

⁷³ GA 83: 31.

⁷⁴ GA 83: 31.

⁷⁵ GA 83: 31.

⁷⁶ GA 83: 31.

⁷⁷ GA 83: 28.

⁷⁸ GA 83: 29.

⁷⁹ Heidegger sees Aristotle's articulation of the many ways in which being is said as a development of Plato's insight that the One is Many, though he leaves open the question of

ond hypotheses: the discussion of the ἐξάφνης.⁸⁰ The thesis is stated without ambiguity in Heidegger's notes: "In ἐξάφνης genuine ἕνωσις of the ἓν [genuine becoming one of the one] and thereby of all wholes".⁸¹ How does Heidegger arrive at such a startling conclusion? The arguments that precede the so-called addendum have attributed to the one a host of contradictory properties, thus achieving what Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue⁸² considered cause for wonder (θαυμάζεσθαι): that the one should be in itself multiple.⁸³ But how are we to understand this? We must locate the unity in the "change", μεταβολή, between these opposite properties, a "change" that cannot as such take up "time" in the normal sense of the word.

Recall that in the *Sophist* the challenge was to understand being as including both motion and rest and therefore as itself neither in motion nor at rest. This is the challenge taken up in the *Parmenides*. What goes from being at rest to being in motion, or from being in motion to being at rest, cannot be either at rest or in motion at the moment of transition between the two. Furthermore, this transition cannot occur *in time* since there can be no time at which something is both at rest and in motion (or neither). The transition therefore can take place neither while at rest nor while in motion nor at any time.⁸⁴ Indeed, we could therefore say that it simply *cannot take place*; it is, as Parmenides says, *atopos*. This "out-of-place" and "out-of-time" is what Parmenides calls ἐξάφνης, the "all-of-a-sudden," and uses to explain all "change": not only that between motion and rest, but also that between coming-to-be and perishing, between similarity and dissimilarity, and even between unity and plurality themselves.⁸⁵ It is only on account of the ἐξάφνης that these contradictory properties can be attributed to the one, in which case the unity of the one turns out to be the "change" that occurs in the ἐξάφνης.

This, as we have seen, is precisely Heidegger's conclusion. What might appear an addendum is on this view rather the culmination and explanation of the two preceding hypotheses: only the "change" in the ἐξάφνης can explain how both motion and rest can be attributed to the one⁸⁶ in the second hypothesis, i.e., by explaining the "transition" between them, and how motion and

who influenced whom (*Aristoteles*, *Metaphysik* Θ 1–3: *Vom Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft*, 2nd ed., GA 33 (Vittorio Klostermann, 1990): 28.

80 Adv., "suddenly".

81 GA 83: 33.

82 *Prm.* 129bc.

83 GA 83: 26.

84 *Prm.* 156cd.

85 *Prm.* 157a.

86 *Prm.* 145e–146a.

rest can be denied to the one⁸⁷ in the first hypothesis, i.e., by explaining how the transition cannot be itself motion or rest. The same applies to all the other opposites denied to the one in the first hypothesis and attributed to it in the second.

Far from the one being understood here as an *eidos* separate from the plurality of things and itself existing as something present-at-hand, the one is being thought here as “change” or “transition” that as such is inherently relational or plural and that as such is not at all *present in time*. Thus after the sentence quoted above, Heidegger continues:

When being is in itself *relational* [*verhältnishaft*] (like nothing [*nichtig*]), then is it itself πολλά. But then the difference—as χωρισμός—between ἓν (εἶδος) and πολλά ὄντα no longer holds at all, but only that between πολλά and πολλά. What does this mean? Nothing less than: beings should not and can never as *beings* in themselves be set over against being, they are as πολλά already ἓν. I.e., the whole problem of the ontological difference, of the distinction between being and beings, is to be determined anew, i.e., *to be taken up for once as a question!* But how? Does εἶδος continue to play a role here? *Where* in general is the dimension for this difference? Μεταβολή—ἐξάιφνης.⁸⁸

Note how according to what Heidegger says here, the second half of the *Parmenides* raises the question of the ontological difference precisely by rendering it problematic. No longer can we, like the young Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue, simply oppose beings and being interpreted as *eidos* through some kind of separation (χωρισμός). The plurality of being itself forces us to rethink its relation to the plurality of beings.

Is this breakthrough in the thinking of being confined to the second half of the *Parmenides*? Heidegger must be well aware that it is not.⁸⁹ As he himself saw in 1924/25, the characterization of being as in itself relational and as such inseparable from not-being is to be found in the *Sophist* in the guise of the definition of being as *dunamis*. There are two cryptic references in Heidegger's notes for the *Parmenides* seminar to the δύναμις κοινωνίας,⁹⁰ but it is the

87 *Prm.* 138b–139b.

88 *GA* 83: 33.

89 Even if in the 1932 seminar, *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie: Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides* (*GA* 35: 148), Heidegger refers to the *Parmenides* as the dialogue in which Plato “die Seinsfrage am radikalsten und weitesten entfaltet”.

90 *GA* 83: 31, 36.

following note that, while not explicitly referring to the *Sophist*, best enables us to see the connection between the two dialogues:

When the ἔν ὄν ἐν ἑστίν, then is *it* not this and that, then does *not-being* belong to its *being*. [This is presumably a reference to the first hypothesis, 141d–e.] When it therefore in its being *is not*, is nothing-like [*nichtig*], then *is* it precisely this and that. [A reference to the fifth hypothesis, i.e., if the one is not, then it must have being (161e–162b)?] When therefore ὄν in its being *is and is not*, then *umschlägig*.⁹¹

This last word, impossible to translate, is clearly derived from a literal rendering of μεταβολή as *Umschlag*. The suggestion, then, is that the notion of μεταβολή in the *Parmenides* explains what was concluded in the *Sophist*: not only that not-being is, but also that being *is not*. The connection is even clearer when Heidegger goes on to suggest that this μεταβολή introduces both appearance and untruth into being itself:

When it *is* in this way, then is it in its essence *simultaneously not* (*zugleich nicht*), i.e., it 'is' also *appearance* [*der Schein*]. To being belongs truth and untruth.⁹²

This of course is the major outcome of the *Sophist* and the thinking in the second part of the *Parmenides* is moving, on this reading, in the same direction.

With the word “*zugleich*” in the last citation we can no longer avoid addressing the fact that the radical rethinking of the unity of being in the second part of the *Parmenides* goes along with a radical rethinking of the nature of *time*. The “one being” “at the same time” *is and is not*. But what the introduction of the ἐξαιφνης shows us is that this “at-the-same-time” is *no time*. It shows us that we cannot understand being in its unity-plurality, its being-seeming, without thinking *beyond* the time defined by the distinction between past, present, and future. Here we should recall that the first hypothesis characterizes the one as not in time,⁹³ while the second hypothesis characterizes the one as partaking of time past, present and future.⁹⁴ The question is how we can think the one as “at once” not in time and in time. The “at once” that enables us to think this is the ἐξαιφνης. It is on account of the ἐξαιφνης that there can

91 GA 83: 34.

92 GA 83: 34.

93 Prm. 141ad.

94 Prm. 155d.

be “change”, e.g., from being at rest to being in motion, and therefore any distinction between past, present and future, but it therefore cannot itself be in time. If not in the time that (to use Aristotle’s definition) is the number of both motion and rest, however, the *ἐξάφνης* is still a temporal concept that therefore arguably points to a radically different kind of temporality.

Unfortunately, Heidegger’s notes for the seminar at this point become very fragmentary and barely comprehensible. Fortunately, we have Herbert Marcuse’s detailed transcript of the seminar as preserved in the Marcuse Archive in Frankfurt am Main, which not only provides much detail lacking from Heidegger’s own sketchy notes but that also picks up from where the latter break off, i.e., reproducing the conclusion of the winter semester and the whole of the summer semester.⁹⁵ Surprisingly, the editor of *GA* 83 appears not to have consulted this Marcuse transcript since he claims that the continuation of the seminar in the summer semester—for which Marcuse dates and documents with detailed notes six classes—never took place!⁹⁶

But to return to the point at hand, the transcript makes Heidegger’s conclusion perfectly clear:

But the *exaiphnēs*, we say, is *time* itself. Time is *not* eternity, but rather the instant [*Augenblick*].⁹⁷

The full significance of this claim emerges when Heidegger, later in the transcript (i.e., in that supposedly non-existent summer semester continuation), is reported to have claimed that the whole of Western metaphysics can be summed up thus: what is not in time must therefore be *eternal*.⁹⁸ With the notion of time as *exaiphnēs* rather than eternity, then, Plato’s *Parmenides* stands outside the metaphysical tradition. The transcript therefore has Heidegger reaching the following remarkable conclusion: “The third approach of the ‘Parmenides’ represents the deepest point to which Western metaphysics was ever able to penetrate. It is the most radical advance into the problem

95 The document in question is catalogued as “0020.01”, with the title, “Heidegger, Plato: Parmenides. Seminar Wintersemester 30–31”. See Regehly (1991), 181, 196.

96 *GA* 83: 668. The editor, Mark Michalski, also speculates that Heidegger’s notes are as incomplete as they are because, according to the records of the University of Freiburg, he shared the seminar with the classical philologist Wolfgang Schadewaldt (*GA* 83: 668). But whatever Schadewaldt’s role, it is most clearly Heidegger’s voice we hear throughout the Marcuse transcript, which moreover solely lists Heidegger as the leader of the seminar.

97 Marcuse Archive 0020.01: 15. To my knowledge the only other discussion of this transcript, and indeed of this extraordinarily important seminar, is Jussi Backman (Backman 2007, 400). Backman of course did not have Heidegger’s own notes made available only in 2012.

98 Marcuse Archive 0020.01: 18.

of being and time, an advance that afterwards (by Aristotle) was not taken up, but rather closed off".⁹⁹

Heidegger had to see here in Plato an important, indeed perhaps the only, companion in his own never-completed attempts to think being and time together.¹⁰⁰ It is here even more impossible than in the *Sophist* course to impose upon Plato a conception of being as presence and Heidegger does not even attempt it. In the unequivocal words from the unpublished transcript, instead of static presence, "Being is *metabolē*, *metabolē* is *exaiphnēs*".¹⁰¹ Furthermore, rather than claiming that Plato reduces being to the *eidos* and thereby transforms truth into the mere correctness of a "look", Heidegger interprets the entire and unifying project of the *Parmenides* to be the *shake-up* of such a philosophy. Rather than being the thinker of the χωρισμός who in "separating" being from beings reduces the former to a being and thereby inaugurates the onto-theology condemned to forget the question of being, Plato here is the thinker who explicitly takes up the difference between being and beings *as a problem*. Finally, as to the nature of truth in particular, Heidegger, after a breathtaking analysis of all the hypotheses of the dialogue's second half to demonstrate the central role played by the third, concludes the seminar by noting that the dialogue ends with the word ἀληθέστατος ('most true') after having dealt with the necessity of semblance. He takes Plato's point to be the following: "What is most true [das Wahrste] is the result of taking up semblance and not-being into truth and being".¹⁰² In addition, he explains that the reason why the dialogue does not end with a 'result' is that "the essence of philosophical truth consists in the developing and seeing-through of a hypothesis; therefore the necessity of training, of *gymnasial*"¹⁰³ What this amounts to, of course, is a complete repudiation of both the title and thesis of Heidegger's famous essay.

99 Marcuse Archive 0020.01: 15.

100 With extraordinary perceptiveness, R. Petkovšek notes the affinity between authentic temporality in Heidegger and Plato's notion of the *exaiphnēs* while lamenting that Heidegger did not pay attention to this notion as analyzed in the *Parmenides* (Petkovšek 2004, 306). Petkovšek of course wrote his book well before the publication of Heidegger's seminar on the *Parmenides*. His discussion of this affinity (see especially 306–8) is still the best available, especially since he notes that Plato's notion of the *exaiphnēs* is not confined to the *Parmenides*, but plays a crucial role in the *Republic* and other dialogues, most obviously, the *Symposium*: see my (2013), 483–488.

101 Marcuse Archive 0020.01: 13. Contrast this with what Heidegger presents as Parmenides' own "Zeitsatz über das Sein": "Sein ist Gegenwart allzumal" (GA 35: 165).

102 0020.01: 24.

103 0020.01: 24.

2.4 *The Theaetetus Interpretation of 1931–32: The Erōs of Being and Future-directed Temporality*

Heidegger's interest in the dialogue *Theaetetus* goes back at least to the 1926 course *The Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*.¹⁰⁴ When he returns to it in the 1931–32 course *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger focuses on the central section, 184–187, because he sees there not only the turning point of the dialogue, but both the beginning and the ground of the whole of Western Philosophy.¹⁰⁵ This is where Socrates argues that the soul relates to being and truth not through the senses but through itself. Here I can note only the key points Heidegger deduces from Socrates' argument.¹⁰⁶

(i) In *Theaetetus*' description of the soul's relation to being as *eporegesthai*,¹⁰⁷ Heidegger finds the idea that our relation to being is *erōs*¹⁰⁸ or what he calls *Seinserstrebnis*.¹⁰⁹ What this means, as Heidegger shows through an extensive analysis, is that being is both "had" and not "had", or that it is "had" only as sought and therefore *in not being possessed*. As striven for, furthermore, being is not an object, but rather refers back to the being of the striver, being the "measure and law" for his way of comporting himself towards beings.¹¹⁰ It is on the basis of the soul's striving for being that beings can be present at all, that they can be "had" as there before one.¹¹¹ So we have here an interpretation of what Heidegger in the *Sophist* lectures called the "*Unterwegssein des Dasein zum Unverdeckten*"¹¹² that sees it as a relation neither of producing nor of making-present.¹¹³

(ii) As Heidegger infers from another of *Theaetetus*' statements, this understanding of our relation to being in terms of *erōs* involves a conception of time that prioritizes the dimension of the future instead of the present. *Theaetetus* describes the soul as in itself reckoning with "what has been and what is present with regard to what will be [*πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα*]." ¹¹⁴ Heidegger's comment is revealing:

¹⁰⁴ *Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie*. GA 22: 109–39.

¹⁰⁵ GA 34: 182; also 327–8.

¹⁰⁶ For a more detailed interpretation, see Ch. 4 of my (2009).

¹⁰⁷ *Tht.* 186a4–5.

¹⁰⁸ GA 34: 216.

¹⁰⁹ GA 34: 203.

¹¹⁰ GA 34: 216.

¹¹¹ GA 34: 230–1.

¹¹² GA 34: 369.

¹¹³ See Le Moli (2002), 110, though his reading does not give sufficient emphasis to the notion of *Seinserstrebnis*.

¹¹⁴ *Tht.* 186a11–b1.

To what extent there is already in Plato an explicit and genuine insight into the relation of being to time cannot be objectively determined. It is enough that these relations of present and past, and indeed with a *pre-eminent* relation to the *future*, already come into view here.¹¹⁵

But has not Heidegger himself provided us with a way of objectively determining that Plato had this original and explicit insight into the relation between being and time: namely, reading the *Parmenides*? Furthermore, far from being the faint passing glimmer that Heidegger claims it to be,¹¹⁶ the insight expressed in Theaetetus' statement is inseparable from what is expressed in his other statement: to understand our relation to being as *striving* is *necessarily* to understand being within a temporal horizon that gives prominence to the future rather than the present, since striving is essentially future-directed. It is important to note that the future cannot be identified in this context with the not-yet-present. As Heidegger notes, being as striven-for is not possessed, not present-at-hand, but *had* precisely as not possessed and in such a way that it refers back to the being of the striver. So the future of being as striven-for forms here an inseparable unity with the presence of beings as had and with our own having-being (thrownness). In short, the striving-for-being is characterized by a future-directed temporality in which the future is not simply a part of time, but rather determines the whole of time. Rather than the future being what is not-yet-present, the present is what is stretched out towards the future while the past is that back towards which the future refers us. We therefore have again reason to deny that Plato labors under the naive conception of time attributed to the Greeks by Heidegger. Indeed, Heidegger himself observes that the insight with regard to time and being at *Theaetetus* 186a11–b1 is *completely lost with Aristotle*.¹¹⁷

(iii) Though Heidegger turns to the *Theaetetus* to show how truth as unconcealment undergoes in Plato a transformation into correctness, something he expects to find in the account of falsehood, he instead encounters, in the

¹¹⁵ GA 34: 227; my translation.

¹¹⁶ GA 34: 226.

¹¹⁷ GA 34: 227. Nevertheless, by 1938/39 Heidegger goes in the opposite direction, deciding that there is no insight here on Plato's part into the relation of being to time and even dismissing his earlier reading as a *Gemeinplatz*. Quoting *Tht.* 186a10–b1, he comments: "hier ist das einfache Rechnen mit dem Seienden gemeint, hier ist gerade vorgebildet das Rechenhafte des λόγος und der späteren *ratio*, hier ist in keiner Weise auf das Zeitwesen des Seins, sondern auf die Innerzeitigkeit des Seienden hingewiesen ..." (GA 67: 131). In reducing what is said in this passage to a mere "reckoning with beings", Heidegger appears to have forgotten entirely the notion of *Seinserstrebnis* that, according to his own analysis several years earlier, forms the real basis of Plato's future-oriented conception of time.

characterization of the soul as not being able to get hold of *truth* without getting hold of *being*,¹¹⁸ an understanding of truth as the unconcealment of being: “Unconcealment is in itself unconcealment of beings; indeed, we saw that with the Greeks the word ‘unconcealment’ even means for the most part nothing other than beings in their unconcealment”.¹¹⁹

In the *Sophist* lecture, Heidegger suggested in passing that Platonic *erōs* is to be understood as “der Drang zum Sein selbst”,¹²⁰ but only here does he develop the implications of this for the understanding of both being and time. The resulting reading of Plato is one clearly at odds with the “official” interpretation he will present in *Plato’s Doctrine of Truth*, which is presumably why the *Theaetetus* is not even mentioned in that publication, and why, even in the 1933–34 version of the course, the discussion of this dialogue is severely curtailed and the detailed analysis of *Seinserstrebnis* completely disappears.

2.5 *The Phaedrus Seminar of 1932: Dasein as Erotic Relation to Being and to Others*

But so drawn is Heidegger to the notion of *erōs* in Plato at this point that he makes it his central focus in an immediately following seminar on the *Phaedrus*. This seminar, only recently published,¹²¹ is of great importance, as it is here that Heidegger’s appropriation of Plato is arguably at its most intense, sympathetic and productive.¹²² Heidegger’s central thesis, which seeks to explain the unity of the dialogue, often seen as disjointed between a first half focused on *erōs* and a second half focused on the art of speaking, is that for Plato all genuine speaking is grounded in *erōs*, so that “the essence of every λόγος is the ‘λόγος ἐρωτικός’”.¹²³ In defending this thesis Heidegger begins his reading with the account of what it means to “speak well [*kalōs*]” in the dialogue’s second half. If to speak well is to speak with “art” (*entechnon*) according to Socrates, Heidegger insists that *technē* does not here refer to *production* as opposed to *praxis*, but has the broadest possible sense as a way of unconcealing.¹²⁴ Furthermore, *technē* is here not simply a kind of knowing,

118 *Tht.* 186c7.

119 *GA* 34: 241.

120 *GA* 34: 315.

121 *GA* 83. The student protocols are indispensable, as Heidegger’s own notes are often very unclear. Both will be cited in the following discussion. Translations are my own.

122 For a more detailed reading, see my article, “I Have to Live in Eros’: Heidegger’s 1932 Seminar on Plato’s *Phaedrus*,” *Epoché* 19(2) (Spring 2015): 217–240.

123 *GA* 83: 313.

124 *GA* 83: 103.

but a way of being, a way of comporting ourselves:¹²⁵ one in which we disclose beings to ourselves and to others in a determinate way. When this “art” of speaking turns out to be *dialectic*, Heidegger therefore insists that dialectic is not a technique, but rather a way of being, in and through which the soul is led into a certain disclosure of being.

“Speaking well” not only involves this ability to unconceal—even deception, as Socrates argues, requires knowing the truth—but it is also a *leading of the soul*: ψυχαγωγία. Here the erotic character of dialectic begins to emerge and this, for Heidegger, in two senses: in *dialegesthai* the soul seeks to break through to the truth—but with others. Heidegger thus understands the “dia” in *dialegesthai* to have two senses:

So to lead the soul means to bring the other to the point that he in “conversing-together” [*Miteinanderreden*] (διαλέγεσθαι) looks upon beings [*auf das Seiende blickt*], speaks his way towards beings [*hindurchredet zum Seienden*]; for the διά in δια-λέγεσθαι appears to express not only being-with-one-another [*Miteinander*], but also to signify speaking as a means towards the break-through [*Durchgang*] to truth.¹²⁶

If Heidegger now turns back to the first half of the dialogue, it is to show that both senses of “dia”, i.e., the attempt to break through to the truth of being and the conversing with others, are grounded in *erōs*.

Even this brief synopsis shows that, while the account of dialectic here is similar to that in 1924/25, most significantly in its basic assumption that “λέγειν is an essential moment of human comportment”,¹²⁷ the significant difference in 1932 is the emphasis given to *erōs* as the foundation of all genuine speaking and thus of dialectic, along with the related emphasis given to *dialogue*, to “conversing-together” as an essential dimension of dialectic. Significant in this regard is Heidegger’s repeated observation that the *erōs* that is the theme of the conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus is enacted in this very conversation.¹²⁸ Socrates does not seek to disclose being for himself, but rather to lead Phaedrus with him into the unconcealment of being. There is no monologue here, not even when Socrates gives a speech.

Indeed, when Heidegger finally turns to Socrates’ great speech in praise of *Erōs*, he insists that this speech is not only about *erōs*, but is an act of *erōs*.

¹²⁵ GA 83: 333.

¹²⁶ GA 83: 332–333.

¹²⁷ GA 83: 133.

¹²⁸ See GA 83: 89, 138, 315–318.

When Socrates characterizes dialectic as involving collection and division, if we understand the latter as simply a technique of defining and making conceptual distinctions, then we must conclude that Socrates' first speech, in which he follows Lysias in denouncing love, is as technically correct, as "well-spoken," as the second speech: it divides the soul into its different parts, places *erōs* in the irrational desiderative part, and then distinguishes it from other kinds of desire by defining its object (beauty). This then raises the question of why a speech that proceeds so correctly so completely misses the phenomenon.¹²⁹ Heidegger's suggestion is surprising: "Did perhaps the first speech miss the essence of *erōs* precisely because *erōs* was missing in it?"¹³⁰

When Heidegger turns to Socrates' second speech, he identifies two ways in which it is methodologically superior to the first: it takes the phenomenon of *erōs* back to its *origin* in madness,¹³¹ and it *unifies* the phenomenon through an account of the being of the soul.¹³² What Heidegger wants us to see, and what he takes the content of Socrates' speech to show, is that this quest for the original unity *is erōs itself*. This is the sense in which Socrates' second speech, unlike the first, is an *erotic* discourse on *erōs*. If, then, this seeking of the original unity, and not some purely conceptual defining and classifying, is the true character of the "collecting" Socrates identifies with dialectic,¹³³ then the ground of this collecting, and thus of dialectic itself, turns out to be nothing other than *erōs*.

When Heidegger turns to Socrates' account of the soul, he identifies a tension between the characterization of the soul in the proof of immortality as "not leaving itself", which suggests a conception of being as constant self-presence,¹³⁴ and, on the other hand, its characterization as the *epimeleia*¹³⁵ for what is soulless, which suggests a conception of being as *care* ("*Seiendheit ist Sorge*").¹³⁶ But what most clearly emerges from Socrates' speech, of course, is the soul's erotic relation to being. When Heidegger insists that all genuine speaking is grounded in this "caring", erotic being of the soul, it is as if Socrates' speech were simply thematizing the conditions of its own possibility. This conclusion is clearly summarized in the following passage:

129 GA 83: 347, 115.

130 GA 83: 347.

131 GA 83: 349.

132 GA 83: 355.

133 GA 83: 349.

134 GA 83: 121.

135 "[C]are, attention".

136 GA 83: 359.

λέγειν, the expository grasping of what is, grounded in ἐρᾶσθαι, in the seeing-caring understanding of being and not-being; ἐρᾶσθαι fulfilling itself in λέγειν. They bring each other forth and in their coming forth are nothing other than the emergence of the origin [*der Aufgang des Anfangs*].¹³⁷

The reciprocal character of the relation is important here: speaking does not limp behind *erōs*, but is rather the way in which the *erōs* for being realizes itself. If speaking can become genuine only in *erōs*, *erōs* can be fulfilled only in speaking.

Far from forgetting, however, the other erotic dimension of dialectic, i.e., *psychagōgia*, Heidegger emphasizes the importance of the second part of the speech in which Socrates describes how the lover awakens a “counter-love” in the beloved.¹³⁸ The striving for the unity of being is carried out in conversation with others. The *erōs* for being is realized in the *erōs* for others. What Heidegger insists on—and this is the key point—is that the dialogical relationship of love and counter-love between two people is grounded in that pre-love (*Vor-liebe*) that is “the striving of *Dasein* towards the being of beings”.¹³⁹ What is thus revealed to be the ground of all speaking and all speaking-with is the same *Seinserstrebnis* encountered in Heidegger’s reading of the *Theaetetus*, which he already there identified with *erōs*.¹⁴⁰ Heidegger therefore asserts: “Being is the ἔν towards which all love and counter-love is directed. The sustaining, hidden ground of love and counter-love is being”.¹⁴¹ The reference to being as the ἔν cannot help but remind us of the *Parmenides* and the transformation from Socrates’ first speech to the second, as Heidegger sees it, indeed does appear to parallel the transformation he noted in that dialogue from the ontic, logical-eidetic dialectic of the first half, to the “gymnastic” dialectic of the second half, which sought precisely to press forward to the true unity of being. The suggestion now, however, is that what makes this transformation possible is nothing other than *erōs*.

While no critiques of Plato are allowed to emerge in this sympathetic reading of the *Phaedrus*, this is not to say Heidegger did not have them. In some loose notes published with the notes for the seminar and of uncertain date, there are suggestions that Platonic *erōs* turns being and truth into an *ideal* and thus ultimately subjects them to the Idea.¹⁴² But the striking thing is that none

¹³⁷ GA 83: 361.

¹³⁸ See *Phdr.* 255de.

¹³⁹ GA 83: 368.

¹⁴⁰ GA 83: 216.

¹⁴¹ GA 83: 368.

¹⁴² See GA 83: 147, f.

of these claims are defended in the seminar itself and indeed seem hard to reconcile with its results. It is almost as if Heidegger is insisting to himself that whatever Plato's insights to the contrary, it is inevitable that eventually being will be reduced to the static Idea and truth to correctness. The thesis of *Plato's Doctrine of Truth* continues to reassert itself.

2.6 *Unfinished Business with Plato in the Later Years*

The *other* Plato, however, continued to be a presence in Heidegger's later thought. In 1942, Heidegger gave a course on Parmenides in which he interprets the Myth of Er from the *Republic*.¹⁴³ This will be his last detailed commentary on a Platonic text. What is surprising given the proximity to the publication of *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, and particularly revealing of the schizophrenia in Heidegger's approach to Plato, is that in this course he ascribes the transformation of truth into correctness not to Plato, but to the *Romans*. It is their interpretation of the *pseudos* as *falsum*, as what is unstable or liable to fall, that leads to the identification of truth with *rectum*, what stands upright and rules.¹⁴⁴ If Heidegger here still claims that the beginning of such a transformation can be traced back to Plato, he now significantly adds that it begins "above all through the thinking of Aristotle".¹⁴⁵ This is an extraordinary thing to say, given that the title of the essay Heidegger had just published was *not* "*Aristotle's Doctrine of Truth*". But the explanation for this sudden change in perspective is not far to seek: it is there in the reading of the Myth of Er that Heidegger offers later in the course. For what he finds in this myth is not only an experience of truth as unconcealment that in no way subjects it to a conception of truth as correctness; much more importantly and surprisingly, what he finds is an attempt to think and bring to language the concealment at the heart of unconcealment. The myth has as a central theme the $\lambda\acute{\eta}\theta\eta\iota$ in $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$. This is highly significant, because in Heidegger's view, what brings about the transformation in the essence of truth is the failure to think this concealment: it is this failure that allows truth to be identified with what is only and fully manifest, and thus to be "yoked" under the brightness of the Idea. Furthermore, Heidegger recognizes the significance of Plato's choice of a *myth*: only in mythic discourse, and certainly not in scientific propositions, can the experience of $\lambda\acute{\eta}\theta\eta\iota$ be brought to language. Plato is therefore here as far as can be from seeing truth and untruth as properties of the proposition. Not only that, but Heidegger's reading shows Plato to be at least a major exception to his claim in 1931–32 that

¹⁴³ *Parmenides*. GA 54.

¹⁴⁴ GA 54: 57–71.

¹⁴⁵ GA 54: 72.

in the Greeks “concealment, *λήθη*, is worn down to a mere not-being-present, being-away, absence”.¹⁴⁶ In brief, Plato’s myth of *λήθη* at the end of the *Republic* requires us to reject “Plato’s doctrine of truth”.

While Heidegger in later years continued to propagate the image of Plato presented in the 1942 essay, that is, continued to use the name “Plato” as a kind of shorthand for everything wrong with Western metaphysics, privately he recognized that this image was at best a gross simplification and that there was much in Plato’s dialogues at odds with it. The best evidence for this is a book never written. In correspondence during the 1950s with both Hannah Arendt and his wife Elfride, Heidegger expressed his intention to write a book on Plato. That he repeatedly promised such a book to Elfride suggests it was a serious intention.¹⁴⁷ That he described it to Arendt as requiring him to work through the *Sophist* lectures again suggests that the book would be a fundamental reconsideration of Plato’s thought, and the kind of careful reading of his dialogues that we find in the 1924/25 course.¹⁴⁸ One thing seems certain: the book in content would have looked much more like the seminars on the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedrus* than like the essay on Plato’s doctrine of truth. Indeed, in one extraordinary letter to Elfride in which Heidegger asserts most emphatically his determination to write a book on Plato and dedicate it to her, he expresses the importance of *erōs* to him, how it is the central and most powerful motivating force for his thinking.¹⁴⁹ It is presumably not the metaphysician Plato with his gaze fixed on stable and eternally present Ideas that would have featured in Heidegger’s book, but the erotic Plato, the Plato capable of *thinking* plurality, change and concealment in the very heart of being. We of course cannot be certain, since the book was never written; but this very fact suggests what an effort of rereading, reexamination and philosophical dialogue such a book would have demanded.

The rereading of Plato Heidegger was pursuing in these later years did have one very important outcome: the final retraction of the thesis that Plato understood being in terms of *poiēsis*. This thesis goes back to the 1920s and was encountered in the *Sophist* course when Heidegger attributes to the Greeks a conception of being as *Hergestelltsein*. The thesis is reasserted in the 1962 seminar on *Time and Being*¹⁵⁰ in relation to Aristotle, but is now retracted in relation to Plato: “In contrast, it was established [*wurde geltend gemacht*]

146 GA 34: 142.

147 Heidegger (2008), 187, 212, 241, 244.

148 Heidegger and Arendt (1998), 125, 148.

149 Heidegger (2008), 213.

150 *Zeit und Sein* (Heidegger 1969a).

that, although in his late works—especially in the *Laws*—the productive character of νοῦς already comes increasingly to the forefront, the defining relation between presencing [*Anwesen*] and what presences [*Anwesendem*] is in Plato not understood as ποιήσις.¹⁵¹ One might conclude that Heidegger is here still attributing to Plato a conception of being as presence, but this would be a mistake. The conception Heidegger in 1924/25 attributes to Plato is one that, *understanding being from the perspective of production*, identifies beings with what-is-present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) and being with constant, abiding presence. Here what is being attributed to Plato is an understanding of the relation between being and beings as one between *presencing* and *what presences*, both understood verbally, dynamically: language that Heidegger during this period appropriates for his own attempt to think being.¹⁵² The seminar proceeds to refer to, without explicitly citing, what Socrates says at *Phaedo* 100de to support the conclusion that for Plato Beauty itself does not *produce* beautiful things, but is rather *with* them (παρουσία). Being does not produce beings—an understanding of the relation that would turn being into *a* being, even if the highest being (onto-theology!). Instead, being is the presencing of what comes to presence and thus is found *with* what comes to presence. How we are to understand this “with” is of course the question with which Heidegger himself struggled since *Being and Time*. In denying now that Plato interprets this “with” in terms of production, as does Aristotle and all subsequent metaphysics, Heidegger appears to recognize in him a fellow thinker of this “with”. Indeed, we recognize here the Plato Heidegger already encountered in the 1930/31 seminar: a Plato who thinks beyond the χωρισμός, who does not set beings over against being, but attempts to think beings and being together in their mutual unity and plurality.

2.7 Conclusion

We must conclude that the official doctrine on Plato as synonymous with all that needs to be overcome in Western Metaphysics¹⁵³ was at odds with the Plato that emerged from Heidegger’s careful readings of the dialogues. Though I speak of an “official doctrine” here, it is important to note that Heidegger’s ambiguous relationship to Plato cannot be explained through a distinction between “exoteric” and “esoteric” teachings. We find in Heidegger’s recently

¹⁵¹ Heidegger (1969a), 49.

¹⁵² For discussion and relevant literature, see Juan Pablo Hernández, “How Presencing (*Anwesen*) Became Heidegger’s Concept of Being,” *Universitas Philosophica* 28, 57 (2011): 213–40.

¹⁵³ As Pierpaolo Ciccarelli has noted, “Ἰδέα e ‘platonismo’ sono per Heidegger sinonimi di ‘metafisica’” (Ciccarelli 2002, xvi).

published “esoteric” writings, texts such as the *Beiträge* and, more recently, the so-called *Black Notebooks*, the same metaphysical Plato we find in *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*. It is also important to remember that the *other Plato* is one Heidegger presented, if not in print, then at least in seminars and lectures. So the ambiguity has a deeper source. Heidegger presumably would say that it lies in Plato's thought itself as both laying the ground for subsequent metaphysics *and* pointing to another possibility, a road not taken, as it were. Thus in the *Black Notebooks* we read the following: “Plato—Aristotle—precisely through their greatness is the ambiguity of their philosophizing augmented.”¹⁵⁴ But one must wonder if the ambiguity is not at least as much in Heidegger's own philosophizing: in the tension between seeking to inaugurate a new beginning, and recognizing that the first beginning is not done beginning, that the thought of Plato and Aristotle is more covered up than continued by the subsequent metaphysical tradition. In any case, the important conclusion is that, counter to what is suggested by the title of his published essay, what Heidegger has bequeathed to us in relation to Plato is not, once we take into account the full scope of his reading, an interpretation or a doctrine, but rather a task. Whether we like it or not, the ambiguity is now ours.

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The Tübingen School

Vittorio Hösle

Among so many interpretative approaches to Plato, as far as I can see, only one has been named after the town where it was developed: the Tübingen School.¹ On the one hand, this is certainly due to the fact that the approach did not convince the whole community of Plato scholars; in fact, it has remained relatively isolated and was met, particularly in the Anglo-American world, mainly with skepticism if not outright hostility. On the other hand, the toponymic designation is an honor: unlike, say, the analytic approach to Plato, the new approach did not spread diffusely among many people but was the achievement of a handful of scholars who worked as colleagues in the same small German university town, a town the importance of which for the development of early German Idealism and historical-critical theology is known across the world. The originality of the approach is thus comparatively much higher; and although originality is no warrant of truth, bold new conceptions deserve admiration even from those who do not accept them.

At the end of his long critical review of the work of Krämer that inaugurated the school—a review to which I will return—Gregory Vlastos called attention

to those entirely admirable qualities which make this book a remarkable performance: vigor of argument, boldness of conception, breadth

1 It is sometimes called the “Tübingen-Milan School”, since Giovanni Reale (1931–2014), who taught at the Università Cattolica in Milan, further developed the ideas of Krämer and Gaiser; his book *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone* (Reale 1984) is the most exhaustive presentation of Plato’s philosophy taking into account the unwritten doctrines. I will, however, have to ignore Reale and his pupils’ (especially Maurizio Migliori’s and Giancarlo Movia’s) important contribution, since the present volume is dedicated to the *German* reception of Plato. In France, Marie-Dominique Richard is closest to the Tübingen School. I can only mention the work, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (Findlay 1974), by the South African philosopher and vigorous critic of Wittgenstein, John Niemeyer Findlay (1903–1987). While published after the works of Krämer and Gaiser, Findlay developed his interpretation of Plato long before its publication and the rise of the Tübingen School. The astonishing convergence between his and the Tübingen approach is the more striking as there was no reciprocal influence. His book offers an English translation of the main documents concerning the esoteric doctrines (Findlay 1974, 413–54).

of vision. Had K. done no more for us than challenge us to free ourselves from *σμικρολογία*, he would still have placed us greatly in his debt.²

The application of small-mindedness to the study of great philosophers has considerably proliferated in the last half-century, certainly not to the benefit of philosophy and probably not even to that of historiographical work; and the challenge of freeing oneself from it has correspondingly increased. It is my hope that even those who remain unconvinced by several claims of the Tübingen School recognize the challenge that motivated it, the ingenuity of its solution, and its potentially far-reaching importance for the history of philosophy in general, beyond the issue of the correct interpretation of Plato.

I will, first, investigate why there is so little consensus today regarding the correct interpretation of Plato (I); second, explain which problems and philosophical discussions led to the emergence and articulation of the Tübingen School as a complex answer to the question of how to correctly interpret Plato (II); and, third, discuss some of the arguments against it, as well as several external causes that prevented its general acceptance (III).

I

Hardly any other philosopher has in the course of history elicited more different interpretations than Plato, and even today Plato scholars disagree on the most basic issues. Note that I am not speaking here about the *evaluation* of Plato's theories; I am referring to the simple issue of the *ascription* of certain doctrines to Plato, independently of whether one agrees with them or not. The reasons for this lack of consensus are at least six.

(1) Plato's interests were as universal as perhaps only those of Aristotle, Kant, or Hegel. There are not many scholars who are equally competent in, say, the history of the philosophy of mathematics and the history of political philosophy, and inevitably they will focus on different features of Plato's philosophy, even when they are reading the same book, such as the *Republic*. While their different selections will lead to different results, these need not logically contradict each other; but a widespread tendency to ascribe one's own core interests to the object of one's research easily transforms such differences into incompatibilities. (2) Plato is the first to articulate many philosophical problems, from the issue of how to define knowledge to the ontological status of mathematical objects. Since the freshness of the first discovery of a problem

² Vlastos (1963), 655.

remains inspiring even after millennia, almost every serious systematic philosopher at least once in a while turns to Plato for inspiration; and although only systematic concerns can truly breathe life into historical research, it is almost inevitable that the more original the reader is, the more he will tend to be inspired by Plato and believe that his own discoveries, which were often triggered by the study of Plato but in fact went beyond what Plato himself intended, were taken from Plato, while in fact the reader has read them into the Platonic texts. Even more significantly, the experience of encountering one of the greatest philosophical geniuses makes it difficult to accept that Plato may have cherished doctrines that the reader regards as utterly unpalatable, and since ascribing doctrines to Plato himself is not easy, as we will see, the admiring reader will be naturally tempted to deny that Plato is upholding the doctrines that unfold in his dialogues when they appear untenable to the reader. (A theory notoriously recalcitrant to reconstruction in terms of modern ontology and logic is, for example, Plato's theory of Forms.) (3) Since Plato's influence on the history of Western thought is second to none, nobody comes to Plato without some often unconscious familiarity with earlier classical interpretations of Plato, ranging from Aristotle to at least Natorp. Particularly when these interpretations were not studied *as such* but more or less absorbed as common knowledge about Plato, they often bias one's reading of Plato.

But it is not simply Plato's range, his status as an inspiring classical thinker, and the complexity of his reception that render his correct interpretation so difficult. These three factors operate also with respect to Aristotle, but despite important disagreements among researchers, there is no comparable dissensus concerning his interpretation. There are three further difficulties specific to the interpretation of Plato. (4) He did not write in the first person but composed only dialogues in which he himself is not an interlocutor. (5) Even in his dialogues his main character, Socrates, does not simply state what he thinks true but often limits himself to asking questions and sometimes even advances claims that seem "ironic"—that is, not seriously intended—because they contradict other Socratic assertions. Even if we were to manage to find out what the Platonic Socrates "really" means, that does not seem to be sufficient to reconstruct Plato's ideas: for how would we know that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece in this instance?

Plato's anonymity apparently invites skepticism concerning the correct interpretation of his thought.³ Of the various possible interpretations of Platonic anonymity, I mention here only two that have had a certain influence. The first is that Plato faithfully depicts doctrines of *other* people, e.g., of

3 See, for example, Press (2000a), as well as several other essays in Press (ed.) (2000b).

Socrates in the dialogues in which he is the main interlocutor, or of Timaeus in the dialogue named after him.⁴ In the *Laws*, however, as even A.E. Taylor assumes, Plato really does speak for himself, the Athenian Visitor being but a very thin mask through which Plato himself is recognizable.⁵ The second approach consists in ascribing to Plato himself the skepticism from which the interpreter suffers:⁶ Plato did not write treatises, so it is argued, because he was ultimately a skeptic who satisfied himself with portraying philosophers in action, in order to show connections between life-forms and thoughts without wanting to commit himself to any of their positions—much less to a faithful historical account of other thinkers' ideas. The temptation of such a reading is intensified by the fact that the Academy became a harbor of skepticism from Arcesilaus up through Philo of Larissa.

The last source (6) of hermeneutical difficulties is the one that inspired the Tübingen School. Plato was not simply a philosophical writer, like, say, Kierkegaard, whose interpretation is quite arduous, too, but less so, since he authored hermeneutically less challenging autonymous works in addition to his intellectually often more exciting pseudonymous works. Plato was, in addition, the leader of a school, the Academy, graced by the presence of some of the greatest mathematicians in history, such as Theaetetus, and particularly Eudoxus, whose mathematical originality was superior even to Archimedes', who owes so much to the former's method of exhaustion. Now, Plato's philosophical pupils—above all, though not exclusively, Aristotle—who spent much time with their teacher, attribute to him certain metaphysical doctrines that we do not find articulated in the dialogues. (By contrast, when it comes to Plato's political philosophy, Aristotle quotes exclusively the published dialogues.) This is a fact impossible to deny and hard to explain. It is from this problem, then, that the Tübingen School takes its starting point. But before I address its solution, I have to briefly lay out why this problem was so long ignored at the beginning of modern Plato scholarship.

II

I have sketched the history of Plato interpretation elsewhere and, following a suggestion by Giovanni Reale, distinguished three paradigms: (a) the Middle Platonist and Neo-Platonic; (b) Schleiermacher's Romantic turn; and

⁴ See Taylor (1928), 28, 226, ff. (on *Ti.* 48b, f.).

⁵ Taylor (1927), 465.

⁶ I allude to *Cratylus* 411c.

(c) the rediscovery of the esoteric Plato by the Tübingen School.⁷ Why was Schleiermacher, thanks to the introductions written for his masterful translations of Plato's dialogues, such an extraordinary turning point in Plato studies? The historiography of philosophy as an independent discipline begins to emerge in the eighteenth century; before that, one dealt with philosophers of the past mainly with the intent to appropriate the truths they had discovered, or perhaps to confute their glaring errors, but not with the desire to reconstruct their opinions, bracketing the question of the truth of those opinions.

The Middle and Neo-Platonists (including the Christian Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance) often read into Plato whatever they themselves held true, doubtless with good conscience, since Plato, they assumed, must have already known all relevant truths. Their procedure, which even in their commentaries to individual dialogues is so markedly different from ours, was facilitated by their belief that Plato had defended, beyond the teachings exposed in the dialogues, an esoteric doctrine, to which they could appeal whenever their own ideas were not mirrored in the dialogues. It is this latter belief that Schleiermacher challenges in the name of philological rigor.⁸ In his eyes, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine applies only to the different levels of reading the Platonic dialogues. There is no way of reconstructing those other supposed esoteric doctrines, and even Aristotle, who most of all should have been familiar with them, does not speak of them. Moreover, all attempts to reconstruct such doctrines miss the basic unity of form and content so crucial in the Platonic dialogues.⁹

The last item points to the central discovery of Schleiermacher—his fascination with the literary genre of the dialogue, which before him had merely been neglected, since it was not at all ignored by the Middle and Neo-Platonists; and his conviction that Plato can only be understood as both a philosopher and an artist. Schleiermacher clearly shared the Romantic enthusiasm for a new unity of art and philosophy. He contributed to the journal *Athenaeum*, edited by the Schlegel brothers, which offered a forum for new experiments in the unification of philosophy and art, such as Friedrich Schlegel's dialogue, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (*Conversation on Poetry*). (Needless to say, pointing at a connection between Schleiermacher's own philosophic-literary ambitions and his interpretation of Plato does not disprove the correctness of his approach to Plato; for almost every new interpretation, whether false or correct, is influenced by new categories, which sometimes bias the reader and sometimes enable

⁷ For documentary evidence for the following claims, see Höhle (2006a).

⁸ See Laks's and Szlezák's chapters in this volume.

⁹ See Schleiermacher (1996), 34–38; Schleiermacher (1973), 9, ff.

him to see for the first time features of the *interpretandum* that had been overlooked earlier.)

A further important innovation of Schleiermacher is his attempt to give a relative chronology of the Platonic dialogues. The first paradigm regarded Plato's philosophy as a unitary system; there was no discussion of a possible development of the master, and the various dialogues were regarded as exposing different facets of the same convictions. Schleiermacher himself is far from being a revisionist, i.e., a defender of the theory that Plato radically changed his philosophical beliefs over time;¹⁰ indeed, like the authors of the first paradigm, he is a unitarian. However, he ascribes such importance to the reconstruction of the chronology of the dialogues because he assumes that the order of their publication, while not revealing a discontinuous development of Plato's mind, manifests a complex pedagogical plan according to which the earlier dialogues prepared the reader for the reception of the later ones.

As interesting as this idea may be, Schleiermacher's concrete attempt at offering a relative chronology of the dialogues was soon rejected, and for very good reasons. An important advance with regard to this complex issue was achieved with the development of stylometric analysis in the late nineteenth century;¹¹ and despite certain limits of the method, which has continuously been improved, one cannot see how any non-formal approach may fare better. It is manifestly circular if dialogues are dated at will in order to justify one's own unitarian or revisionist inclinations.¹²

10 A good example of a revisionist reading of Plato is John McDowell's translation and commentary of Plato's *Theaetetus* (McDowell 1973). McDowell thinks that Plato in this dialogue rejected the doctrine of Forms presented in earlier dialogues. Needless to say, McDowell's philosophical acumen makes his commentary extremely worth reading even for those who disagree with his specific version of revisionism.—One should conceptually distinguish between developmentalism and revisionism. While there are a few philosophers, such as Berkeley and Schopenhauer, who hardly developed after the publication of their first work, there are, on the other hand, some thinkers who completely reconceived their philosophy, such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Most philosophers, however, seem to undergo some form of continuous development.

11 The term was coined by the Polish philosopher, Wincenty Lutosławski, who in 1898 published "Principes de stylométrie" (Lutosławski 1898).

12 A famous example is G.E.L. Owen's pushing the *Timaeus* from the late into the middle period (Owen 1953), in order to sustain the theory that Plato had come to reject the doctrine of Forms, as he supposedly does in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, a supposition threatened by the re-emergence of the Forms in a late work. It is much more plausible to offer instead an alternative interpretation of the other two dialogues. Given the hermeneutical complexities of the Platonic dialogues, there is hardly any hope to achieve any agreement at all if even the most formal research, still independent of one's own philosophical inclinations, can be dismissed.

The other idea that did not prove convincing was Schleiermacher's rejection of the esoteric doctrines. It is simply not true that Aristotle does not speak about them—in fact, Aristotle explicitly uses the term, “ἄγραφα δόγματα”, to refer to Plato's “unwritten teachings”,¹³ and again and again ascribes theories to Plato that must have been part of these teachings, since they are not expounded in the dialogues. While Schleiermacher's anathema proved very powerful for almost a hundred years—the leading historian of ancient philosophy in the late nineteenth century, Eduard Zeller, for example, wholeheartedly endorsed Schleiermacher on this point—it is worth mentioning that a few contemporaries continued to defend the idea of Platonic esotericism.

The eminent philologist, August Boeckh, in an enthusiastic review of Schleiermacher's translation, in which he recognized that no person had ever understood Plato as profoundly as Schleiermacher, still voiced his sharp dissent from the latter's anti-esoteric turn.¹⁴ And in the 1820s, Christian August Brandis,¹⁵ Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, and Christian Hermann Weisse¹⁶ thoroughly studied the Aristotelian reports on Plato's esoteric teachings. Some quotations from Trendelenburg, who later became one of the most influential German philosophers of the nineteenth century and a renewer of Aristotelianism, are indicative.

While full of praise for Schleiermacher, while recognizing the enormous importance of developing a relative chronology of the dialogues, and while himself scorning the flight into alleged esoteric teachings whenever an interpreter is unable to validate his claims by passages in the dialogues,¹⁷ Trendelenburg can nevertheless not agree with the hermeneutical maxim that Plato's philosophy should be sought only in his dialogues. While dubious later sources must be rejected, the reports of contemporaries, most of all Aristotle's, ought to be taken absolutely seriously, even when they are not congruent with the dialogues. Against the possible objection that Aristotle may have misunderstood Plato, Trendelenburg, pointing to the fact that Aristotle is the father of the historiography of philosophy, asks the poignant question: “Quod si nescivis-

13 *Physics* 209b15.

14 Boeckh (1872 [1808]), 5, ff.

15 Brandis (1823).

16 Weisse (1828).

17 See Trendelenburg (1826), 2: “horum certe ratio digna fuit quae acriter castigaretur” (“the point of view of these people certainly deserved sharp criticism”). Trendelenburg differs from the Tübingen School by not recognizing any Platonic passages as pointing to esotericism. He rightly regards the *Second Letter* as spurious, but also doubts the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* and refuses an interpretation of the *Phaedrus* that could connect it with the unwritten doctrines (Trendelenburg 1826, 1).

set Aristoteles, tanti ingenii vir, per tot annos Platoni familiaris—quis tandem sciret?” (“If Aristotle had not known it (sc. how to interpret Plato correctly), a man of such genius and intimately acquainted with Plato for so many years, who else would know [sc. how to interpret Plato]?”)¹⁸ Trendelenburg’s dissertation proves that even someone completely committed to the methodological revolution brought about by Schleiermacher’s break with the first paradigm could nevertheless investigate the issue of Platonic esotericism.

Trendelenburg’s approach did not find many successors in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Only in the first half of the twentieth century did important scholars of ancient philosophy achieve true progress in the reconstruction of the esoteric doctrines by studying Aristotle’s statements about Plato—I mention Léon Robin,²⁰ Julius Stenzel,²¹ Paul Wilpert,²² and Sir David Ross.²³ A natural way of explaining why Plato had not presented in a written form the ideas that Aristotle ascribes to him was to assume that they belonged to the last years of Plato, who regrettably had not found the time to write a dialogue in which they could appear. This explanation was much in tune with the enthusiasm for reconstructing the development of a philosopher’s thought that had spread in the second half of the nineteenth century²⁴—an enthusiasm that found its most elaborate expression in Werner Jaeger’s classic study on Aristotle.²⁵

Yet this solution underwent challenges from two different sides. The first came from Harold Cherniss, who, having investigated the way Aristotle represented Presocratic philosophy, claimed that, similarly, his depiction of Plato

18 Trendelenburg (1826), 3.

19 One must, however, mention the astonishing essay by Karl Friedrich Hermann, “Ueber Plato’s schriftstellerische Motive” (Hermann 1839). While far less interested in the reconstruction of the Aristotelian passages on Plato, the great philologist brilliantly reconstructs Plato’s self-interpretation as a writer. One of his most important insights is that the criticism of writing in the *Phaedrus* encompasses also the written dialogues (287, f.).

20 *La théorie platonicienne des idées et des nombres d’après Aristote* (Robin 1908). Robin studies, in much more detail, the same topic that Trendelenburg had tackled.

21 I mention only *Zahl und Gestalt bei Platon und Aristoteles* (Stenzel 1924).

22 *Zwei aristotelische Frühschriften über die Ideenlehre* (Wilpert 1949).

23 *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*. See esp. 142, ff.

24 Think of Wilhelm Dilthey’s studies on the life of Schleiermacher and the young Hegel.

25 Jaeger (1923). Jaeger’s construction has not stood the test of time, partly because it is very difficult to date even passages within an Aristotelian book that can itself be roughly dated (they might have been added later when Aristotle lectured on the same subject again); partly because the anti-Platonic ontology of the early *Categories* hardly fits with Jaeger’s model “from a Platonist to an empiricist”. The structure of the *Metaphysics*, furthermore, seems to represent an ordering by Aristotle himself, who must have regarded his essays from different times of his life as more or less compatible with each other and must thus have interpreted himself in a unitarian way.

and the other philosophers of the Old Academy was also utterly unreliable, so that we should give up the search for unwritten Platonic doctrines.²⁶ Despite important insights from Cherniss's side, particularly concerning the fact that Aristotle rendered other philosophies in his own conceptual framework and terminology, and that he hardly cared for immanent critique (which points to internal contradictions, not to disagreement with the critic's tenets), Cherniss's central thesis is shattered by the question that Trendelenburg asked in 1826: "*quis tandem sciret?*" Not only are unwritten Platonic doctrines reported also by other pupils, it is incompatible with the respect due to a mind of Aristotle's quality to assume that his accounts are only based on misunderstandings of Plato's dialogues. A great thinker may be unfair in his criticism. He may offer a tendentious version of a doctrine that he does not like in order to confute it more easily, and may even occasionally infer from certain doctrines, in conjunction with principles that he himself holds but that his adversary does not, consequences that his opponent would reject, and ascribe them to him. But he cannot make up nonexistent doctrines if he is even modestly intelligent and fair.

The Tübingen School takes the opposite view: it accepts the Aristotelian and the other pupils' reports, while rejecting the dating of the unwritten doctrines to the last phase of Plato's life. In respect of the content, it in a way returns to the first paradigm, for it accepts a systematic doctrine of principles, although methodologically it accepts all the innovations that philology underwent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its starting point is the dissertation of Hans Joachim Krämer (1929–2015) of 1957, which appeared in 1959 as *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*.²⁷ This book, unlike his later *Platone e i fondamenti della metafisica*,²⁸ has unfortunately not yet been translated into any other language, a fact that certainly did not facilitate its international reception in an age of decreasing interest in German culture and language. This is deplorable, as everyone who wants to approach the Tübingen School is well advised to start with it. For all the later works, both by Krämer and his colleagues, presuppose it: reading only the later studies leaves one often with argumentative gaps that in fact had been already addressed in the first book. What then are its main theses?

26 Cherniss (1935); (1944). Vol. II of Cherniss (1944) never appeared, nor did Cherniss ever react to the challenge of the Tübingen School, although he lived until 1987.

27 Krämer (1959).

28 Krämer (1982). The Italian version was published first. Among its various translations, I mention especially the English one (Krämer 1990). Krämer's Platonic essays were recently collected in his (2014).

Neither the title of the book nor even its first two chapters reveal the central thesis. This thesis came to the author only in the course of writing his dissertation, which had started as a relatively traditional comparison of Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines of virtue. But as he proceeded, Krämer became more and more impressed by the similarities of the two doctrines, particularly by the conception of virtue as a mean between two extremes. True enough, in Aristotle the doctrine is developed far more explicitly than in Plato, but Plato's allusions to it, from the *Protagoras* to the *Statesman*, are so strikingly precise that it would be naïve to assume that Plato was still struggling with vague ideas, which only Aristotle was able to articulate clearly.²⁹

The feeling that both Socrates and his creator know more than they say, and are holding something back, is irresistible for most careful readers of Plato, and Krämer's momentous steps, unfolded in the third and fourth chapter of his book, consisted in connecting the theory of virtue with the various reports

29 The idea, still widespread in the Anglo-American world, that Plato is a more intuitive thinker, while only Aristotle achieved conceptual precision and rigor in arguments, is misleading—while Plato was also a great artist, he *adds* the literary dimension to a philosophical conception hardly less rigorous than Aristotle's. However, he does not present it in written form because the dialogues, unlike Aristotle's preserved lectures for academic and peripatetic pupils, address a broader audience. (If Aristotle's dialogues had been preserved, we would likely find them in a similar way much less technical without therefore being able to infer that he did not have precise concepts in the back of his mind.) Certainly only Aristotle developed an axiomatized logic: his exceptional utterance of pride concerning his logical achievements (*On Sophistical Refutations* 183b34, ff.) shows that here, and probably only here, he was breaking completely new ground. But one can still think precisely without giving an explicit account of logical rules, as the extremely high level of the mathematics of the Academy proves: it took two centuries for modern calculus to find a logically satisfying foundation (with Cauchy and, finally, Weierstrass), but Eudoxus' method of exhaustion, while considerably less powerful, was logically faultless from the start. We are therefore well advised to assume that most if not all of the obvious fallacies in the Platonic dialogues are deliberate. They illustrate the low intellectual level of the corresponding interlocutors (such as the sophist brothers in the *Euthydemus*). But does the Platonic Socrates not also commit elementary fallacies? I regard it as unlikely that Plato wanted to distance himself from his favorite character in this way and find that, usually, Socrates suggests primitive fallacies *in interrogations* (e.g., *Protagoras* 349e, ff.; *Theaetetus* 205a). Questions, however, are not assertions, and the error lies with Theaetetus, who assents, while Protagoras is experienced enough not to get himself trapped. Trying to trap one's interlocutor was regarded as legitimate in the game called "elenchus", and Plato must have hoped that the intelligent reader would grasp where the interlocutor had conceded something that he should have avoided. (The distinction between $\pi\alpha\nu$ and $\epsilon\lambda\omicron\nu$ at *Theaetetus* 204a, ff. is so reminiscent of Aristotle, *Metaphysics* $\Delta 26$, that, while certainly Aristotle added new distinctions, it is not unlikely at all that several of his differentiations were already present to Plato, even if he unfolded only those that fitted into the context of the conversation depicted.).

ascribing to Plato a dualistic ontology based on two principles, the One and the Great and Small (the Indeterminate Dyad), which manifest themselves in virtue as measure (*metron*), and the two corresponding vices of excess and defect. Scholars had already long before correlated the famous passages from the *Phaedrus* (275c, ff.) and the *Seventh Letter* (341b, ff.)³⁰ with the reports on the esoteric teachings. But Krämer's thorough reading of the *Phaedrus* passage now made it plausible that τιμώτερα at *Phaedrus* 278d points to the two principles as the ultimate foundation of Plato's metaphysics.³¹

Finally, Krämer was the first to discover in the dialogues numerous passages in which the main interlocutor states that he must skip over something and leave it for another occasion.³² While it is true that several of these passages point to discussions in later dialogues, many do not, and most of these can instead be naturally connected to the doctrine of the two principles. From this, Krämer inferred that the unwritten doctrines were not a theory of the elderly Plato but were, rather, the background of most of the dialogues (at least from the *Protagoras* on), deliberately held back and only alluded to in the dialogues.³³

A historically faithful reconstruction of Plato must therefore consider both the dialogues and the esoteric doctrines. The last two chapters of Krämer's *Arete* reinterpreted Plato's position with regard to his predecessor Parmenides, and his successor Aristotle: Plato appears as someone deeply influenced by the Presocratic search for the ἀρχή, and as a Neo-Eleatic thinker.³⁴ Aristotle,

30 The authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* is controversial, but in order to get to an objective and non-circular judgment on the issue, it is wise to look at formal criteria. Gerard R. Ledger strongly argues for Platonic authorship (Ledger 1989, 148, ff.). The best defense of the authenticity based on the content remains von Fritz (1968), esp. 59, f., on 350c, f.

31 One might say that Krämer offered a synthesis of Trendelenburg's reconstruction of Aristotle's passages about Plato and Hermann's analysis of Plato's self-interpretation. On τιμώτερα, see esp. Szlezák in this volume.

32 Krämer (1959), 389, ff. The German term is "*Aussparungsstellen*".

33 This theory presupposes that we have the dialogues as originally published, not a last-hand edition (as is probable in the case of Aristotle's lectures). For the latter assumption, already defended by Schleiermacher and recently by Holger Thesleff, there is no sufficient evidence (*Crat.* 438a is the *only* passage in the corpus that could speak for a second edition having circulated, while the short text of Tertullian's *Apologeticum*, the standard example of a book of which two editions were published, shows far more variants). If the theory were true, there would be no chance to speak competently, either in the affirmative or the negative sense, about Plato's development. It is in any case impossible to assert that Plato still lacked certain ideas when they do not yet appear in a determinate dialogue. If there was a pedagogical plan, the silence may well be intentional.

34 It is a very plausible theory given the time he spent, after the death of Socrates, in Megara where a synthesis of Socratism and Eleaticism had been worked out. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 3.6.

on the other hand, is considered to owe much more to Plato (and the other philosophers of the Old Academy) than had previously been assumed.³⁵ In a series of splendid essays, in two monographs on Middle and Neo-Platonism³⁶ as well as on Hellenistic philosophy,³⁷ and in his large contribution on the Old Academy,³⁸ Krämer extended his research to much of ancient philosophy and traced the survival and transformation of the two basic Platonic categories. It is worth mentioning that, while *Arete* was still vibrant with the hope that the newly discovered Platonic esoteric doctrines could inspire contemporary systematic thought, the later Krämer restricted his claims to exclusively historic ones: he wants to render Plato's thought in all its complexity, looking at both its written and oral parts, without committing himself to the question of its possible objective truth.

In 1963, the second foundational book of the Tübingen School appeared, Konrad Gaiser's (1929–1988) *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre (Plato's Unwritten Doctrine)*.³⁹ Its importance consisted, first, in its appendix, which for the first time collected, as "*Testimonia platonica*", the original documents concerning the esoteric doctrines of Plato. It is hard to believe that this happened so late, and unfortunately Gaiser, who belonged to a generation of Germans in which every educated person was still supposed to read Greek,⁴⁰ did not give a translation, a fact that did not facilitate the reception of the appendix outside of Germany or, later on, in Germany itself. Thorough notes justified the inclusion of the texts and addressed most of the questions of source criticism that Krämer had not yet fully tackled. Second, Gaiser added a very important dimension to Krämer's Eleatic-Socratic Plato—he insisted on the strong Pythagorean moments in his thought. This, too, should not come as a surprise for anyone even superficially familiar with Plato's biography. (Furthermore, the three main interlocutors in his dialogues before the *Laws*, Socrates, the Eleatic

35 An important study inspired by the Tübingen School is Happ (1971). Its central thesis is that Aristotle's concept of matter is a transformation of the Indeterminate Dyad.

36 *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik* (Krämer 1963).

37 *Platonismus und hellenistische Philosophie* (Krämer 1971).

38 "Die ältere Akademie" (Krämer 1983).

39 Gaiser (1963; 21968).

40 An amusing anecdote in Hans Jonas's autobiography exemplifies this attitude. In the oral doctoral examination for philosophy, Heidegger presented to one of his pupils a passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which he was supposed to comment upon. The text was, of course, in Greek, which this pupil was one of the few philosophy students not able to read. Since it would have been too embarrassing to confess this publicly, he touched Heidegger imploringly under the table with his foot. Heidegger remembered the exceptional circumstance and changed the topic (Jonas 2003, 109, f.).

Stranger, and Timaeus, clearly mirror the three schools that Plato synthesized in his own philosophy: the Socratic, the Eleatic, and the Pythagorean.)

Unlike Krämer and Szlezák, Gaiser was competent in ancient mathematics⁴¹—a capacity unfortunately lacking in most contemporary Plato scholars (including those with analytic backgrounds), who inevitably miss a considerable part of Plato's philosophy. The first part of Gaiser's book dealt with mathematics and ontology—it showed how a tetradic model of epistemic stances and strata of reality, familiar from the analogy of the Divided Line, was connected with a conception of the three dimensions unfolding as point, line, plane, and solid, thus proving another continuity between Plato and Plotinus. Further, it investigated the intermediate ontological position of mathematical objects between the Forms and the sensible world and why this gave them a special affinity to the soul. While his explanation of the ideal numbers is highly problematic both philologically and mathematically, his connection of the doctrine of movement in *Laws* x with esoteric teachings remains an excellent example of how a better understanding of the dialogues can be gained by taking the unwritten doctrines into account and how the two traditions flesh each other out.

The second part of the book offers a far richer account of Plato's complex philosophy of history than any earlier scholar has ever been able to give, thanks to an analysis of how the two principles structured the patterns Plato believed that he had discovered in history. The third part was dedicated to Plato's contribution to the foundation of mathematics and the natural sciences and, in a spirit very similar to Krämer's, to the differences between Plato and Aristotle, in whom the various philosophical disciplines gained an autonomy that they could not have had in Plato, since, according to him, all were grounded in the two basic principles.

After Gaiser's premature death, Thomas Alexander Szlezák (*1940) became his successor in the Tübingen chair for Greek philology. As a scholar of Greek culture more encompassing than both Krämer and Gaiser (he wrote important books on what Europe owes the Greeks as well as on Homer), Szlezák's contribution to the Tübingen School consisted not in the discovery of new contents of these doctrines, but in an in-depth analysis of the allusions to the unwritten doctrines within the dialogues themselves.⁴² A particularly striking discovery was that Plato ascribes to some of the negatively depicted characters, such as

41 See his splendid essays "Platons 'Menon' und die Akademie" (Gaiser 1964); and "Die Rede der Musen über den Grund von Ordnung und Unordnung: Platon, *Politeia* VIII 545D–547A" (Gaiser 1974), now included in Gaiser (2004), 353–399 and 411–450, respectively.

42 See Szlezák (1985) and (2004).

Euthydemus and Cratylus, the pretension of keeping certain teachings secret. Needless to say, this occurs in order to discredit the characters. But Platonic irony is never cheap, and so the unsubstantiated claim of the charlatans sheds light on the property of the true philosopher, who has teachings that go beyond what he discloses in public. Szlezák also published a brilliant best-selling book for a general audience on the literary techniques and the specific traits of the Platonic dialogues and the way references to esoteric teachings are embedded in them, thus clarifying important issues, such as the difference between esotericism (based on the plausible belief that certain insights are not accessible to everybody) and enforced secrecy.⁴³ His results converge with Pierre Hadot's interpretation of ancient philosophy as a way of life.

Also connected with the three founders of the Tübingen School are Jens Halfwassen (*1958) and the present author (*1960). Halfwassen was not educated in Tübingen, but spent a year as a Heisenberg scholar in Tübingen. He has mainly worked on Neo-Platonism, further uncovering the continuity between Plato, Middle Platonism, and Neo-Platonism. One of his most important texts on Plato's unwritten doctrines is the thorough investigation of the relation between the two principles, which can be conceived neither as completely dualistic nor as monistic. The Indeterminate Dyad does not originate from the One, but neither is there symmetry between the two principles. Halfwassen speaks of reductive monism and deductive dualism.⁴⁴

Although by instinct more a systematic philosopher than a historian of philosophy, I myself was a pupil of both Krämer and Gaiser. My first book aimed at a general theory of the history of philosophy, according to which certain philosophical positions recur in regular order.⁴⁵ The focus of the book is on what I call the first cycle, the history of Greek philosophy from Parmenides to Plato. Plato's two principles are interpreted as a deliberate synthesis of the Eleatic principle of the One and of the Ionic principle of the Many. The reduction of the Many to the Two is Plato's specific innovation with regard to the Pythagoreans. In a later essay I insist on the importance of Philolaus' doctrine of principles for Plato's own development.⁴⁶ Plato was influenced not only by

43 *Platon lesen* (Szlezák 1993). The book has been translated into almost twenty languages. The English title is: *Reading Plato* (London, 1999: Routledge).

44 Halfwassen (2001). This essay, together with essays by Krämer, Gaiser, Szlezák, and myself, is included in English translation in the volume, enriched by an excellent introduction by the editor, Dmitri Nikulin: *The Other Plato: The Tübingen Interpretation of Plato's Inner-Academic Teachings* (Nikulin 2012).

45 Hölsle (1984).

46 See Diogenes Laertius 8.85. My essay is "Platons 'Protrepitkos': Gesprächsgeschehen und Gesprächsgegenstand in Platons 'Euthydemos'" (Hölsle 2004a).

the duality of the principles of Philolaus but also by his quasi-transcendental argument that only a co-operation of the two principles renders the world intelligible: if the latter were determined by either of the principles without the other, it could not be known. The idea of constituting reality out of two interacting principles standing in polar opposition to each other is strikingly similar to German Idealism, even if here the principles are no longer unity and duality but object and subject. The unwritten doctrines, by presenting a rudimentary attempt to bring the general concepts into a systematic order of derivation, transcend the intuitionism sometimes ascribed to Plato. In other essays, I dealt with Plato's foundational ideas concerning arithmetic and geometry, connecting them with Imre Tóth's studies on the parallel postulate in the *Corpus Aristotelicum*.⁴⁷ My book on the philosophical dialogue,⁴⁸ finally, demonstrated that a pupil of the Tübingen School may well show interest in the literary genre that Plato brought to perfection, even if Plato himself subordinated literature to oral conversation.

III

The objections to the Tübingen School have been both philological and philosophical. In his review mentioned at the beginning, Vlastos raised four main objections. First, he attacked Krämer's use of a long passage from Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* x 248–80); second, he doubted Aristotle's reliability; third, he interpreted Aristoxenus' report on Plato lecturing on the Good as pointing to a single event; finally, he challenged Krämer's reading of the *Phaedrus*. I have already discussed the second point and believe that Szlezák has forcefully corroborated the interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, but the first and the third point remain valid.

Gaiser's masterful criticism of sources⁴⁹ has rendered it plausible that the Sextus report, while ultimately going back to a source from the Old Academy about Plato, depends directly on a Neo-Pythagorean mediator, who may well have added later ideas, thus making it difficult to ascertain whether an individual passage in the text reaches all the way back to Plato himself. We should therefore be especially cautious when dealing with this source. Regarding Aristoxenus, it is indeed likely that he speaks about a single event, which

47 See my (2004b).

48 Höhle (2006b); English translation, Höhle (2012).

49 Gaiser (1968). The other two problematic passages sifted by Gaiser are Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1090b13–1091a5 and *On the Soul* 404b16–30.

Gaiser dated late in Plato's life.⁵⁰ But this particular public lecture by no means precludes a long tradition of teaching within the Academy, centered on the doctrine of the two principles. In fact, Vlastos himself recognizes that if "Plato practiced in the Academy what he preached in the *Phaedrus*", it would be natural to suppose

that in the course of his arguments Plato explored with his associates not only the views we know in the dialogues but a great many other theories as well which he found attractive enough to merit exposition and defense in oral argument but which he did not succeed in working out fully and confidently enough to think them worthy of publication.⁵¹

This passage is important for two reasons. First, Vlastos acknowledges that, if Plato followed his own theory (and why should he not?), he must have discussed much in the Academy to which his pupils refer when they ascribe to him doctrines not to be found in the dialogues. But he then adds that these theories were not published because they were not deemed worthy of publication. It is surprising that this explanation is added after Vlastos recognized the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. It is clearly an explanation that would hold water for what goes on in the contemporary academic world, in which the greatest honor is to get published, preferably in some prestigious journal. But it is utterly anachronistic to project this value system back into Plato, whose explicit statements (in a dialogue!) are incompatible with it. On the contrary, it is rather what Plato toys with that he publishes in the dialogues, reserving what is more valuable for oral discussions. He was, after all, a pupil of Socrates and a follower of Pythagoras, neither of whom published anything. We would therefore be well advised to try to reconstruct, as far as possible, what went on in these oral conversations.

Another reason for doing so is that, while the dialogues were not written in the first person, Plato himself articulated his esoteric doctrines. They are therefore the starting point for any correct interpretation of what in the dialogues has to be regarded as expressing Platonic convictions. Since Plato's doctrine of the principles does not prove him a skeptic, the skeptical interpretation of Plato mentioned above can be happily dismissed. Moreover, since the extraordinary literary qualities of Plato's dialogues, rightly highlighted from Schleiermacher onwards, render it impossible that they mirror historical conversations; and since, furthermore, there are various passages where Plato outs himself as the

⁵⁰ Gaiser (1980).

⁵¹ Vlastos (1963), 654.

author of the thoughts defended by his Socrates,⁵² we may safely assume that the dialogues offer a protreptic approach to what Plato ultimately believed in. However, that approach is always adapted to the intellectual capacities of the interlocutor of the leader of the conversation, who, for his part, never represents the whole Plato but rather the Socratic, Eleatic, or Pythagorean aspect of his multifaceted personality.

But what is the epistemic status of the esoteric doctrines? Here we have to distinguish sharply between two questions: first, what status did Plato ascribe to them? Second, how do we evaluate them? The second question goes beyond the realm of the history of philosophy, and certainly every reasonable person today will recognize that many ideas of Plato are far too general (the Indeterminate Dyad, for example, playing too many roles), even though I myself remain convinced that the idea of a dialectical relation between polar categories, ultimately founded in the need to make the world intelligible, is one of the greatest philosophical ideas in history. Regarding the first issue, Plato may have hesitated with regard to various metaphysical options.⁵³ But since he notoriously defends in the *Republic* the problematic epistemological doctrine that the higher something is ontologically, the better it can be known, he must have believed that the knowledge of the two highest principles is particularly secure. Again, we do not have to *follow* him—but we should *ascribe* to him what he most probably considered true.

While conceding that the “*Aussparungsstellen*” point to the fact that Plato was early on committed to the doctrine of the two principles (at the latest, I presume, after having studied Philolaus), one may still object that the late dialogues, particularly the *Parmenides* and the *Philebus*, reveal this doctrine, which therefore was not hidden after all. Ken Sayre has argued forcefully in this direction.⁵⁴ Now, he is certainly right that the mentioned dialogues divulge more than the earlier ones, and it is tempting to connect this result with Schleiermacher’s doctrine of a pedagogical plan, in which Plato deliberately brings his readers ever closer to his foundational idea. But this does not entail that the late dialogues must explicitly state the doctrine. Rather we must

52 Cf. Höhle (2012), 150, ff., 435, ff. Aristotle himself, while sometimes speaking about the historical Socrates (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b25, f.; 1147b15, ff.), refers indiscriminately to Socrates and Plato when dealing with the *Republic* (*Politics* 1261a6, ff.; 1264b29, ff.; 1274b9m, f.; 1291a11, ff.; 1293b1, 1316a2, ff.; 1342a32, ff.); he must thus have considered the Platonic Socrates a spokesman of Plato.

53 See Cherniss (1945), 74, f., regarding the famous passage in Aristotle’s *On the Heavens* 279b32–280a11.

54 Sayre (1983).

already know it, in order to have a chance of giving a reasonable interpretation of the *Parmenides*, and even the *Philebus* only sketches the two principles in the context of an ethical investigation.

These are the strongest arguments against the Tübingen School and their rebuttal; but the resistance against the Tübingen School is not exclusively rational. An incapacity of imagining a different valuation of orality, a mistrust of esotericism as undemocratic,⁵⁵ a dislike of the metaphysical tradition (from which Plato is torn away and appropriated for one's own existential needs), and, finally, a lack of the patience required to study the sources of the unwritten doctrines and the mathematics within the Academy—all these help explain why the Tübingen approach will not become generally accepted in the near future. But it is from Plato himself that one can learn that this does not mean that the Tübingen approach is not the right one—needless to say, so long as it is open to being integrated with all the other valuable schools of interpretation that are consistent with it.

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55 In the United States, the Tübingen School is sometimes confused with the Straussian approach. But the two versions of esotericism have nothing to do with each other. Strauss discovered that the fear of persecution may deeply affect a philosophical text. But he rightly states as "a necessary negative criterion: that the book in question must have been composed in an era of persecution" (Strauss 1952, 32). Now there was no persecution of philosophical doctrines in ancient Greece, and certainly not of metaphysical theories. Plato's esotericism can therefore not be explained with Straussian tools.

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Form and Language: Gadamer's Platonism

François Renaud

This paper¹ is divided into three parts. I first situate Gadamer's underlying motivations in light of Heidegger's oral teaching in the 1920s. I make occasional reference, including in the footnotes, to the interpretation of Plato made by other students of Heidegger, in order to underscore the specificity of Gadamer's contributions. After sketching the main components of his reading, I concentrate on the theory of Forms, especially in the *Phaedo*, in connection with the paradigm of number. In the last section I discuss a few potentially problematic features of that interpretation with reference to Heidegger and Kant.

1 Before, with, and against Heidegger

It is easy to forget that there is a Gadamer before Heidegger. Three important elements of that first period in the development of his thinking should be emphasized: the situation in Germany in 1918; the dominance of Neo-Kantianism; and his reading of Plato. The experience of the tragedy of the Great War undermined the belief in progress, thus prompting a skepticism about science which would come to be characteristic of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.² This crisis renewed and stimulated thinking, leading to a proliferation of discussion and reading groups, and the young Gadamer discovered poetry, especially that of Stefan George (1868–1933).³ He was initiated into philosophy through transcendental idealism taught by the Neo-Kantians Richard Höningwald in Breslau, Nicolai Hartmann, and especially the towering figure of the Marburg School, Paul Natorp. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the concept of pleasure in Plato (1922)⁴ under the supervision of Natorp, whose

1 Warm thanks to Denis Dumas and Alan Kim for helpful and challenging comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2 For the Breslau and Marburg periods before Heidegger (1918–1923), cf. Grondin (1996); (1999), 61–107.

3 See Gadamer (1983b); Kim (2010), 186–222.

4 Gadamer (1922).

Platos Ideenlehre had just been reprinted.⁵ Gadamer's thesis was a rather conventional exercise, although it did treat the entire Platonic corpus. Gadamer would later claim that he had "been formed more by the Platonic dialogues than by the great thinkers of German Idealism".⁶ He would also frequently criticize Natorp's Plato interpretation. Nevertheless, the influence of the Neo-Kantian and of the transcendental approach more generally leaves significant traces in Gadamer's thinking, as I will show in the last section.

When Heidegger came to Marburg, in 1923, his lectures primarily focused on Plato and even more on Aristotle. Hannah Arendt testified to the novelty and vitality of Heidegger's teaching:

It was technically decisive that, for instance, Plato was not talked about and his theory of Forms expounded; rather for an entire semester a single dialogue was pursued and subjected to question step by step, until the time-honored doctrine had disappeared to make room for a set of problems of immediate and urgent relevance. Today this sounds quite familiar, because nowadays so many proceed in this way: but no one did so before Heidegger. The rumor about Heidegger put it quite simply: Thinking has come to life again.⁷

Arendt is evidently referring to Heidegger's seminar on the *Sophist* (1924–25), the climax of his early engagement with Plato. At that time, he read Plato in light of Aristotle, following Natorp⁸ and his critique of Platonic Forms, which would later contribute to his rejection of "Platonism" as dogmatic metaphysics. Heidegger was also interested in the ideal of the theoretical life (the life of *νοῦς*, *σοφία*), endeavoring to bring out both its conceptual and existential motives with a view to the ontology he was in the process of developing, namely "the hermeneutics of facticity".⁹ Only after the "turn" (*Kehre*) would he develop his radical criticism of Platonism as "forgetfulness of being". Yet, in 1927, Heidegger

5 Natorp (1921), newly with a so-called "Metacritical Appendix", "Logos-Psyche-Eros"; see Lembeck in this volume.

6 Gadamer (1985a), 184 (Gadamer 1986a, 500).

7 Arendt (1978), 295.

8 Heidegger (1992), 10–12; cf. 1–5.

9 See for instance Heidegger (1985). We now know, thanks to the publication of his lectures and seminars, that his relation to Plato was complex and remained ambivalent, even paradoxical. For a detailed and comprehensive study of the question, see Gonzalez (2009), and in this volume.

still sees fit to announce his revival of “the question of Being” in *Being and Time* with an epigraph from the *Sophist* (244a7–9).

Some of his most influential students, inspired by this return to the Greeks, elaborated their own readings of Plato, which are at once Heideggerian and anti-Heideggerian in character. In addition to Gadamer, the most important include Walter Bröcker,¹⁰ Jacob Klein,¹¹ Leo Strauss,¹² and Gerhard Krüger.¹³ A detailed study of the connections between what can be called the “Marburg School of Plato” and Heidegger is still needed; in the meantime, I shall content myself with a few comparisons, usually ignored by commentators, that may contribute to a better understanding of the underlying motifs of Gadamer’s “return to Plato”, viz., the specific differences between Gadamer’s reading and those of Heidegger as well as Gadamer’s Marburg friends, Krüger, Strauss and Klein.

The young Heidegger’s efforts to “think with” the ancients astonished and perplexed his audience. Who was, in fact, speaking? Plato and Aristotle—or Heidegger? Therein lies for Gadamer a fundamental hermeneutical truth, which he will later analyze more explicitly, namely that in the reading of ancient texts, and more generally the understanding of the past and of the other, one is transformed by this dialogue, in what he calls a “fusion of horizons”. The unity and reciprocity of practice and theory implied in this conception ultimately means the primacy of the practical, that is, application of the object of understanding to one’s specific situation, and therewith self-knowledge. Philosophy thus conceived is activity and participation, as opposed to dogmatic thinking and, more particularly, the methodological ideal of neutrality embodied then in the field of classical philology by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (the once severe critic of the young Nietzsche)¹⁴ and Werner Jaeger. What are the conditions for a reading of the Greek texts that allows them to speak to us about human life? According to the scientific model of philology, the task is to translate, where translation is conceived as mere reproduction of the same. But Gadamer would reply: translating is rather transposing into the present. These ancient texts can only speak to us again if we let them do so “from the fundamental experiences of our own life-world [*Lebenswelt*]”.¹⁵ Thus Heideggerian practice leads to Gadamerian theory. The reverse is equally true. Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory rests on Heideggerian

10 Bröcker (1965).

11 Klein (1934–1936); (1968); (1965); (1977).

12 Strauss (1953); (1964).

13 Krüger (1939); (1948); (1950).

14 Gadamer (1982a), 274–6.

15 Gadamer (1989b), 124.

substantive views, that is, just as much on the “content” as on the “mode” of Heidegger’s oral teaching, namely the hermeneutics of facticity, which reflects a modified version of Dilthey’s conflict between science and life (*Lebenswelt*). More specifically, Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory is originally inspired by the appropriation of Aristotelian practical reason (*phronēsis*) in Heidegger’s 1923 seminar on *Nicomachean Ethics* vi.¹⁶ Gadamer will seek, in his first major publication (1931), and especially after 1960, to fuse Aristotle’s *phronēsis* and Platonic dialectic.

Gadamer’s Plato interpretation changed over the years and key elements of its final version sometimes lack clarity, posing hermeneutical difficulties of their own to the commentator, as we will see in the last section. It is important to underscore the fact that Gadamer gained his independence from Heidegger only slowly and belatedly, in contrast to his Marburg friends, especially Krüger and Löwith.¹⁷ To that end Gadamer first decided to acquire better training in classical philology from 1924 to 1927. His main mentor in this field was Paul Friedländer, a student of Wilamowitz, and admirer of George’s poetry. At the time Friedländer was working on the first volume of his *Platon* (1928).¹⁸ The fact that Gadamer’s distancing from Heidegger was slow and gradual explains his long ambivalence towards Plato. Both his *Habilitationschrift*, entitled *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*,¹⁹ and *Truth and Method* (1960), testify to this lingering indecision. It is in his magnum opus that this ambivalence is most evident, namely in the two sections dealing specifically with Plato, which present two largely opposed accounts of Platonism.²⁰ One essentially corresponds to the Heideggerian critique, while the other takes up the dialectical and aporetic reading of his 1931 book, a sympathetic account he deepens and

16 Heidegger’s notes for that seminar have never been published, although the appropriation of *phronēsis* is well documented in the 1924–25 *Soph.* lecture (Heidegger 1992, 21–64; 132–88). Attendance at the 1923 seminar was actually preceded for Gadamer by his private reading of the “*Natorp-Bericht*” (1922; Heidegger 1989), which was for him an “electric shock” comparable to his first contact with Stefan George’s poetry (Gadamer 1977, 212).

17 Cf. Grondin (1999), 149.

18 Gadamer (1986d), 332.

19 *Platos dialektische Ethik* was written under Heidegger’s supervision in 1928 and published in 1931.

20 “*Das Vorbild der platonischen Dialektik*” (1986a), 368–75, and “*Sprache und Logos*” (1986a), 409–22.

strengthens after 1960.²¹ Plato would move into the center of the increasingly outspoken quarrel between Heidegger and Gadamer concerning the status of philosophy and tradition.²² "Plato is not a Platonist", Gadamer would contend, no more than true philosophy is scholasticism.²³

The key element of the Gadamerian appropriation of Plato is dialogue (*Gespräch*).²⁴ As in play, dialogue is not about the will or subjectivity of the participants but about the question at stake (*Sache*), a give-and-take that transcends it. For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, thinking is a practice, not a set of propositions or doctrines. Therein lies the two thinkers' common conception of the primacy of the practical. The phenomenological task of tracing modern scientific terminology back to the ordinary understanding of things requires a return to the Greeks. For Gadamer this task rests upon a permanent possibility rooted in the infinite potentialities of speech (*Sprechen*), following the example of Socratic conversation. Heidegger's Plato however soon proved metaphysical, dogmatic, un-Socratic. On the whole, Gadamer's and Heidegger's disagreement about Plato rests upon a deeper agreement, viz., that the pre-theoretical language of the life-world, which is historically changing and limited, is the source and basis of all authentic thinking. Thus the motivations underlying Gadamer's Plato interpretation, both positively and negatively, go back to Heidegger's lectures, in which a simultaneously old and new conception of philosophy as practical and finite emerges.

21 In the section on the *Cratylus* ("*Sprache und Logos*") Gadamer formulates a severe and fundamental criticism against Plato, Heideggerian in inspiration, that Plato reduces language, conceived on the mathematical mode, to the mere sign of a well-defined and already known reality; pure thinking of the Forms is a direct grasp, without words, of Being conceived as reified objectivity; the net result of which is "that Plato's discovery of the Forms [*Ideen*] conceals [*verdeckt*] the true nature of language even more than the theories of the Sophists [did]!" (Gadamer 1989c, 408; 1986a, 412). Earlier in the book, in "*Das Vorbild der platonischen Dialektik*" (Gadamer 1986a, 368–75), he claims on the contrary that "the literary form of dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of conversation" (*in die ursprüngliche Bewegung des Gesprächs*), thus protecting "the word" from dogmatic abuse (Gadamer 1989a, 368–9; 1986a, 374). In his later Plato-studies, Gadamer endeavors to explore and insist upon this consciousness of finitude, namely the dependence of thinking upon language and the fundamental and irreducibly dialogical character of all authentic thinking; see e.g. Gadamer (1968a), 73, 95.

22 Cf. Gadamer (1978a), 130; Dostal (1997).

23 Gadamer (1986a), 508; (1988a), 331.

24 This element, largely absent from Heidegger's interpretation and thinking, is possibly the key difference between him and Gadamer; cf. Gonzalez (2006), 432–3; (2009), 344–5.

2 The Gadamerian Rereading of Plato

2.1 *Principles and Outlines*

Let us begin with a brief inventory. Gadamer's studies in Greek philosophy fill up three of the ten volumes of his Collected Works.²⁵ Plato is discussed in far greater detail than any other author.²⁶ There are two monographs, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* (1931; trans., 1991) and *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (1978a; trans., 1986c); one book of translation and commentary on the "theory of Forms" (1978b);²⁷ and some twenty-eight articles or chapters. To these one must add the two previously mentioned sections of *Truth and Method*.²⁸ From a chronological point of view and across all categories, the vast majority of Plato studies were published after 1960, the year of *Truth and Method*. Thematically, his studies on Plato deal with dialectic, broadly defined (as both method and ontology), and the theory of Forms, especially the Form of the Good. About ten Platonic dialogues are given individual treatment, including *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Philebus*, as well as the *Seventh Letter*.

The novelty of the approach taken in this chapter lies mostly in considering the following aspects: (i) the relation to Heidegger in connection with his other Marburg students; (ii) Gadamer's Plato-translations, and thus some philological features of his interpretation; (iii) the connection between the theory of Forms and the "unwritten doctrine";²⁹ (iv) the modified Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism implicit in his reading.³⁰

25 *Gesammelte Werke* (= GW): 5–7 ("*Griechische Philosophie* I–III").

26 See Gadamer (1986a), 494; 487. As for works mainly on Aristotle (a clear division between his Plato and Aristotle studies is not always possible; see, e.g., Gadamer (1978b), there are two translation books (Gadamer, 1948; 1998) plus some eleven articles or chapters, most published after 1960.

27 *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre* is not reprinted in the GW; the translations were already published in 1965, without the Greek text and commentary, in the first of a three-volume history of philosophy (Gadamer 1965). This small book is divided into four parts: introduction (7–10), Greek texts and translations (12–73), commentary (75–92), bibliography (93–5). The Greek text is Burnet's (1900–1907).

28 Gadamer (1986a), 368–75; 409–22.

29 But see Zuckert (1996), 96–100, and especially Gadamer (2010) for an account of that issue.

30 The reception of Gadamer's Plato interpretation could be generally characterized as follows. Apart from the typical neglect by philosophers (among them some sympathetic to Gadamer) who view Plato as irredeemably "metaphysical" and by Plato specialists who find his Plato suspiciously modern looking, the reception has been on the whole positive: most of his Plato studies have been translated into many languages (English, Italian, French, etc.); the numerous book reviews and short studies are either interested

What are the principles and outlines of Gadamer's Plato interpretation? Its critical intention must be emphasized first. The separation (χωρισμός) of the Forms from the phenomena do not imply, he claims, the traditional two-world doctrine, a reading that constitutes a deformation of Plato's true intentions (*eine Umformung der eigentlichen Intentionen Platos*).³¹ Against the dualistic and dogmatic Platonism criticized by Nietzsche and the later Heidegger, Gadamer defends a Socratic Platonism focused on human finitude. The separation of the Forms, he argues, does not imply the laws of the empirical sciences, as Natorp claimed, but rather it constitutes the condition of dialectic and a bulwark against the Sophistic misuse of language.³² Gadamer generally accepts, although rarely discusses, the traditional chronology of the dialogues (divided roughly in three periods) and so, too, stylometry,³³ but he rejects the developmental theory on the ground that the unity and coherence of Plato's thought are by far more significant than its discontinuity.³⁴

This coherence resides in dialectic as rooted in the practice of dialogue. Here we must draw a sharp contrast between the Platonic dialogues and Aristotle's treatises and lecture notes.³⁵ The dialogue form is meant to mimic living conversation grounded in daily life, as exemplified by the Socratic logic of question and answer about the good in human life. The doctrinal content cannot be detached from the dialogical context, conceived as an event (*Geschehen*), for the Platonic dialogues always present thinking in action (*im Vollzug*). In that sense Plato-Socrates unites argumentation (λόγος) and action (ἔργον), theory and practice.³⁶ False knowledge displays just this lack of unity between thinking and life.³⁷ The dialogue form in Plato was discovered, Gadamer repeatedly points out, by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1804),³⁸ and later explored again by

in the importance of Plato in Gadamer's thought (e.g. Smith 1991; Dostal 1997, 2010; Wachterhauser 1999, 62–91; Figal 2001; Grondin 2010; Gonzalez 2006, 2010; Risser 2012) or its relevance for contemporary Plato scholarship (e.g. Griswold 1981; White 1988; Szlezák 2010; Renaud 2012) or both (e.g. Zuckert 1996, 2002; Renaud 1999, 2008). Rowe's general remark (1994, 217) is still worth quoting: "the question whether or not [Plato] was ever really a Platonist seems a good one, if the object of knowledge remains permanently out of reach". For a more detailed account of the reception up to 1998, see Renaud (1999), 18–21.

31 Gadamer (1986b), 13–14.

32 Gadamer (1978b), 9.

33 Cf. Gadamer (1969), 312.

34 Cf. Gadamer (1968a), 73.

35 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

36 Gadamer (1977a), 501. Cf. Krüger (1948), xviii–xxii; Klein (1965), 3–10, Strauss (1964), 50–5.

37 Gadamer (1991), 117.

38 See Laks and Szlezák in this volume.

Friedländer as well as Krüger, Klein, and Strauss.³⁹ Unlike Friedländer however, Gadamer emphatically subordinates the philological and literary questions to philosophical issues. He also does not interpret “between the lines” to the extent that Klein and Strauss do—their esotericism is foreign to him.

While the Platonic dialogues cannot be reduced to a set of dogmatic teachings, Gadamer grants that certain dialogues and key passages in them stand out in importance and offer special insight into Plato's thought, the core of which is the so-called theory of Forms. In the introduction to his anthology of texts on that theory, *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, Gadamer presents the passages he has chosen as setting up an overall interpretation as well a cross-examination of it. Since Aristotle, the meaning of the theory of Forms has been subject to endless controversy. There are two main areas of disagreement, one pertaining to the ontological status and function of the Forms; the other, to their place in the development of Plato's thought. The question has also been raised as to whether we should even speak of a “theory of Forms”, given the fact that this expression (or anything similar) cannot be found anywhere in the corpus nor is any general exposition of it given.⁴⁰ For Gadamer, the “theory” is not the dividing line between an ethical Socrates and a metaphysical Plato, as has been widely held since Aristotle.⁴¹ Rather, Gadamer insists on continuity throughout the corpus and the connection of this theory with the problem of the One and the Many. For Gadamer recognition of the theory of Forms and of the method of dialectic is the natural consequence of Socrates' demand for definition: the function of the theory is to make explicit the conditions of the dialectic that Socrates is already practicing in the “early dialogues”.

The theory of Forms does not, however, constitute the center of Platonic thought, Gadamer argues. This honor goes to the dialectic of the One and the Many. Gadamer thus decisively links the theory of Forms with the doctrine of ideal numbers presented in Aristotle's reports of Plato's oral teaching. Gadamer claims that he had advocated this approach since the 1930s, which would suggest he had arrived at it independently from the Tübingen School (to which I return below). His approach to this question could therefore have been the fruit of his close collaboration with Jacob Klein,⁴² whose important study, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, dates from the time of

39 It would more accurate to say that Schleiermacher rediscovered it, after the ancient, especially Neo-Platonic commentators; see Renaud and Tarrant (2015), 196.

40 See Wieland (a Gadamer student) (1982), 125–150, as well as Sayre (1993) and Gonzalez (2002).

41 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1078b23–32: the notions to be defined according to Socrates are not separate (χωριστά).

42 See e.g. Gadamer *GW* 5: 159 (1967 preface from the second edition of Gadamer, 1931).

their most intense association (1934–1936). In connection with Klein's work, as well as in departure from it, Gadamer elaborated a new interpretation of the role of mathematics in Plato, especially with regard to language and thinking. While mathematics represents an ideal of rationality, it remains subordinated to the requirements of dialectic (understood primarily as the method of questioning and answering), and therefore prone to the “weakness of language” (*Seventh Letter* 343a1). The *logos* has, Gadamer claims, a “numerical structure”: like number it exists only in a whole defining both its identity and its difference. A single number can only exist as part of a series of numbers, such as the various relations of numbers in string lengths on a musical instrument. Likewise Forms are not isolated but interrelated, constituting a unified plurality. A *logos* (or statement) unifies what by nature is distinct, as numbers are unified by counting. For every Form, there exists a *logos* giving its essence. Thus, according to Gadamer's reading there exist indefinitely many—adequate and inadequate—ways of grasping the Forms, and this is why indefiniteness is an integral part of intelligibility. The ideality of number and language is therefore articulated in terms of the dialectic of the One and the Many. On the whole, the importance of mathematics for Plato resides paradoxically in the limits of knowledge. The Pythagorean heritage is understood in the light of the Socratic heritage.⁴³

2.2 *The Theory of Forms or the Aporetic Dialectic*

I will now examine Gadamer's interpretation of the theory of Forms more closely. My analysis is based on his book of translation (*Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, 1978b), generally neglected by commentators, as well as on his two monographs (1931, 1978a), and articles on the *Phaedo*, *Parmenides* and the *Seventh Letter*, all published between 1964 and 1991.⁴⁴

The three passages chosen by Gadamer in his translation are *Ph.* 95b–108c; *Prm.* 128c–136e; and *Seventh Letter* 342a–344d. This selection implies a general interpretation of the theory of Forms and its place in the corpus.⁴⁵ His translation seeks to render Plato's Greek as living speech (*lebendige Sprache*).⁴⁶ His brief commentary (75–92) does not pretend to discuss all the difficulties, but rather aims to bring out the main steps in the argument; the underlying agreements between the three passages; and the innermost motives (*innersten Impulse*) of Platonic thinking. More generally, following the example of

43 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

44 That is: Gadamer (1964, 1968a, 1973, 1974, 1982, 1983b, 1988a).

45 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

46 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

Heidegger, Gadamer endeavors to dissolve “the dogmatic and doxographic sclerosis” that has plagued analysis of the theory.⁴⁷ I concentrate here on the decisive segment of his treatment of the *Phaedo* and link it thereafter to the two passages.

Gadamer regards the *Phaedo* as the dialogue in which the theory of Forms is first explicitly introduced. According to Gadamer, Socrates, on the day of his execution, attempts to prove the immortality of the soul through the analogy between the soul’s mode of being and mode of being of numbers and Forms. In the key passage (*Ph.* 99e–101e), Socrates explains wherein lies the insufficiency of the natural science of the age (περί φύσεως ἱστορία), especially that of Anaxagoras, and argues for the necessity of a new method of inquiry. Anaxagoras speaks of Intelligence (νοῦς) as the cause of the coming-to-be and passing-away of things, and as the cause of the world’s order (ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος). This provokes Socrates’ initial enthusiasm, but Anaxagoras’ explanation turns out to be exclusively empirical and mechanical. It thus confuses, Socrates complains, the cause (αἰτία) with that without which the cause could not be cause, i.e., the material conditions of its realization. Socrates’ presence in prison cannot possibly be explained by the bones, blood and nerves of his body which hold it together and allow him to be seated. Rather his presence there can only be explained by the fact that the Athenians believe it is best to condemn him, and that he in turn believes it is best to submit to their verdict (*Ph.* 98e). Likewise, Socrates claims, it must be possible and necessary to explain the world and all its natural constituents by the fact that is best for them to be the way they are and not otherwise. In other words, the true good (ἀληθῶς τὸ ἀγαθόν) must be what links and binds everything in the universe by Intelligence. His predecessor’s account supposes immediate sensory access to things, and is therefore misguided in ignoring (despite Anaxagoras’ teleological promise) the common opinions, which view things in terms good and worse. A “second sailing” doing justice to them must be adopted. The key passage, which I quote at some length,⁴⁸ then follows:

So I thought I must take refuge in the way we speak about things [εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα—*meine Zuflucht zu der Weise zu nehmen, wie wir von den Dingen reden*] and investigate the truth of things by means of words [σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐκείνοις {sc. λόγοις}]. I started in this manner: taking in each case as my presupposition the statement [ὑποθέμενος

47 Gadamer (1978b), 10; this remark recalls that of Arendt cited earlier.

48 My English translation tries to stay as close as possible to Gadamer’s German rendering, otherwise following mostly Grube (in Plato, 1997).

ἐκάστοτε λόγον—*indem ich jeweils ... diejenige Behauptung zugrunde lege*)⁴⁹ that seemed to me the most compelling [ἐρρωμενέστατον], I would pose [τίθημι] as true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed [συμφωνεῖν] with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree [setze ich das, was mit dieser in Übereinstimmung zu sein scheint, als wahrhaft seiend] ... This ... is what I mean. It is nothing new, but what I have never stopped talking about [ἐν τῷ παρεληλυθότι λόγῳ], both elsewhere and in the earlier part of our conversation. I am going to try to show you the kind of cause [αἰτίας] with which I have concerned myself. I turn back to those oft-mentioned things [ἐκεῖνα τὰ πολυθρύλητα] and proceed from them [ἄρχομαι ἀπ' ἐκεῖνων—*meinen Ausgang nehmen*]. I assume [ὑποθέμενος—*ich setze also voraus*] the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great [τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα], and all the rest.

Ph. 99e–100b

And whenever you must give an account of the presupposition itself [ἐκεῖνης αὐτῆς δέοι σε διδόναι λόγον—*über jene Voraussetzung selber Rede stehen*] you will proceed in the same way: you will adopt another presupposition [ἄλλην αὖ ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος—*indem Du wieder eine andere Voraussetzung zugrunde legtest*], the one which seems to you best [βελτίστη φαίνοιτο—*als die beste erscheint*], of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable.

Ph. 101de

Gadamer's translation of the key terms, "λόγος" and "ὑπόθεσις", involves important hermeneutical and philosophical decisions. He avoids translating "λόγοι" as "thoughts" ("*Gedanken*", Schleiermacher), "concepts" ("*Begriffe*", Apelt) or even "reasonings" ("*raisonnements*", Dixsaut); Grube's "discussions" (*Ph.* 99e) comes closest to Gadamer's option, although a little later, Grube then uses "theory" for λόγος (*Ph.* 100a). Rather, Gadamer chooses a paraphrase drawn from ordinary language: "the way in which we speak of things" (*die Weise, wie wir von den Dingen reden*).⁵⁰ He thus opts for one of the two basic possible meanings of λόγος (in the singular): speech (*Rede*), instead of reason

49 Likewise, Bröcker's translation (1965), 202: "*Indem ich voraussetze oder zugrunde lege* [ὑποθέμενος]".

50 See Krüger's similar translation (1949), 46: "*vernünftige Reden*". He elaborates on this elsewhere (1958), 159. Bostock's general position (1986, 160) partially concurs with Gadamer's: "We must conclude that *logos* does not here mean 'definition' after all, and apparently it just bears its general meaning of 'statement' or 'proposition' (or, as Gallop prefers to say,

(*Vernunft*). This translation is arguably justified insofar as Socrates has just castigated the natural sciences for ignoring the way people talk about things in terms of good and better. He translates the verb, ὑποθέμενος, as “taking as my presupposition” (*zugrunde legen*) rather than “hypothesis” (Grube, Bostock). The noun, ὑπόθεσις, occurs three times in the passage (*Ph.* 101d2, 3, 7) and is in each case rendered as “presupposition” (*Voraussetzung*). On the whole, his translation of “λόγος” and “ὑπόθεσις” implies his twofold hermeneutical and philosophical thesis, namely that (a) the acceptance of the Forms is inseparable from language and dialogue; and (b) they are a starting point, not an endpoint.

Gadamer thus interprets the recourse to Form (*Wendung zur Idee*)⁵¹ as a return to everyday language (*Sprache*), as opposed to the “scientific” method, in both Socrates’ day and our own. Socrates readily admits that his presupposition of the existence of the Forms (of the Good, of the Beautiful, of the Just) may strike one as “naive and perhaps foolish” (*Ph.* 100d4).⁵² As such it does not so much constitute a theory as a pre-understanding, in the sense in which we all have an “idea” of the ἰδέα, since it lies at the very root of all human speech and action. The separation of the Form from sensible things, according to Gadamer, does not therefore imply the metaphysical “two-world view”, but simply the concrete condition (*Möglichkeit*) of thought (*Denken*) against its foe, the sophistical abuse of language. Without common speech, neither conversation nor dialectic are possible.⁵³ The Socratic “What-is-X?” question just is the quest for the *eidos* of a thing, of which Socrates’ interlocutors all have

‘theory’). It apparently covers any kind of view that may be advanced, and not only views about definitions”.

51 Gadamer (1986a), 502.

52 Gadamer (1931), 50. Cf. also *Ph.* 76d8: “as we are always saying” (ἅ θρυλοῦμεν αἰεῖ).

53 Gadamer (1978b), 9. Klein (1968, 73 = 1934–36, 73–4) approvingly refers to Gadamer’s interpretation (“1931: 56 ss.”) and further brings out the relation to modern science *avant la lettre*: “We must not overlook the fact that the procedure by ‘hypothesis’ stressed by Plato is not a specifically ‘scientific’ method but is that original attitude of human reflection prior to all science which is revealed directly in speech as it exhibits and judges things. Thus, compared to the study of nature embarked upon by the physiologists, that ‘second-best sailing’ (δεύτερος πλοῦς) of Socrates, which consists of ‘taking refuge in reasonable speech’ (εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα—*Ph.* 99e) is indeed nothing else than a return to the ordinary attitude of the *dianoia*; ... When engaged in reasonable speech under the guidance of the *dianoia*, we always suppose something ‘other’ to underlie the objects, namely *noeta*. These, albeit appearing in the mirror of our senses, are the true objects of our study, though we may not even be aware of making such ‘suppositions’”.

some idea (viz., just in virtue of speaking and of having general notions at all regarding the Good, the Beautiful), but no clear, exact understanding.⁵⁴

What is the connection between language and the transcendence of the Form? It lies in the ideal intelligibility of the word (*Idealität des Wortes*).⁵⁵ Every word, spoken or written, always retains the same meaning and so constitutes a stable, intelligible unity. The acceptance of the Forms, and the quest for essence, is implied, presupposed in our very use of words. The so-called theory of Forms merely makes that function and aim explicit. The “turning to the Forms” therefore prefigures, in Gadamer's view, the criticism of Neo-Kantianism by Husserl⁵⁶ as well as the radicalization of that criticism by Heidegger. That is, the error of Neo-Kantianism consisted in taking scientific analysis as a starting-point and forgetting its precondition, namely the pre-theoretical understanding of things as objects of everyday concern.

The Forms or ideal essences (*ideale Wesenheiten*) cannot therefore be mere concepts.⁵⁷ They imply a vision of the whole of things (*ein Ganzes des Seienden*) as they are represented in our mind (*wie es sich unserem Geiste darstellt*).⁵⁸ Gadamer points out that, far from being a mere mental representation, the Platonic Form is the object of that representation, an object external and independent from it. He cites the *Parmenides*: the Form is not a thought (νόημα—*ein blosser Gedanke*) present in the mind (ἄλλοθι ἢ ἐν ψυχᾷ—*im Geiste*), but that of which (τινός) thought is a thought (*Prm.* 132bc).⁵⁹ Forms must therefore be conceived like norms or models (ὥσπερ παραδείγματα—*wie Urbilder*) embedded in nature (ἐν τῇ φύσει) (*Prm.* 132d2).

Gadamer emphasizes moreover the underlying unity between the hypothesis of the *eidos* in the *Phaedo*, and the dialectic of participation (μέθεξις) in the prelude to the *Parmenides*. The problem associated with the concept of “participation” (the way in which phenomena partake in the Forms) is genuine and even insoluble, but, according to Gadamer, it is not in fact Plato's main concern.⁶⁰ The *existence* of the Forms is the key, and their acceptance the defining moment of dialectic. There occurs in the *Parmenides* no crisis, no major shift,

54 See Allen (1970), 107–10. Also, Kirkland (2012), 111–5, who characterizes the theory of Forms and therewith the Socratic project as a whole as “proto-phenomenological” in character (154, 159, 199), often employing openly Heideggerian terminology.

55 Gadamer (1978b), 82; (1986a), 394.

56 See Kim in this volume.

57 Cf. Krüger (1950), xxix; the Forms are not laws of the mathematical sciences (cf. Natorp) but “*das eigentlich Seiende*” (1950: xxx).

58 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

59 Gadamer (1978b), 55.

60 Gadamer (1988a), 330, f.

despite the common belief to the contrary.⁶¹ The mathematical entities in favor of which Plato is supposed to have abandoned the Forms are inseparable from the Forms. According to the Aristotelian criticism of Plato, the Forms are identical to numbers.⁶² But where does the close relation between Form and number lie?

Gadamer raises this question, which comes to prompt a revision of his own earlier critical interpretation. He reasons as follows. The problem of the relation between Form and what “participates” in it, is illustrated, metaphorically, by number.⁶³ A number is not something isolated, yet it is different from the totality of numbers of which it is a part. Like all beings in general, it is one, that is identical with itself, and yet distinct from others. The number’s mode of being therefore illustrates, in the *Parmenides*, the question of the essence of a thing, to which the *eidos* is the answer. The relation between the multitude and unity of numbers is mathematical, or eidetic, in nature.⁶⁴ The Forms or ideal essences are similar to the whole series (*Gefüge*) of numbers: just as there exists no isolated Form (ἀντὰ καὶ αὐτὰ—*rein für sich*; *Prm.* 133a9), so too there exists no individual number that does not have its place in the whole series of numbers.⁶⁵ This is also true, Gadamer claims, of thinking and being in general. All knowledge implies a whole (*ein Ganzes*). This means in turn that the soul’s conversation with itself is endless, and all thinking dialectical, that is, aporetic.⁶⁶

Gadamer’s interpretation of Plato was developed in contrast to that of the Tübingen School, a school of interpretation of vital importance in current Plato scholarship, deserving to be better-known in the English-speaking world.⁶⁷ Its major representatives, and Gadamer’s main interlocutors, Hans Joachim Krämer (1959) and Konrad Gaiser (1963), agree with him in adopting a unitarian approach, although they base it on the indirect tradition, notably the Aristotelian testimony. Unlike Gadamer, however, they defend a systematic and deductive interpretation of the Forms with reference to a so-called doctrine

61 Cf. esp. *Ph.* 96e–97b; 101b, 104a.

62 Aristotle, *Metaph.* 987b10–13; Gadamer (1988b), 245.

63 The being and becoming of numbers are already discussed in the *Phaedo*, first inadequately with the logic of physiology (*Ph.* 96a–97b), then, as we have seen, in terms of “participation” (the Small and the Great: *Ph.* 100e5–101a; 102b–103a).

64 Gadamer (1982), 292.

65 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

66 Gadamer (1978b), 10. Gadamer likes quoting (e.g., 1978a, 161) Plato’s definition of thinking (διάνοια) as a dialogue of the soul with itself (*Soph.* 263e3–4; *Tht.* 206cd; cf. 208c).

67 See Höhle in this volume; also, D. Nikulin (2012) for a collection of classic and more recent essays by leading proponents of the school: H.J. Krämer, K. Gaiser, but also T.A. Szlezák, J. Halfwassen, V. Höhle, and Nikulin.

of principles (ἀρχαί; *Prinzipienlehre*), viz., the One and the Indefinite Dyad (τὸ ἓν καὶ ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς), associated with the Great and the Small.⁶⁸ From these two principles, they claim, Plato deduced the ideal numbers; the intermediary numbers; the world-soul; and the sensible realities. Although Gadamer also admits the existence of oral instruction (*mündliche Unterweisung*) held in a small circle of members at the Academy,⁶⁹ yet he grants the written dialogues methodological primacy for the study of Plato's thought. On his view, this "teaching" is not so much doctrine as dialogue, conceived in continuity with the one modeled in the written dialogues. According to Gadamer, the main error of a systematic and deductive reconstruction of the principles, characteristic of the Tübingen School, consists in giving primacy to the One as the source of the Forms, for, he claims, the One is inseparable from duality. Instead, it is really, as we have seen, the *problem* of the One and the Many, a problem frequently discussed in the dialogues. The One is never alone, but always unfolds within plurality. In the *Republic*, the One is the principle of goodness and the highest object of knowledge (μέγιστον μάθημα, *Rep.* 504e5–6).⁷⁰ It does not, however, imply a system. Reason necessarily seeks unity, but endlessly; the notion of a closed system is an addition that dates from late antiquity.⁷¹

Gadamer admits that in his 1931 book he pushed the notion of a Platonic "teaching" (*Lehre*) too far into the background.⁷² From the 1960s on, he developed and defended a new interpretation of the "Platonic teaching" about the unending quest for unity. The doctrine of principles, now interpreted as the doctrine of the One and the Many, stems from the existence of the Forms, not the reverse, as the Tübingen School claims. This is because the relation between the One and the Many is based on the *logos* itself (language and thinking). The *logos* has a "numerical structure", in the sense that it is at once One and Many. The task of definition requires the method of division (διαίρεσις), but the whole of which it is a part remains unattainable. The doctrine of the One and the Many thus illustrates the dialectical, or open character of the all (human) knowledge. The objects of knowledge never manifest themselves univocally; rather, the same thing appears in various ways and different contexts. This is why all things, all relations among Forms is a mixture (*Mischung*) of unity and plurality.⁷³ According to Plato's rich and largely metaphorical vocabulary of "participation" (μέθεξις, κοινωνία, συνουσία, παρουσία, μίξις,

68 Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1081b31–1083a.

69 Gadamer (1978b), 91; 1968b, 130.

70 Gadamer (1968b), 135.

71 Gadamer (1998d), 87–90.

72 Gadamer (1968b), 130.

73 Gadamer (1968b), 145.

συμπλοκή), the Forms partake in one another, just as sensible things participate in Forms.⁷⁴ They constitute, as in the *Phaedo*, the very condition of speech and dialectic.⁷⁵ On the whole, Gadamer's aporetic conception puts the principle of the Dyad first. He thus reverses the traditional hierarchy of unity and plurality,⁷⁶ insisting on the gap between human finitude and infinite, divine knowledge. Contrary to God, human beings are incapable of conceiving, in a single intuition, all the relations determining a thing or a Form.⁷⁷ The doctrine of the indeterminate duality thus understood implies "the primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon" (*Ursprünglichkeit des Auseinanderfallens von Wesen und Wirklichkeit*) and the endless character (*Unabschliessbarkeit*) of dialectic.⁷⁸

For Gadamer, the "epistemological digression" of the *Seventh Letter* (342a–344d) corroborates this dialectical conception of knowledge. Although it does not mention the doctrine of first principles, it does present itself as a well-structured and coherent view that Plato probably held on various occasions.⁷⁹ It gives an account of why a written presentation of Plato's thought does not and cannot exist.⁸⁰ The weakness of all discourse (τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές, 343a1) makes all forms of knowledge of true being uncertain. In this way, the choice of the dialogue form over that of the treatise is justified.⁸¹ The decisive distinction is not so much between written and oral teaching, as the Tübingen School claims, but more fundamentally between doctrinal presentation and dialogical search. All linguistic expression, written or oral, is susceptible to misunderstanding and falsification;⁸² at the same time, immediate, intuitive grasp of reality beyond language is also impossible.⁸³ Hence, the

74 Gadamer (1968b), 147.

75 *Prm.* 135c1–2: he who would not admit that for each thing the Form is one and always the same, would destroy the possibility of dialectic (καὶ οὕτως τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ—und auf diese wird er die Möglichkeit des Sichverständigens vollständig zerstören). The presupposition of the Form must therefore be maintained. In that sense *Prm.* 135e–136a (συμβαίνοντα ἐκ τῆς ὑποθέσεως) perfectly parallels *Ph.* 100b–101e.

76 Cf. Krämer (2007), 209.

77 God (or a god) possesses that exact and complete knowledge (οὐκ ἄν τινα μᾶλλον ἢ θεὸν φαίης ἔχειν τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην;—so wird doch kein anderer als ein Gott diese genaueste Wissenschaft besitzen, 133c10–11). See Gadamer (1968b), 152; cf. Gadamer (2010a), 152.

78 Gadamer (1980), 205–6 (1968a, 79–80).

79 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

80 Gadamer (1978b), 88.

81 Gadamer (1978b), 8.

82 Gadamer (1978b), 10.

83 This is an interpretation diametrically opposed to that polemically advanced in one of the Plato sections of *Truth and Method* (1986a), 416. Yet, as we have seen (note 21), the

dialogue form is more than just an appropriate literary form for introducing and exhorting to philosophy—it is the method of philosophy. “The harmony between *logos* and *ergon*, on which Plato’s *œuvre* rest, is true for all thinking [*alles Philosophieren*]”.⁸⁴

Gadamer’s numerous publications on Plato display considerable continuity (especially after 1960 when he finally overcomes an ambivalence largely due to the influence of the later Heidegger’s anti-Platonism), viz., in his rejection of a two-world metaphysical Platonism, and his defense of a Socratic Plato. Gadamer’s unconventional account of the theory of Forms has been examined here in connection with the key *Phaedo* passage and the doctrine of ideal numbers from Plato’s oral teaching. Basic aspects of his translation of the *Phaedo* (especially of λόγος and ὑπόθεσις) reveal how he conceives the Platonic Form as a presupposition anchored in language. In opposition to the Tübingen School, Gadamer understands the doctrine of the One and the indeterminate Dyad as being identical to that of the One and the Many. The *logos* has a numerical structure in the sense in which it is both One and Many, implying the aporetic relation between essence and phenomenon.

3 The Theoretical and the Practical: The Relation to Heidegger and Kant

It is a remarkable fact that the Platonic conception of dialectic and knowledge as interpreted by Gadamer corresponds exactly to the main thesis of *Truth and Method*, as this latter is formulated against the mathematical model of modern science.⁸⁵ Is this because Gadamer elaborated his hermeneutical theory, as he claims, from his reading of Plato, or because he read Plato in the light of his

dialectical (or aporetic) interpretation is defended in the other section on the dialogue form, and again at the end of book (1986a), 461. As Smith remarks (1991), 31, this is a “dramatic turn” when Gadamer comes to consider the Platonic Forms as “eventual” and “linguistic” in character. Yet while this might be true of the *Phaedo*, it does not appear to be so in the *Republic*: after looking at shades and reflections in water, the freed prisoner would then be “capable of looking at and contemplate the sun itself” (δύναται ἄν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν, 516b6–7). See also *Phdr.* 249c.

84 Gadamer (1978b), 10, 92. Friedländer, whose first Plato book (1928 = 1958 rev.) opens with a chapter entitled “Eidos”, strongly emphasizes the existential dimension of Plato’s encounter with Socrates and of his conception of philosophy based on it: his dialogues “do not philosophize about existence; they are existence, not always, but most of the time” (1958), 235.

85 Gadamer (1986a), 461.

hermeneutics of finitude?⁸⁶ I would like to address this question indirectly by raising two interrelated questions: (1) If we admit that Plato is a dialectical, non-dogmatic thinker, then what is his view on the status of the theoretical in relation to the practical? (2) According to Gadamer's Plato, what access can we have to the Forms? More specifically, do Forms have a transcendent or, in the Kantian sense, a transcendental status? The second question is inseparable from, although not reducible to, the question of whether the access to the Forms is language-bound and therefore indirect, or, rather, intuitive and direct.⁸⁷

Gadamer's interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of One and Dyad, the meaning of which limits the legitimate scope of mathematics, remains speculative insofar as it is not based upon the dialogues or the admittedly fragmentary testimonies of the indirect tradition. While Gadamer knows Krämer and Gaiser's work well and acknowledged its importance,⁸⁸ he never discusses it in detail. His interpretation is based essentially and more simply on the existence of a doctrine of the One and of the Dyad, and in his main paper on the subject he advances it "as only an hypothesis".⁸⁹ One could object to it for example, as many have done, by arguing that the limiting role attributed to mathematics in Platonic thought by Gadamer is incompatible with the role Plato grants it in the *Republic* and later dialogues.⁹⁰ My own approach will be rather to step back and consider his reading in light of Heidegger's lectures, as well as of the Kantian and Neo-Kantian background.

As we have seen, Heidegger's reading of Plato and Aristotle in the early and mid-1920s was characterized by a certain ambivalence, as it combined appropriation ("thinking with") and critical intent. This approach led Gadamer to his own hermeneutical theory of finitude (*Endlichkeit*). Interestingly, however, in elaborating his ontology of facticity, Heidegger insisted in his own way on the ideal of *theōria* (or *sophia*), that is, the task of "*durchsichtigmachen*"⁹¹ or

86 Cf. Grondin (2010a), 153.

87 It is possible that in Plato's view dialectic fulfills an indispensable but only preliminary function preparing thought (διάνοια) for a silent intellectual grasp (νόησις). On this view, the *Phaedo*'s "escape into the λόγοι" would be followed and completed by an intuitive, immediate mode of knowing. See, e.g., Sayre (1988).

88 Gadamer co-organized the 1967 conference on the Tübingen School, the proceedings of which were published as Gadamer and Schädewaldt (1968).

89 Gadamer (1968b), 133.

90 For such and other critical considerations, see Renaud (1999), 102–42.

91 A frequently used expression by Heidegger at the time, as Gadamer notes retrospectively when rereading the "*Natorp-Bericht*". Gadamer, 1989b: 14; there he also points out that the later Heidegger ends up going in the opposite direction in recognizing more and more the irreducible lack of clarity (*eine letzte Undurchsichtigkeit*) as constitutive of human thought.

clarification. The appropriation of practical reason (*phronēsis*) is, however, what proved decisive for Gadamer.⁹² The primacy of the ideal of *theōria* is nevertheless present in his (1931), *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*. There, in his analysis of the *Philebus*, the ideal of the contemplative life is viewed as an integral part of the Socratic search concerning the (human) good. In contrast, the recovery of the theoretical ideal is absent from his 1978 book. Should one therefore see in the latter a more coherent picture with respect to Plato and with respect to Gadamer's own hermeneutics of finitude, or possibly both? In other words, if the ideal of the life of *theōria* is not (fully) realizable for us human beings, does this imply that it is devoid of meaning and should therefore be abandoned?⁹³

Heidegger's analysis of human existence is partially based on the question of Being raised by Plato and Aristotle. This question is primarily addressed to the only being capable of raising it, viz., the human being (*Dasein*). However, while for Plato and Aristotle "being" means in its truest sense always—or eternally-being, according to Heidegger the most authentic sense of being is, rather, to "exist": human *Dasein* as fundamentally constituted by temporality and mortality. Some of his students (Krüger, Klein, Strauss),⁹⁴ inspired like Gadamer by his rediscovery of Greek philosophy as a return to the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) would, however, ultimately opt for the theoretical life and permanence over against the phenomenology of finitude and temporality.⁹⁵

92 Cf. Taminiaux (2002b), 176–202.

93 This is Gonzalez's view (2010: 185).

94 Contrary to the two others, Strauss did not regularly attend Heidegger's course then, and the influence of the later on him is partially due to the intermediary role of his friend, Jacob Klein. See Taminiaux (2002c), 208.

95 Comparing Gadamer's interpretation with Klein's is particularly instructive given their otherwise very similar approach. After referring approvingly to Gadamer concerning *Ph.* 99–101 (see note 53), Klein (1968: 73 = 1934: 74) forcefully asserts that the pre-understanding of the *logoi* is but a starting point the aim of which is knowledge in the strong sense (ἐπιστήμη):

There is, however, a higher kind of reflection in which this "supposing" is raised to the rank of a conscious procedure; this is the origin of every science and every skill (cf. *Phlb.* 16 C). For all science and all skill grows out of the natural activity of reflection when it attains the character of a fully developed "art" (τέχνη), which obeys definite rules. The "devices" of the *dianoia* that now becomes transparent and thereby learnable make completely explicit what the *dianoia* has in effect been accomplishing prior to any science. Conversely, the nature of this ordinary accomplishment of the *dianoia* can be grasped only through such a reflective understanding. And precisely those *technai* which are most highly developed, the science of measurement and above all, the science of counting and calculation (cf. *Euthyphro* 7bc), that "common thing of which all arts as well as all thinking processes and all sciences make use" (κοινόν, ᾧ πάσαι προσχρῶνται τέχναι τε καὶ διάνοιαι καὶ ἐπιστήμαι—*Rep.* 522c; *Phlb.* 55e; cf. *Rep.* 602d), permit us to grasp the true sense of the *dianoia*.

Gadamer, Klein and the other Marburg friends all agree that Plato is aware of the limits of human understanding. The dispute between them is the following: does the human being have a notion, however vague, of what it would be like to have a full grasp of the Forms?⁹⁶ Put inversely: is it possible to conceive of a finite knowledge of finitude without implying the notion of a full intelligibility reserved for divine intelligence (νοῦς)? In other words, what access can human beings have to the Forms as objects?

Gadamer sometimes seems, in *Truth and Method*, to consider the grasping of truth as a genuine possibility, conceived of as adequation or correspondence between language and thing, and speaks then of the “language of things” (the title of the paper from which the following passage is taken):

The idealistic philosophy of language from which Herder and Humboldt start already provokes the critical question that touches [Cassirer's] philosophy of symbolic forms as well: by directing attention to the “form” of language, does it not isolate language from what is spoken in and mediated through it? It is not as a formal power or capacity that language presents the correspondence we are seeking, but rather as the preliminary medium that encompasses all beings insofar as they can be expressed in words. Is not language more the language of things [*Sprache der Dinge*] than the language of man?⁹⁷

Gadamer also sometimes admits that for Plato knowledge in the strong sense (ἐπιστήμη) is possible. In the introduction to his translation volume, *Plato: Texte zur Ideenlehre*, he claims that the very existence of Socrates, the just man, in an unjust world, is possible because “justice is in its true essence [*in ihrem wahren Wesen*] is knowable [*erkennbar*] to the human soul”, so long as it correctly seeks it by means of dialectic.⁹⁸ He also occasionally grants that the Platonic conception of “philosophy” is more comprehensive than ours today, transcending the modern distinction between the natural and human sciences.⁹⁹ Indeed, the metaphysical turning-point in the *Phaedo* lies in the

According to Klein therefore, dialectic, although based upon a pre-understanding of the Forms, yet finds its goal in the full grasp of them. He does not appear here to be criticizing Gadamer, whose 1931 book (*Plato's Dialectical Ethics*) still allows for the theoretical ideal, while *Truth and Method* will come to reject that ideal in terms of the Heideggerian Plato-critique of the 1930s.

⁹⁶ Cf. White (1988), 256–7.

⁹⁷ Gadamer (1976b), 76–7 (= 1986b, 72–3).

⁹⁸ Gadamer (1978b), 8.

⁹⁹ Gadamer (1967), 309.

recognition of rationality (λόγος) in the world order, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in our ability both to grasp that order by means of our own *logos*, and to give an account (λόγον διδόναι) of that grasp, i.e., dialectic. This twofold *logos* is typically understood in classical metaphysics as the reciprocal relation between macrocosm and microcosm. Is such a conception also implied in Gadamer's Plato interpretation or even in his own thought more generally? Gadamer's position both as interpreter and philosopher on this key question is not easy to discern.

He insists, as we have seen, on "the primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon".¹⁰⁰ Is this gap to be understood in connection with Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism? Gadamer says little about a possible debt to his teacher Natorp, and explicit references to Kant are infrequent, when not overtly critical, especially with regard to aesthetics. Gadamer contends, like Dilthey and Heidegger, that the Neo-Kantian concern with validity (*Geltung*)¹⁰¹ presupposes the methodology of modern science, and thus neglects more fundamental questions of historicity and language. Nevertheless, he takes up the Kantian transcendental question about the conditions of possibility: "How is understanding possible? [*Wie ist Verstehen möglich?*]".¹⁰² Gadamer traces Kant's categories and their application back to their preconditions, namely language and history conceived as primarily beyond human conscious, or that which he calls the history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).¹⁰³ In contrast to Schleiermacher's classical hermeneutics, language for Gadamer is not merely a tool for "translating" and understanding the world; rather, language itself schematizes and structures it and as such constitutes it.¹⁰⁴ Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of language thus appears as a modified Kantianism, since access to objects cannot be conceptually separated from the cognizing subject. The very notion of immediate knowledge (or intellectual intuition) is rejected; only a kind of mediated knowledge through language is countenanced. He does appropriate key concepts from pre-Kantian metaphysics, notably from Plato, but excises them from their original context. At the end of *Truth and Method* (in the final section, entitled "the universal aspect of hermeneutics"), Gadamer writes:

100 Gadamer (1968a), 80.

101 See Lembeck and Kim in this volume.

102 Gadamer (1989a), xxvii (preface to the second edition of *Truth and Method* from 1965).

103 Gadamer (1986a), 305–12.

104 Grondin (2010b), 105.

We can also see that the metaphysics of light brings out a side of the classical concept of the beautiful that is justified apart from [*losgelöst aus*] the context of substance-metaphysics and the metaphysical relationship to the infinite divine mind.¹⁰⁵

Gadamer's ontology of language differs from the Greek and medieval traditions, insofar as it abandons substance metaphysics. For him the "presupposition" of the Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, is not so much an ascent from opinion to knowledge as a turning away from the (sophistic) wanderings of thought.¹⁰⁶ The same applies, according to Gadamer, to our access to Plato's text and the notion of hermeneutical practice. The classical text as an object of understanding is mediated by our pre-understanding, which for its part is determined by the ever-changing context of reception. Gadamer insists upon the vigilance required in the "fusion of horizons" in order to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate prejudices, e.g., what comes from Plato as opposed to what comes from ourselves.¹⁰⁷ This task is, however, conceived as infinite; more importantly, it appears to be conceived similarly to the Kantian noumenon, viz., as a necessarily postulated but inconceivable object. This is because, according to Gadamer, we only have access to readings mediated by an inexhaustible and insurmountable history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). From this perspective, the notion of an objectively correct and final interpretation must therefore be considered futile, because unattainable.¹⁰⁸ Platonic *anamnēsis* in Gadamer amounts to a historicized *a priori* implying the fusion of the theoretical and the practical, and the primacy of the practical understood as application (*Anwendung, Applikation*) to one's specific, ever-changing situation. On the whole then, his anti-dogmatic interpretation of Plato appears to be a modified version of Kant's metaphysics of finitude. One is led, finally, to conclude that there is a significant and problematic gap between Gadamer's post-Kantian position and Platonic metaphysics.

Yet there remains an undeniable proximity between Plato and Kant in the field of ethics.¹⁰⁹ According to both, humans are beings in search of the Good. While for Plato the Form of the Good is the supreme object of study (μέγιστον μάθημα), Kant conceives of the supreme good (*das höchste Gut*) in practical

105 Gadamer (1989a), 484; (1986a), 487.

106 Gadamer (1988b), 248.

107 Gadamer (1986b), 14; Figal (2001), 26; Grondin (2010a), 155.

108 See Krämer's criticism (2007: 44) that Gadamer's hermeneutics is unable to allow for degrees of correctness in interpretation, thus succumbing to relativism.

109 See Baum in this volume.

terms. The Platonic “Forms” are for him postulates of practical reason, and as a result the Form of God and the immortality of the soul are based not on ontology (which is for him necessarily *Schwärmerei*) but on a metaphysics of freedom.¹¹⁰ The “Form [*Idee*]” thus conceived is an ever-unattainable ideal, which is precisely why it constitutes the condition for human freedom.¹¹¹ Gadamer ends his study on the *Phaedo* with what he regards as the perfect parallelism between the Platonic Form and Kantian freedom:

To be sure, Kant displayed the fallacy of the “rational” demonstration which Mendelssohn¹¹² developed in his rethinking of the *Phaedo*. But Kant’s own philosophical insight comes very close to that of Plato’s dialogue. Kant’s critique “proved” human freedom just as little as Plato proved immortality. But it did prove that the *a priori* validity of causality underlying all natural science could not disprove our human sense of being free. For Kant freedom was the only rational fact (*Vernunftfactum*). Plato called that same fact something else: *idea* (*Idee*).¹¹³

As for Plato, the Form of the Good for Kant is the criterion by which we can evaluate the moral nature of our actions. While the concepts of practical reason constitute the necessary condition for the possibility of practical life, they have no value from a theoretical viewpoint. For Gadamer the (Platonic) Form of the Good is not an object of knowledge, as it cannot be conceptualized,¹¹⁴ and all substantive absolutes are excluded.¹¹⁵ However, Gadamer is here more Neo-Kantian than Kantian, for while Kant excludes ideas from the realm of experience, Neo-Kantian (Platonic) “ideas” are categories that structure

110 Grondin (2013), 45–50.

111 This conception of the “idea” is very similar to that of Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A328/B384).

112 See Rosenstock in this volume.

113 Gadamer (1980), 38 (1973, 200); cf. Gadamer (1997, 274): “Kant’s example taught me what the Socratic wisdom basically was: to leave questions open and to keep them open. That is not skepticism but originates from the spiritual need for freedom”. For a similar conception of Platonic Forms as “problems” (although independent from Kant’s metaphysics of freedom), see Strauss (1953), 125.

114 It is, according to Gadamer, beyond knowledge; he refers to the famous formulation in the *Republic*: the Form of the Good is “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, *Rep.* 509b9) as well as to the *Seventh Letter* (341c5–6) according to which the highest principles can in no way be expressed in words as the other forms of knowledge (ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα). Gadamer (1988b), 243.

115 Cf. Dostal (2010), 37.

experience.¹¹⁶ Gadamer's conception of knowledge is emphatically language-bound. His central thesis, that "Being that can be understood is language", means that each thing "has its being in its presentation [*Darstellung*: i.e., the way it is presented or manifests itself]".¹¹⁷ This ontology of things as "self-presentation" (*Sich-darstellen*) takes up the Heideggerian definition of the phenomenon as "self-showing" (*das sich Zeigende*).¹¹⁸ However, while Heidegger's "self-showing" is immediate, Gadamer's "self-presentation" is mediated by and therefore inseparable from language; it is as he puts it "total mediation" (*totale Vermittlung*).¹¹⁹

At the end of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains his ontology by referring to the Platonic conception of the beautiful (τὸ καλόν) as the manifestness of the intelligible: the Good presents itself in the guise of beauty,¹²⁰ in the visibility of the ideal. Therein lies the unity of Form and phenomenon.¹²¹ He also points to *Phaedrus* 250de, where the Beautiful is characterized as what is the most radiant (ἐκφανεστάτον) and most lovely (ἐρασμιώτατον). Moreover, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1987), Gadamer considers Platonic beauty as the object of Eros, i.e., as both human lack or finitude, and the consequent impulse towards the intelligible. These aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics have undeniable affinities, as he claims, with Plato. A crucial problem arises however. Gadamer's "self-presentation" is language and, while there is a gap between the phenomenon and the essence (*Wesen, idea*), there is none between the phenomenon and language. In what sense then can Platonic beauty or Being be an object of contemplation? From a Neo-Kantian view-point, the beautiful can neither be a thing nor an object; it is rather a norm, an ideal allowing us to speak of beautiful things or the degree of beauty in them. Is the *idea* for Gadamer such a transcendental, formal, structuring, active category? While Gadamer's unity of Being and language precludes the pre-Kantian way of speaking of Being as existing prior to subjectivity (or heteronomy), he also emphatically avoids the modern model of the primacy of subjectivity, by elaborating an ontology of language as "the language of things".¹²² But the "things"

116 On the question of the relation between Plato, Kant and Neo-Kantianism, see the detailed treatment in Kim (2010), 80–2.

117 Gadamer (1986a), 480.

118 Heidegger (1993 [1927]), 35 (2.5–8).

119 Gadamer (1986a), 125; cf. Figal (2007), 532–4.

120 *Phlb.* 64e5–6: Νῦν δὲ καταπέφευγεν ἡμῖν ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δύναμις εἰς τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ φύσιν.

121 Gadamer (1986a), 485, f.; (1978a), 193–5.

122 For the historically affected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) remains for Gadamer an event that is "more Being than consciousness" (*mehr Sein als Bewusstsein*); Gadamer (1978c), 247.

remain forever elusive given “the primordial discrepancy” between Form (or noumenon) and phenomenon.

Unlike Gadamer, other Heidegger-students writing on Plato defended the pre-Kantian notion of object or, expressed in Kantian language, the priority of heterogeneity. According to Klein, Strauss and Krüger, Platonic Forms are “problems”, endless “tasks”. This conception comes close to the Kantian “Forms”, but according to Klein, Strauss and Krüger, human beings necessarily have an “idea” of the inaccessible as such.¹²³ For them, thought is not necessarily the fruit of human activity or “spontaneity”; it can also be “receptive” to a given that is prior to subjectivity. Such is the Platonic conception of thought as Eros, as a passive state, as something that befalls us (πάθημα).¹²⁴ This in the end raises the question, with Plato and perhaps the late Heidegger, of whether human life can be intelligible without the divine as that which precedes us and upon which we are dependent.

In this last section, I have examined the question of the status, in Gadamer's interpretation and in his hermeneutical theory, of the Platonic Form as object. While he seems to regard the Platonic Form as an object distinct and independent from representation, he sometimes speaks of it as though it solely had a transcendental status. He follows the early Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity (or finitude) and, unlike some of his Marburg companions, eventually comes to abandon his teacher's early concern for the Greek ideal of *theōria*. Both Gadamer's conception of language (as that which structures reality) and his interpretation of the Platonic Form (as endlessly open “problem”) can be considered modified versions of Kantianism: “things” and with them “Forms”, remain, and must remain, forever out of our reach, like Kantian noumena. Gadamer thus fundamentally disagrees with Heidegger's others students who defend in their Plato interpretation the pre-Kantian notion of object as heterogeneous. Yet Gadamer himself gives some weight to this position (that today seems so unlikely) with his thesis of the “language of things”. In the end, Gadamer's lack of clarity on this decisive issue has its roots in the extreme difficulty of this question and we should at least partially excuse him for it.

123 Krüger writes (1950, xxxvii): “die Wissenschaft von den Ideen in Platons Dialogen [bleibt] überhaupt immer noch ein offenes Problem. Um sie aber auch nur als solches darstellen zu können, bedarf Platon allenthalben eines Vorgriffs auf das Unerreichte, das für die liebende Frage doch so unentbehrlich ist”. Cf. Strauss (1953), 124–6.

124 *Ph.* 79d6–7; cf. *Grg.* 481cd; Krüger (1958), 88.

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